

1

Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

Introduction

Good news about police race relations in the UK is rare. Tension and conflict have been their keynote since the 1950s, a period of primary immigration from Commonwealth countries into England.¹ Place names like Notting Hill, Brixton, Broadwater Farm, Toxteth, and St Paul's, Bristol have for many years symbolized serious clashes between ethnic minorities and police officers (Keith, 1988, 1993; National Black Police Association, 2004). During the 1990s, however, the name of an 18-year-old black youth, Stephen Lawrence, moulded this dominant symbolism of place into one of personal victimization. This young person was killed for no other reason than the colour of his skin, itself emblematic of his membership of a different race from that of his white murderers (Rock, 2004).

Lawrence's murder brought Justice Macpherson (one of two judges to have reported formally about police race relations in London) into the limelight of national attention (Scarman OBE, 1981; Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, 1999). Macpherson's report into the police investigation of Lawrence's murder placed the charge of 'institutional racism' before constabularies and as a major policy problem to be addressed by the newly elected, 1997 Labour government. Acceptance of 'institutional racism' within the Metropolitan Police separated Macpherson's analysis from Lord Leslie Scarman's earlier analysis of police race relations following serious clashes between the police and local people in Brixton, South London during a weekend in 1981 (ibid). Both have etched their names into the annals of government

¹ This is referring to recent decades. Race relations in the UK has a much longer history analysed, for example, in Fryer, P. (1984) *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London: Pluto.

2 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

reports about police race relations, sending rather different but nonetheless serious, critical messages to the police (Holdaway, 1996).

Responding to Macpherson's report, many chief constables expressed publicly their abhorrence of racism and a commitment to change their constabularies, not least to tackle 'institutional racism'.² Building on a considerable number of critical reports about deficient constabulary policy and practice for all aspects of police race relations, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)³ reinforced the chief's views, placing the subject centrally within every chief constable's portfolio (HMIC 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999). 'Institutional racism' had reference points for relationships between the police and ethnic minority communities and, more importantly for this book, between ethnic minority and ethnic majority members of the police workforce, between black and white police officers. Race relations within the police were now inscribed clearly on the police agenda as a matter for urgent attention.⁴

No matter the extent and energy of the police response following Macpherson, its veracity was called into question in 2003 when the BBC broadcast 'The Secret Policeman', a covertly filmed programme during which a trainee officer at Bruche Police Training Centre boasted about issuing ethnic minority motorists with fixed penalty tickets, allowing white motorists to get away with their offences.⁵ Another trainee was filmed wearing a Ku Klux Klan hood. He was recorded saying that he would like to kill Asians and 'bury them under the train tracks'. Perhaps most seriously for chief constables, who had been working to improve race relations within their constabularies, another recruit said he was partly motivated to join the police because he knew it was

² There was no consistency in the definitions of institutional racism the chief constables used.

³ HMIC is Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and is responsible for inspecting all the constabularies of England and Wales, not least to report to the Home Secretary on their performance in relation to many set targets, including those set up after the Lawrence Report was published and accepted by the Home Secretary.

⁴ As imprecise as it was, 'race relations' was nevertheless the term used in police discourse.

⁵ The film was made by a reporter who joined Greater Manchester Police and went through the training period as he filmed covertly.

a racist organization. Here he could, 'look after his own'. 'The Secret Policeman' presented sharp questions to all police officers in the UK and especially to chief officers.⁶ What is the status of race relations policies and chief constables' statements about their commitment to reform? How can members of the UK's ethnic minorities and, crucially, ethnic minority police officers put their wholehearted confidence in any constabulary's commitment to do away with racism from its policies and day to day practices?

Relationships Within the Workforce

Relationships within the police workforce have therefore been retained at the forefront of concern for a number of years but not attracted as much academic interest as, for example, the disproportionate use of legal powers against ethnic minorities, especially the power to stop and search a person (Bowling and Phillips, 2000; Rowe, 2004; Waddington, Stenson *et al*, 2004). As public and criminological attention has been focused upon stop and search and related subjects, important changes to race relations have occurred within constabularies and have been somewhat neglected by academics.

Sarah Locker, David Michael, Paul Wilson, Leroy Logan, Ray Campbell, Ali Dizaei, Surinder Singh, Joy Hendricks, and Gurpal Viridi are the names of just a few ethnic minority police officers who have contributed to important changes to race relations within constabularies. Many more could be mentioned. Their names and contributions, however, are probably unknown to most readers of this book. Some have been the subject of national newspaper reports, but their contributions have mostly passed by.

Each one is a police officer who has been engaged in at times personally testing race relations problems within their constabulary, mostly the London Metropolitan Police Service. Their battles, for that is what they have fought, have not been on the streets but within constabularies. As ethnic minority officers, they have challenged open, racialized prejudice and discrimination within the police workforce, and pressed for reform. Some of them have taken their chief officer to an industrial tribunal and been

⁶ Chief Officers have a responsibility for policy. The term includes the rank of assistant, deputy, and chief constable. Superintendents and chief superintendents are senior officers.

4 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

awarded considerable damages, two on more than one occasion. Others have settled out of court, and others still have been tenacious when challenging the racial prejudice and discrimination they have experienced frequently from white colleagues. They are but a few of the ethnic minority officers and police support staff who, often in quiet ways, have engaged with racism expressed by their colleagues, and accepted the challenge to change their constabularies.

The origins of Black Police Associations, now formed in all of England and Wales's 43 constabularies, can be traced to many of these officers. Their road has been a tough one. Formidable challenges remain. For example, in his 2004 report to the annual meeting of the National Black Police Association (NBPA), Ray Powell, a black constable from South Yorkshire Police and NBPA's Chair, mentioned the 'Morris Inquiry', set up in the aftermath of the Ali Dezaei case to consider the employment conditions of ethnic minorities working in the Metropolitan Police (Morris, 2004). Chief Superintendent Dizaei was suspended from duty by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and eventually charged with fraud. The inquiry and trial were fruitless, with a cost in the region of two million pounds to the tax payer. Powell also mentioned the Commission for Racial Equality's formal investigation into the Police Service, the first ever to monitor constabularies' compliance with the law on equal opportunities and race relations.⁷ He finished his address with a clear message that much remained to be done if constabularies were to be rid of racism, emphasizing the importance of the television programme 'The Secret Policeman' as more than sufficient evidence of a long-standing, serious problem of racism within constabularies. Mark Daly, the reporter who filmed the programme, was the keynote speaker at the meeting. He received an immediate, standing ovation before and after his address.⁸

This book is about the development of Black Police Associations (BPAs); their role within constabularies; their understanding of race and its articulation within constabularies; and related subjects. In

⁷ In 2008 the Commission for Racial Equality was subsumed within the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

⁸ It was noticeable that the only people in the room who did not get to their feet in support of Daly were Home Office officials. Perhaps civil service etiquette forbids such behaviour?

many constabularies, they have been involved in a struggle for recognition and influence and, although variable at the local level, their national, collective impact has been significant. If the tenor of police race relations is generally negative; BPAs offer a different theme, of argument, challenge, and importantly, also of hope and change from *within* the police ranks. BPAs are a rare and probably unique, contemporary example of officers developing from within English and Welsh constabularies a representative organization that has achieved significant change.

Although their brief is narrower than the Police Federation, the formal staff association established by law, BPAs raised their national profile remarkably swiftly. Many chief constables and their senior command teams have identified them as important to the development of race relations policy. Most associations have a secure position within their constabulary. The Home Office helps to fund and consults the NBPA routinely. The elimination of racialized inequalities and racism from policing and constabularies is not complete, not by a long chalk. BPAs nevertheless add a note of encouraging, largely unwritten news about police race relations to all too many stories about inadequacy and error.

This book, however, is not primarily concerned with weighing good and bad news about police race relations. It is not an advocacy for BPAs, even though one cannot but admire many of their members and their work, and some of the Assistant Chief Constables (ACCs) and their colleagues who have responded to their development and demands. Never mind the complexities of an academic researcher's 'position', social science analysis requires reflective distancing from one's subject of inquiry, a stance to which I have tried to be faithful. I am not in the business of telling a good news story about BPAs. Indeed, my theoretical perspective could in many respects be understood as their dissembling. Neither am I so much concerned with their precise role in policy and related subjects. In the vein of administrative criminology so dominant in the UK, BPAs' performance has not been evaluated against stated objectives.⁹ The theoretical and related methodology informing this book has not been concerned with

⁹ For an evaluation of the impact of the Lawrence Inquiry see Foster, J., T. Newburn *et al* (2005) *Assessing the impact of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, London: Home Office.

6 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

evaluating outcomes from BPAs' work but with a fine-grained description and sociological analysis of processes that have led to them (Holdaway, 1997).

Based on a particular sociological perspective and drawing on cognate research I have completed during the last decade or so, BPAs have been analysed to document how race has changed its meaning and articulation within constabularies (Holdaway 1991, 1996; Holdaway and Barron 1997).¹⁰ This has implications for understanding the connotative and denotative meanings of race and ethnicity articulated by the many police officers and their 'civilian' colleagues interviewed during the research project on which the book is based and will be quoted, sometimes at length. Further, it has led to consideration of new relationships within constabularies, between BPA officials and ACCs for example, particularly within the context of New Labour's managerial approach to policy and the related rise of a notion and practice of management within constabularies. And it concerns the changing occupational identity of ethnic minority officers and support staff as they have developed from an ethnic minority group to an ethnic association (Handelman, 1977).

Importantly, it will be argued that it is necessary to conceptualize BPA respondents' understandings of their identity *whilst at work* as related to 'police ethnicity', a notion with implications for recent sociological research about ethnicity *per se*. Other subjects will be considered along the way: Macpherson's notion of 'institutional racism'; ethnic politics within the police, and their boundaries; race and ethnicity within the occupational culture of policing; relationships between the police and ethnic minority communities, for example. Details of the design and methods of research used are found in the Appendix. First, however, the theoretical basis of the research is discussed.

Understanding Race and Ethnicity

As numerous sociologists have recognized as a foundation for their research, race is not a biological or genetically-based phenomenon

¹⁰ 'Race' is placed in inverted commas to recognize what is sometimes seen as an academic protocol concerned with the political consequences of affording the notion a status that exceeds that of a social construction. The protocol is recognized but, for stylistic reasons (and the avoidance of tedium) will not be used from this point forward.

(see, for example, Banton, 1977).¹¹ Race is socially constructed. Racial origins are nevertheless frequently taken for granted as an explanation of individual and group action in everyday settings; at the extreme, genocide has been motivated by beliefs about membership of a race. During the writing of this book, two white youths have been sentenced to life imprisonment for the racially motivated murder of the Liverpool teenager, Anthony Walker. Like Stephen Lawrence, he was murdered for the single reason that his skin colour was black.

Although socially constructed and with a tenuous status, identification with a race is sufficient to motivate action, to stimulate and organize thought and to act as a lens through which the world is observed and lives are lead.¹² In many different ways and in countless contexts, human beings take for granted and affirm their membership of a race, despite its fragile status. Central (largely ignored) questions for criminology are therefore, 'How is race constructed in different settings of relevance to crime and criminal justice institutions, broadly conceived?' and 'What are the meanings of race within particular contexts? How have they changed?' (Holdaway, 1996).

Race and ethnicity are often presented in academic writing as distinct notions. They are difficult to separate, however, when researched empirically within a constructionalist perspective (Alexander, 2002). Race and ethnicity can be related usefully to two facets of the attribution of meaning that makes them significant within mundane contexts. Race tends to be a social category to which individuals and groups with particular attributes are assigned (Jenkins, 2000). Racialized categorizations, however, are often very loosely defined and, when it is asked who is included in and excluded from membership of a group, a host of possible candidates can be identified. Further, membership changes in different social settings (Watson, 1970). 'Black', 'Asian' and 'white people', for example, can be categorized as more or less, or not at

¹¹ It is very tempting but this is not the place to develop a detailed argument about what I view as the inadequacies of many and probably most criminological accounts of race and ethnic relations. See Holdaway, S. (1997) 'Some recent approaches to the study of race in criminological research: race as social process', *The British Journal of Criminology*, 37(3): 383–400 for the basis of such an argument.

¹² The primary signifier of racial origin is skin colour. Ethnic identifications are put to one side for the moment.

8 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

all 'black', 'Asian' or 'white' in some settings but wholly 'black', 'Asian' or 'white' in others.

Each racialized category denotes a group, membership of which explains members' behaviour and life-style.¹³ Claims and access to authority and/or power to mobilize resources that categorize people and groups as members of a race are an important aspect of social science analysis, as are the ways in which categorizations are imposed in mundane settings.¹⁴ Categorization is therefore a process of attribution and an important subject for criminological research.

Remembering that race is a social construct, the notion of 'racialization' has been used to conceptualize processes that attribute meanings of race to phenomena (Small 1994; Holdaway 1996, 1997; Murji and Solomos, 2005). What we sometimes call 'race relations' are therefore better understood as 'racialized relations'. Both ideas will underpin the analysis presented in subsequent chapters.

'Ethnicity' usually refers to a person's understanding of their self-identity in relation to membership of an ethnic group (Jenkins, 1997). It is typically separated analytically from categorizations of race, being understood as an *ascription* and therefore an aspect of subjectivity. Claims to and identification with membership of an ethnic group can draw on common historic origins, a common culture and/or a common sense of belonging to each other. Identification of oneself and others as members of an ethnic group therefore requires processes of ascription.

Ethnic identifications are concerned with *social* identity (Mead, 1934; Jenkins, 1996). As George Herbert Mead argued, the internal conversation between the 'I' and the 'Me' is what we call social identity (Mead, 1934). It is, Mead argued, a process of flux and flow, although the extreme relativism recent post-modern analyses have attributed to the self did not figure in his thought or the perspective of symbolic interactionism developed from it (Rattansi, 1994; Rock, 1979).¹⁵ Hybrid identities, so

¹³ Context is also integral here.

¹⁴ Examples of research about these subjects can be found in Bulmer, M. and J. Solomos (eds) (1999) *Racism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Although Mead discussed the place of language as a key aspect of social identity, he did not reduce or, as is the want of a great deal of recent writings about identity, dissolve away the self as discourse.

much the focus of contemporary studies of ethnicity, fit Mead's conceptualization of self well because he opened the 'I' to creativity. We can, he argued, 'surprise ourselves' as we create and mould our identity, which suggests that attention to Mead's ideas frees us from the over-constraints of determinism and allows us to focus sharply upon human agency (<http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs2/mindself/Mead_1934_22.html>).¹⁶ Thus, a notion of 'police ethnicity' will be considered later. This is a novel ascription, created by ethnic minority officers responding to their categorization by the ethnic majority within the police workforce.

This is a point at which Fredrik Barth's work is relevant to the analysis of BPAs (Barth, 1969). Barth was keen to jettison the idea that cultures are receptacles of history, food, music and so on that fill the minds and order the life-styles of members of distinct ethnic minorities. His main concern was to abandon the primordial understanding of culture, arguing instead that cultures are social constructions. Cultures, he argued, should be understood in relation to the context within which members recognize and identify with them. A person may identify with the membership of an ethnic group in one setting but not in another—they can, for example, be Jewish whilst at home but not Jewish whilst at work as a police officer. An ethnic boundary, flexible and permeable, separates these contexts. The key point is that an ethnic boundary is not placed in an inevitable, fixed position. Cultures and ethnicity are contextual. They define people into membership of an ethnic group and, crucially, others out of membership. This important point will illuminate, for example, an understanding of how black officers in the Metropolitan Police made particular claims about their disadvantaged standing within the police workforce. They argued and lobbied for change based on a distinct claim that their experience of employment as black officers was essentially different from that of their white, ethnic peers. An ethnic boundary was drawn, delineating their experience of police employment and a clear distinction between themselves and their white peers.

One consequence of this understanding is that the meanings of race and ethnicity, and relationships between majorities and

¹⁶ This reference is taken from the pages of the very excellent 'Mead Project' at Brock University, Ontario, Canada <<http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/>>.

10 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

minorities that draw on them, change. Ethnic boundaries are formed and re-formed and, in the case of constabularies, formed and re-formed within the context of police employment. In this particular context of change, I have charted contours of race and ethnicity defining black people who happened to be police officers to become black police officers, their racial identification becoming increasingly central to their occupational identity.

A separation of race and ethnicity is conceptually neat but analytically unsatisfactory, however. Many of the people interviewed in the research about BPAs on which this book is based used the notions of race and ethnicity interchangeably. Others referred to black and Asian people as ‘ethnics’, by which they meant that their categorization was related to biological origins. The everyday world of race and ethnic relationships is not as tidy as that of the academic, conceptual argument and, during analysis of the data, it has become necessary to search for an appropriate theoretical framework that retains the complexity found and, importantly, does not reify constructions of race and ethnicity (Alexander, 2002).

Rogers Brubaker has recently taken the notion of the social construction of race and ethnicity into new intellectual territory, arguing that they are aspects of social cognition (Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker, Loveman *et al*, 2004). His basic point is that

Race, ethnicity, and nationalism exist only in and through our perceptions, interpretations, representations, classifications, categorizations, and identifications. They are not things *in* the world but perspectives *on* the world – not ontological but epistemological realities. (Brubaker, Loveman *et al*, 2004: 45)

This implies that research on race and ethnicity should be directed to questions about

...how gestures, utterances, situations, events, states of affairs, actions and sequences of actions get classified (and thereby interpreted and experienced). The questions, in short, are about seeing the social world and interpreting social experience, not simply about classifying social actors, in ethnic terms. (ibid: 43)

Brubaker’s paper is significant, not just for its fascinating theoretical argument but also because it encourages an analysis of data to identify the ways in which BPA officials, ACCs and others interviewed see and interpret the world in terms of ethnicity and racialized relations. The designation ‘Black Police Association’,

for example, implies a membership that identifies with the one category 'black'. Rather than accept that members of associations share this common perspective on the world of police employment, Brubacker suggests it is more pertinent to analyse how a common, unified definition is constructed, perceived and presented to different audiences.¹⁷ Diverse perceptions of 'black' within BPAs may be shielded by it, which begs the question of why it is thought necessary to portray a common image? What, for example, is the evidence BPAs use to claim that, as black officers, they have a common identity and experience of police employment? More generally, how is the experience of police employment interpreted through schemas and frameworks, the phenomenal form of which may be distinct but the essence similar, shared by claims to membership of racial, ethnic (or national) groups.

Another consequence of this perspective is that, when BPA officials use notions of ethnicity and race interchangeably, at times drawing stereotypical portraits of their colleagues, an essential link with the data is retained by analysing them as ways of articulating their single experience of police employment. This is how they view the world of police work. Perhaps more importantly, it directs us to focus clearly upon how BPAs have constructed and sustained a particular understanding of the experience of police employment, with ethnicity at its centre.¹⁸

Ethnic Minority Officers: the Experience of Individuals

In his report about the 1981 Brixton disturbances, Lord Scarman recommended increased ethnic minority recruitment and urged chief officers to identify and deal with the few serving officers who were racially prejudiced (Scarman OBE, 1981). Scarman's solution was a screening of new applicants for racial prejudice and bias, improved training for all ranks, and closer supervision. His analysis was stated clearly.

Institutional racism does not exist in Britain: but racial disadvantage and its nasty associate, racial discrimination have not yet been eliminated. They poison minds and attitudes: they are, and so long as they remain,

¹⁷ There is obviously an association with some of Goffman's ideas here (Goffman 1974).

¹⁸ Again, human agency becomes central to all these questions.

12 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

will continue to be, a potent factor of unrest. (Scarman OBE, 1981: 11 and 135)

Scarman went on:

It was alleged to me by some of those who made representations to me that Britain is an institutionally racist society. If by that is meant that it is a society which knowingly, as a matter of policy, discriminates against black people, I reject the allegation. (ibid: 11)

Scarman's analysis of policing did not just dwell on inequalities of race as an individualistic phenomenon. He recognized wider inequalities of race relations within England and there is an implicit, Mertonian analysis of race relations within his report. Black youths' opportunities to achieve in educational and labour markets, and other areas, are frustrated by the inadequacies of institutions. He also argued that policing is an art, constantly balancing the claims of law and those of order. This view oriented policing towards communities, recognizing social inequalities within them.¹⁹

The relationship between Scarman's implicit sociological analyses of inequalities of race relations within England and of racialized relations within constabularies is a moot point. As far as he was concerned, the problems of race relations within the Metropolitan Police were certainly not understood helpfully in institutional or collective terms of any type. There were a small number of racially prejudiced and discriminatory serving officers, whose behaviour could cause fractious relationships with ethnic minorities. Nothing about the formal structures, policies or practices of the Metropolitan Police, however, suggested a deliberate intention to discriminate between ethnic minority and majority people. Charges of institutional racism were rejected.

An implication of this argument was that ethnic minority officers might work with a few racially prejudiced and discriminatory colleagues. Those who came up against them would presumably complain to supervisors or deal with the problem in their own way. The fundamental point was Scarman's reduction of race relations within constabularies to infrequent, individual action.

¹⁹ I am grateful to an anonymous review of the manuscript for reminding me of this important point. See Stephen Savage's discussion of Scarman in his recent book about police reform: Savage, S. P. (2007), *Police reform: forces for change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 28–33.

Macpherson's report about the police investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder came to a very different conclusion (Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, 1999). He did not identify the problem of police race relations as one of individual officers who were racially prejudiced or discriminatory. His understanding embraced an institutional rather than an individual perspective. Macpherson argued that the problem was:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, 1999: 28)

Interestingly, evidence from the Metropolitan Police BPA seems important to Macpherson's acceptance of this view. Inspector Paul Wilson, then Chair of the Association, appeared before the Macpherson Inquiry to discuss his BPA's evidence. He placed ethnic minority officers within the wider context of the culture of the Metropolitan Police:

...we should not underestimate the occupational culture within the police service as being a primary source of institutional racism in the way that we differentially treat black people...I say we because there is a marked difference between black and white in the force essentially. We are all consumed by this occupational culture. Some of us may think we rise above it on some occasions, but, generally speaking, we tend to conform, to the norms of this occupational culture, which we say is all-powerful in shaping our views and perceptions of a particular community. (ibid: 25)

These quotes signal a change of emphasis in analyses of race relations within constabularies. Government and police officers have understood them in a variety of ways. Although practice may be very different from policy, a distinction between them does not negate either. Ethnic minority officers have responded to the meanderings of change from an individual to an institutional analysis of police race relations, moulding it in a number of ways, the development of Black Police Associations being one.

Studies of serving and erstwhile ethnic minority officers undertaken in the 1980s and early 90s, before police associations began, documented their considerable experience of open racial prejudice and discrimination (Wilson, Holdaway *et al*, 1984; Holdaway,

1991; Holdaway and Barron, 1997). Evidence from interviews with sizable samples of officers and resigners from many constabularies jarred with Scarman's understanding of the problem of police race relations as one of a few deviant, white officers. Ethnic minority officers' experience was of frequent, open prejudice and discrimination, expressed through joking, banter, exclusion from full membership of their work team, little confidence in the willingness or ability of immediate and more senior supervisors to deal with the difficulties they faced, and an acceptance of the virtual inevitability of racism in the police workforce.

Interviews with serving, white officers of constable to assistant chief constable rank showed they were unaware of the impact of their policies, attitudes, and behaviour on their ethnic minority colleagues. When they were aware, many took the view that racist joking and banter, for example, was an expected aspect of being a member of the police. They reasoned that no harm was meant and their ethnic minority colleagues should appreciate their view. Managerial or policy strategies to address racial prejudice and discrimination within the workforce could not be identified. Scarman's view that a few white colleagues were the source of the problem faced by ethnic minority officers resonated aspects of the police managers' view. Ethnic minority officers would find their own, individual solutions if they encountered difficulties. The problem of racial prejudice and discrimination was individualized.

This working environment was therefore a demanding one for ethnic minority officers but many, albeit a relatively small number, remained in their constabularies. They responded to racial prejudice and discrimination by creating their own tactics and strategies, which I analysed in 'Recruiting a Multi-Racial Police Force' (Holdaway, 1991: 160–67). Some officers interviewed said they could tell whether their colleagues were being racist when they told jokes. They judged much joking and banter to be harmless. Others recalled life-long experiences of prejudice and discrimination; nothing was new in the police. Others still wanted to get on with their work and accepted the situation as unsatisfactory but the reality of their working lives. A small number resisted and challenged their colleagues; telling jokes about white people, rebuking unwanted remarks, and presenting other types of resistance (also see Holdaway, 1997).

These were individualistic responses. Ethnic minority officers mostly found their own way to address prejudice and discrimination without assistance or learning from their more experienced

peers. No matter the effectiveness of their stance, they were to different degrees isolated within the workforce which, of course, was a consequence of ethnic categorization and stereotyping. To be stereotyped and thereby categorized as a member of an ethnic minority is precisely to be set apart from the ethnic majority. *De facto*, it tends to isolate an officer from the mainstream workforce, setting a framework for relationships with colleagues and a perception of oneself within a constabulary.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, ethnic minority serving and erstwhile officers defined themselves as ‘police officers who happen to be black’ (for example, see Wilson, Holdaway *et al*, 1984). Their white peers, however, categorized them as ‘black people who happen to be police officers’, placing their ethnic status in the ascendancy. As Barth has suggested, in this context:

...ethnic identity is super ordinate to most other statuses, and defines the permissible constellation of statuses, or social personalities, which an individual with that identity may assume. (Barth, 1969)

Consequently, ethnic minority officers found it difficult to identify with colleagues as co-members of a team, to rebut stereotypes, to assume trust amongst colleagues, and to claim common membership of a constabulary:

‘You’re not an officer first—to them you are an Asian officer...but you see they make you feel like, that you’re just an Asian officer. You’re an Asian person and then an officer’. (Holdaway and Barron, 1997: 133)

‘I think well, through the 365 days of the years baring holidays, I think I had some comment made about my being black and normally it was in the form of a leg-pull’. (Holdaway and Barron, 1997)

Ethnic minority resigners pointed out that isolation from colleagues could be a consequence of challenging racist jokes. This resigner talked about his experience of basic training:

‘And if I did that once then as soon as I did that I would have been isolated from the rest of the class, instructors, and I would have been on my own. And then the pressure would have built slowly between the white officers and myself and that would have put a lot of pressure on me’. (Holdaway and Barron, 1997: 102)

Another commented on the gradual erosion of his membership of a group of colleagues:

‘You start being apart from everything else, you start staying away from people who are on your shift, you don’t play snooker with them—it just slowly starts draining you’. (Holdaway and Barron, 1997: 137)

16 Black Police Associations: Context and Perspective

Isolation was therefore a common experience for serving ethnic minority officers during the 1980s and early 1990s, and the indication from research is that this situation remains. Indeed, a recently published report of an evaluation of the impact of the Lawrence Inquiry within constabularies found, 'The strongly felt sense of exclusion and discrimination described by women and minority staff, in all sites, was largely unrecognized and unaddressed in all forces' (Foster, Newburn *et al*, 2005). Later in their report, these researchers recognized that important changes of policy have occurred in constabularies but a significant gap exists between the formal view of senior officers and minorities in the workforce

...in particular, women and minorities either experience or expect to experience discrimination within the police service. This may take various forms but is perceived by these staff to affect postings, promotion opportunities, and their everyday interactions. (ibid: 47)

Officers' perceptions were described but not analysed in this evaluation and the question of how the various groups of staff constructed and sustained their particular view of Macpherson's recommendations is not discussed.

One of the intended innovations of black associations, however, has been the reduction of and compensation for their members' segregation. In fact, the early research mentioned above indicated that groups of officers were responding collectively, and beginning to gather informally, well before Black Police Associations were established. A small number of resigners and serving officers spoke of occasional, informal meetings where they talked about their experience of working in the police. These informal gatherings during the late 1990s were a background feature of the development of Black Police Associations in several forces. Black and Asian officers would meet in pubs, hotels, homes or police stations, to discuss their experiences, support each other or just chat to counter their feelings of isolation (ibid: 106).

Signs of change

As ethnic minority officers continued to work in constabularies, a number of important events symbolized their difficult situation and a public remedy to address it. In 1990, DC Surrender Singh of Nottinghamshire Police took his chief constable to an industrial tribunal, following an unsatisfactory in-house investigation

of Singh's allegation of racial discrimination when officers were selected to serve in the CID. Three years later, Constable Sarah Locker of the Metropolitan Police brought an industrial tribunal case against the commissioner, alleging sex and race discrimination. Both cases were successful, with considerable compensation awarded in the glare of national newspaper coverage. Allegations of race discrimination in a number of constabularies persisted and cases against chief constables increased. Judgments in favour of complainants continued when cases went to a tribunal.²⁰ A substantial backlog of cases was building within the Metropolitan Service at this time, with a strong view amongst black officers that the Commissioner was delaying their settlement for as long as possible, hoping they would be dropped or resolved to his advantage.

These circumstances were important, publicizing through non-police channels that ethnic minority officers shared a similar experience of employment. Ethnic minority officers had gone to law and won their cases, often with the award of substantial damages. Chief constables could not ignore the possibility that a case would arise in their constabulary. The national profile of ethnic minority officers was in the ascendancy.

Chief officers' responses to the allegations, however, were not couched in terms of policy reviews, an early settlement of cases or a wider consideration of race relations within their constabularies. Racial discrimination in employment was understood as a legal subject with allegations investigated on a case-by-case basis, which accorded with the Home Office equal opportunities policy framework. If there was an equal opportunities policy question to be solved by a chief officer it was, 'What steps do I need to take to ensure that I am not vulnerable to an allegation of discrimination in employment and a negative finding at an industrial tribunal?' This restricted consideration of what was required to comply with the law in each case. Wider questions about how the organizational culture of constabularies led to a stalling of discrimination cases or about changes required to prevent racial prejudice and discrimination against ethnic minority officers were not asked.

As far as ethnic minority officers were concerned, the Singh, Locker and similar cases were landmarks, symbolizing the

²⁰ Cases of sexual discrimination in employment were also gathering pace at this time, adding to the pressure on the Commissioner.

widespread problem of racial discrimination and their day by day experience in constabularies. An individual officer made each allegation but a shared consciousness of discrimination in employment was developing amongst ethnic minority officers. On the other hand, the legalistic, case-by-case stance of chief officers and, to a certain extent, the Home Office equal opportunities policy framework retained a perception of the problems of ethnic minority officers as those of individuals. When made public, chief officers' views about discrimination in employment sounded to their ethnic minority officers as at best ambivalence and at worst deliberate evasion.

As cases of discrimination in employment increased, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMIC) published three important reports of relevance, the first about equal opportunities in the police service followed by two on developing diversity within the police (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 1992, 1995, 1997). These reports began to change the Home Office policy framework from one of equal opportunities to a concern with ethnic diversity and organizational change.

These cases also had a symbolic function. The plight of ethnic minority officers was no longer the sole province of chief constables. The Home Office and the Inspectorate had now identified it as a problem to be tackled and the HMIC reports contained recommendations for policy change that moved well beyond the legalistic perspectives of chief officers. Ethnic minority officers had been given a voice.

I became aware of this changing context of race within constabularies. The evidence from my previous research about the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority officers was that race was articulated in English and Welsh constabularies as an aspect of the individual experience of officers who did not place their ethnicity at the centre of their identity whilst at work. They were police officers who happened to be members of an ethnic minority. Their white colleagues regarded their membership of an ethnic minority as central and their relationships with them were ordered in such terms. As far as the management of constabularies was concerned, ethnicity was an administrative category, recorded routinely when joining a constabulary. It was not the subject of a raft of constabulary policies and not central to their management. Race was individualized.

Things seemed to be changing, however. BPAs could be a vehicle to bring some ethnic minority officers together and, possibly, change the meaning of race and ethnicity from an individual to a more collective experience, articulated in new ways within the police workforce. If ethnic minority officers and support staff articulated a collective voice, senior managerial ranks might have to relate to them in new ways. An opportunity for interesting, novel research was presented.