



## March 2006 Bulletin



The Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

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## About the Prison Media Monitoring Unit

### INTRODUCTION

The Prison Media Monitoring Unit (PMMU) is based at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University and scrutinizes British media coverage of prison and prisoners. Its monthly bulletins highlight errors, misinformation and distortion about prison issues which, the Unit believes, may have a significant effect on government policy and public attitudes towards prison, punishment and social control.

### METHODOLOGY

PMMU Bulletins are based upon data collected from the nineteen UK national newspapers using the online database Lexis Nexis<sup>1</sup>. The following search terms were used: 'prison', 'prisoner', 'jail', 'punishment', 'inmate' and 'detention'. The terms were applied to three Lexis Nexis criteria – words appearing in the headline, a major mention or three or more times in the article.

Stories were then further sorted to remove any which did not relate to UK prisons, coded for eleven variables<sup>2</sup> and processed through SPSS software. The results of this analysis form the statistical section of the bulletin.

Stories were also explored using discourse analysis, using elements of the critical discourse analysis tradition<sup>3</sup>, and based upon Roger Fowler's position that:

News is a representation of the world in language; because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks<sup>4</sup>.

The paper also considers what Martin Conboy has termed 'an identifiable range of textual strategies'<sup>5</sup> in the printed press's account of prison and the prisoner.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/xchange-international/>>

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I

<sup>3</sup> Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman; Fairclough, N. & Chouliaraki, L. (1995) *Discourse In Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; and Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2001) (ed.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Fowler, R. (1991) *Language In The News*. London: Routledge, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Conboy, M. (2006) *Tabloid Britain: Constructing A Community Through Language*. London: Routledge, p.9.

## CONTACTING THE PMMU

Dr Paul Mason  
Unit Co-Ordinator, Prison Media Monitoring Unit  
School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies  
Bute Building  
King Edward VII Avenue  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NB

e: masonp@cardiff.ac.uk  
t: 02920 874 633  
f: 02920 238 832  
w: <http://www.jc2m.co.uk/pmmu.htm>

## March Summary

### STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

- **Distribution.** There were 88 stories concerning prison printed in the UK's national newspapers in March. This was a drop of 14.5% from the previous month. Of the UK's national newspapers, 15 carried at least one story about prison. *The Times* ran the most stories with 15, nearly double its total for February. Prison coverage in Sunday newspapers made up 11% of the total sample, with only 10 stories. The daily tabloid newspapers printed 43 stories about prison, accounting for just under half the sample (49%), while the daily broadsheets comprised 40%, with 35 stories.
- **Content.** A quarter of all stories concerned prisoners' rights. However 82% of these stories constructed prisoners' rights as excessive and disproportionately generous given the crimes they stood convicted of. Stories about prison conditions was also a dominant theme in March's prison news reports, but focussed on security lapses and dangerous prisoners rather than the poor quality of care received by prisoners in the system. Stories concerning prison policy, and in particular the early release of prisoners were also high. There were 11 stories about Muslim prisoners, 12.5% of the sample.
- **Sources.** The most quoted source in prison stories in March was current prisoners, comprising 21% of all sources used by journalists. The high number of prisoners' quotes did not represent an even distribution across all 19 newspapers. *The Guardian* accounted for 41% of all prisoners quoted which was more than all the tabloid newspapers put together (36%). In a parallel with February's analysis, six of the most quoted sources came from the criminal justice system. Prison reform groups were given very little voice by the national press in March's prison stories

### MAIN PRISON-RELATED STORIES IN MARCH

- **Undeserving Prisoners With Too Many Rights**

A prevalent theme in March's newspaper coverage of prisons was the granting of rights to undeserving prisoners. These 'unreasonable' demands made of the system by prisoners were constructed by newspaper reports within a prison-as-soft-touch discourse. Frequently, the rights claimed or awarded to prisoners were with either the crimes committed by a minority of the prison population, or the lack of facilities of non-prison groups. Consequently, refurbishments or rebuilding programmes were reconstructed as the provision of luxury prison conditions for the most notorious and violent prisoners. Examples included *The Mirror's* story, LUNATICS ARE MAKING OVER THE ASYLUM (13<sup>th</sup> March) about modernization at Broadmoor secure hospital; the *Daily*

*Star's* KILLERS £10 BONUS TO DO NOTHING: PRISON PAYS CHILD MURDERERS 'COMPENSATION FOR BOREDOM' (18<sup>th</sup> March); and LAGS OF LUXURY: INMATES GET MAKE-OVER in *The Express* (30<sup>th</sup> March)

There were also more general attacks on the toughness of prison regimes, such as *The Express* story on the National Audit Office Report on diet and exercise in prison: JAIL OFFERS CLIMBING WALLS, GOLF COURSES...AND BETTER SPORTS CENTRES THAN WE GET ON OUTSIDE (9<sup>th</sup> March). The Report's principal findings were ignored by *The Express* and through misleading and inaccurate information the paper reconstructed them to fit its preferred discourse of prison as a soft option. *The Express* supported its argument by quoting pro-prison pressure groups such as Mothers Against Guns and the Victims of Crime Trust.

- **Muslim Prisoners and HMP Belmarsh**

Several news reports constructed Muslim prisoners as having special privileges at the expense of the rest of the (non-Muslim) prison population. These included *The Express* report claiming PRISON GIVES MUSLIMS THEIR OWN TOASTERS (6<sup>th</sup> March), which recontextualised prisoners' fundamental religious freedoms, as recognised by the Prison Service, into a story about the prejudicial treatment of Christians.

Several papers carried stories about HMP Belmarsh. *The Mail On Sunday* ran a story about the alleged lax nature of the regime at Belmarsh which appeared to be generated by the Prison Officers' Association. POA Chairman Colin Moses suggested that the decision to delay baton training at Belmarsh was evidence of governor Claudia Sturt running the prison "like a flaming holiday camp".

The Chief Inspector of Prison's Report comments on HMP Belmarsh's Muslim prisoners were covered in some detail by several newspapers. *The Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* all ran stories which highlighted the Inspectorate's comments about the lack of staff understanding of Muslim prisoners at Belmarsh. However, all three papers also framed the story within a wider discourse of overcrowding and threat. *The Daily Mail's* story was headlined PRISON 'STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH MUSLIMS' and recontextualised the problems for Muslim prisoners at Belmarsh within a discourse of danger and fear. *The Sun* framed its report around the overcrowding of Muslim prisoners and relied upon the same othering and separation of Muslims that the *Daily Mail* and *The Mirror* used.

- **Security Lapses and Dangerous Inmates**

A dominant discourse of prison and prisoners in news reports was of danger and risk to the public. Hence headlines such as GUN HUNT AS BULLET FOUND AT WEST'S JAIL (*The Sun*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March). These stories took several forms including a number of stories about sex offenders contacting or attempting to contact former victims. Three

stories in March carried reports on Ian Huntley, all framed around the continuing dangerousness of the prisoner, such a story in *The Sun*'s story in which Huntley is alleged to have sent flowers and a rest in peace message to the graves of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

Prison violence was also emphasized. The widely reported story about prison officers' compensation award following their discovery of a dismembered body in a prisoner's cell dwelt on the detail of the murder and subsequent dismemberment rather than the Home Office negligence and failure of the prison system.

- **Support for Prison**

A number of newspapers offered overt support for imprisonment, either through calls for longer sentences or the building of more prisons. *The Sun* launched a campaign 'to stop the early release of criminals who were paroled despite being recognized as long term dangers' (21<sup>st</sup> March). *The Daily Mail* (27<sup>th</sup> March) and *The Daily Telegraph* (26<sup>th</sup> March) reported on government statements regarding sentencing and probation, both suggesting the criminal justice system was too lenient.

*The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Express* attempted to generalize from the specific with little evidence to support their claims. Their emphasis on the exceptional and most violent crimes skewed the crucial arguments around the aim and role of prison towards ones about fear, risk and dangerousness.

- **Prison Criticism**

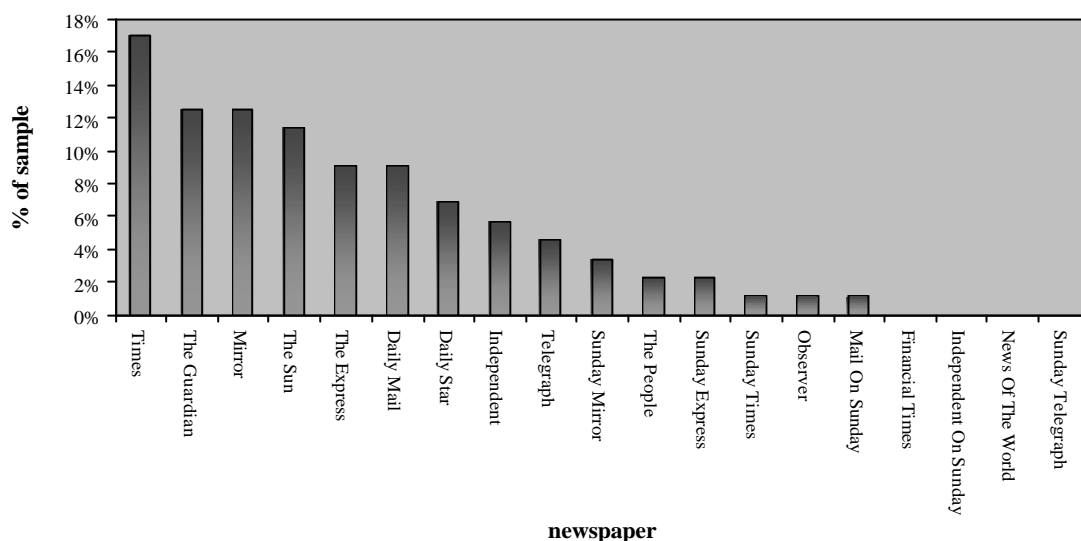
There were some stories however which were critical of the prison system. These included articles about unrealistic levels of activity time reported by prisons to meet key performance targets. *The Independent* was the only paper to report on the launch of the SmartJustice campaign to imprison fewer women. *The Times* noted the Court of Appeal decision which upheld that prison overcrowding was a relevant factor in some sentencing decisions.

## Statistical Analysis

### 1. Stories and Newspaper Distribution

[1.1]. There were 88 stories concerning prison printed in the UK's national newspapers in March. This was a drop of 14.5% from the previous month. Their distribution across March is illustrated below in *Fig. 1*.

*Fig. 1 Which UK Newspapers Carry the Most Prison Stories?*



[1.2] Of the UK's national newspapers, 15 carried at least one story about prison. Those newspapers that contained no prison reports were the same four as in February: the *Financial Times*, *News of the World*, *Sunday Telegraph* and *Independent On Sunday*. *The Times* ran the most stories with 15, nearly double its total for February (9) and contributing to 17% of all prison stories for March. The next two newspapers with the highest total of prison stories were *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*, both with 11. The leading Sunday newspaper was the *Sunday Mirror* which contained 3 stories. Prison coverage in Sunday newspapers made up 11% of the total sample, with only 10 stories. The daily tabloid newspapers printed 43 stories about prison, accounting for just under half the sample (49%), while the daily broadsheets comprised 40%, with 35 stories.

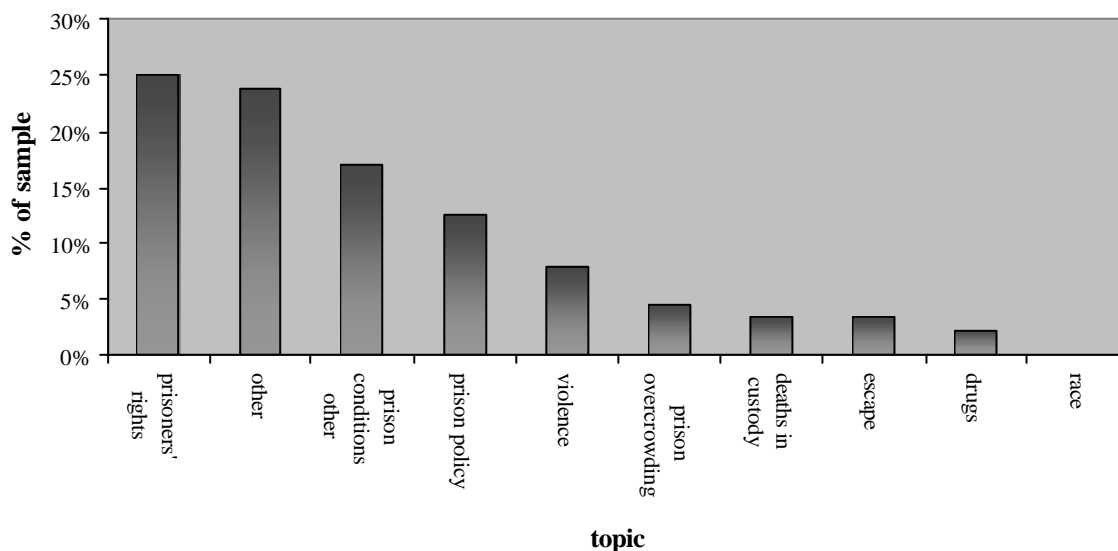
### 2. Content

[2.1] Each prison story in the sample was categorised as falling into one of nine topics as follows:

- deaths in custody
- prison overcrowding
- prison conditions other – including stories about prison regimes, exercise, education and work opportunities
- violence – carried out by prison staff on prisoners, prisoners on staff or prisoners on each other
- escape - actual or attempted
- prisoners' rights - both ‘positive rights’, for example the right to vote; and rights denied, suspended or withdrawn, such as pregnant women transportation
- race
- prison policy - government penal policy, legislation, white papers and so on
- other

[2.2] The distribution of these topics is illustrated in *Fig. 2* below. A quarter of all stories concerned prisoners’ rights. However, and discussed further in section 4 below, the majority of these stories (82%) constructed prisoners’ rights as excessive and disproportionately generous given the crimes they stood convicted of. Stories categorised as being about prison conditions (other than overcrowding which was a separate category) was also a dominant theme in March’s prison news reports (17%, and 22% including overcrowding). Like prisoners’ rights, reports coded as ‘prison conditions’ were much more likely to be about security lapses and dangerous prisoners than they were about the poor quality of care received by prisoners in the system. This is also discussed below in section 6.

**Fig. 2 What Topics Do Prison Stories in UK National Newspapers Concern?**



As in February's papers, stories about prison policy also appeared high in the distribution, although dropped from 23% in February to 13% in March. The themes of early release of prisoners, questions about probation and the release of two reports by the Chief Inspectorate of Prisons<sup>6</sup> would account for this. While there were 11 stories about Muslim prisoners (12.5%), these were not coded as 'race' but under categories in which the story was framed, such as 'prison conditions' and 'prison overcrowding'. A detailed discussion on the press treatment of Muslim prisoners appears in s 5 below. This would also partly explain the 0% figure for prison stories which concerned racial issues.

[2.3] Once more, important stories about prison and prisoners were under-reported in the national press in March. The launch of the SmartJustice campaign to give more non-custodial sentences to women was only reported in brief in *The Independent* (7<sup>th</sup> March). *The Times* law report (28<sup>th</sup> March) reporting on the validity of judge's using prison overcrowding as a factor in determining a custodial sentences in some instances, was not covered by any other newspaper. And while most papers discussed the Chief Inspectorate of Prisons report on HMP Belmarsh, concerning themselves primarily with Muslim prisoners and their 'privileges', the Inspectorate's Report on HMP Long Lartin<sup>7</sup> was only reported briefly in one newspaper, *The Times*. The Report noted that Long Lartin's 'anti-bullying procedures were insufficient, the automatic night sanitation system remained grossly inadequate and provision for the detainees held under terrorism powers required immediate improvement'<sup>8</sup>.

It is of concern that while some of the British newspapers are content to print headlines such as LAPTOPS FOR TERROR SUSPECTS (*Daily Mirror*, 8<sup>th</sup> March) and WOMAN GOVERNOR RUNS BELMARSH 'LIKE A PINK FLUFFY HOLIDAY CAMP' (*The Mail On Sunday*, 5<sup>th</sup> March), serious flaws with British prisons remain almost entirely invisible in the UK national press

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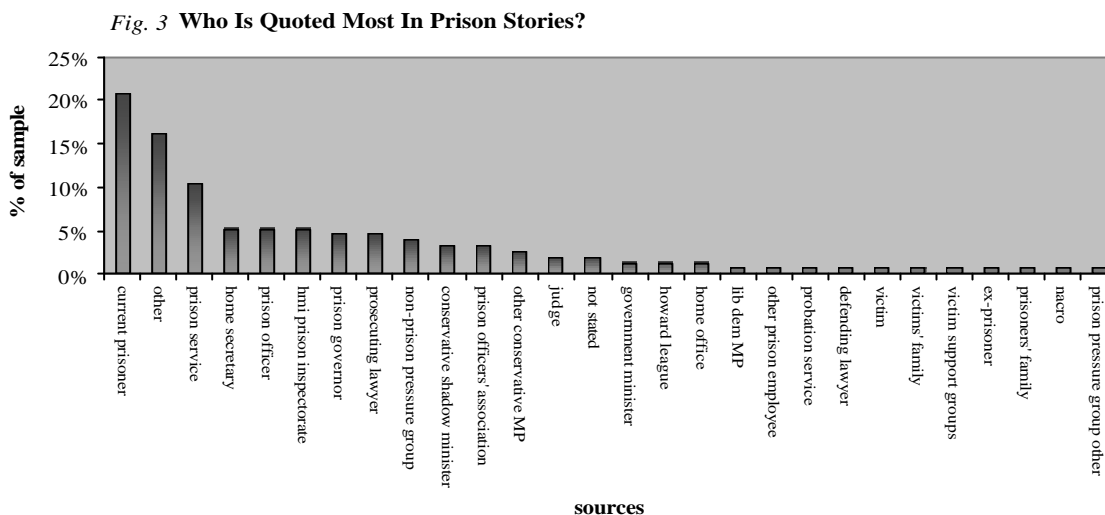
<sup>6</sup> There were a number of reports published by the Inspectorate in March 2006, but two in particular were widely reported on. These were the report on the inspection at HMP Belmarsh in 2005 - HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2006) *Report on an Unannounced Full Follow-Up Inspection of HMP Belmarsh 3rd-7th October 2005*, 4 - 8 October, London: HMSO, available at <[http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect\\_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh.pdf](http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh.pdf)>; and the 2004-5 Annual Report - HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2006) *Annual Report Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales 2004-5*, London: HMSO, available at <<http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/docs/annualreport2004-5.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2006) *Report on an Unannounced Full Follow-Up Inspection of HMP Long Lartin, 19-23 September 2005*: London: HMSO, available at <[http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect\\_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/longlartin.pdf](http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/longlartin.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> Note 7 above, np.

### 3. Sources

[3.1] Prison stories were also monitored for sources quoted, directly or indirectly. These were categorised into thirty nine categories (See Appendix 1) and *Fig. 3* below illustrates their distribution across stories in March. It shows the number of times a source from each of the defined groups was quoted.



[3.2] It is perhaps surprising to find that the most quoted source in prison stories in March was current prisoners, comprising 21% of all sources used by journalists in prison stories. 44% of these quotes appeared in news reports coded as ‘prison conditions’ and 32% in prisoners’ rights. The high number of prisoner’s quotes, 32 in all, does not represent an even distribution across all 19 newspapers. *Fig.4* below, which illustrates which sources are quoted by which newspapers, demonstrates that *The Guardian* accounts for 41% of all prisoners quoted which was more than all the tabloid newspapers put together (36%). Indeed, when current prisoners were quoted by the tabloids, 90% of the quotes appeared in stories about the excessive rights of prisoners.

The second most commonly quoted source was from the ‘other’ category, making up 16% of all sources used. Within this category were thirteen sources described as ‘a prison source’ by newspapers. It was difficult to ascertain whether this source could be attributable to the category of ‘prison service’, ‘prisoner’ and so on. The use of ‘a prison source’ was used exclusively by the tabloid press.

Again, in a parallel with February’s analysis, the next six most quoted sources are located from within the criminal justice system, thus primarily defining the issues surrounding prison. These are the prison service (10%), home secretary (5%), prison officers, prison governors and prosecuting lawyers (all 5%). One could argue whether the Prison Inspectorate falls into this category too (also 5%). If one was to combine prison officers,

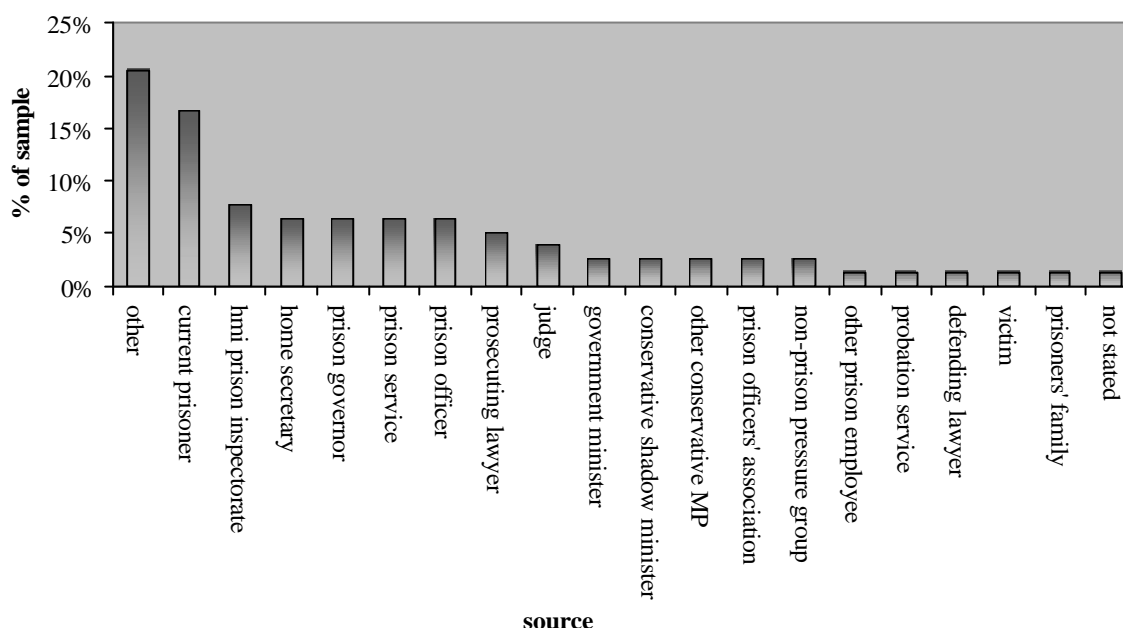
representatives of the Prison Officers' Association and the prison service, this would amount to 19% of all sources used by newspapers printing stories about prison.

[3.3] Prison reform groups were given very little voice by the national press in March's prison stories. The Prison Reform Trust was not quoted once which is in stark contrast to February they were quoted seven times. The National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NACRO), and sources categorized as 'other prison pressure groups' were both quoted only once each, the latter being SmartJustice on the launch of their non custodial sentences for women campaign (2.3 above). This compares to the category coded as 'non-prison pressure groups' that was sourced six times. These groups comprised either victims' support groups (Mothers Against Guns, Victims of Crime Trust) or The Tax Payers' Alliance, used twice by tabloid reports about the use of public money spent on prisons and prisoners (see section 4 below).

| Fig. 4 Which papers do a source's quotes appear in most? | source         |                 |                |                |                         |                    |                  |       |
|--|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------|
|  | home secretary | prison governor | prison service | prison officer | hmi prison inspectorate | prosecuting lawyer | current prisoner | other |
| newspaper  | %              |                 |                |                |                         |                    |                  |       |
| <i>The Guardian</i>                                      | 13%            | 14%             | 6%             | 13%            | 0%                      | 14%                | 41%              | 16%   |
| <i>The Express</i>                                       | 0%             | 0%              | 19%            | 13%            | 0%                      | 29%                | 3%               | 4%    |
| <i>Daily Mail</i>  | 0%             | 14%             | 13%            | 0%             | 11%                     | 14%                | 3%               | 4%    |
| <i>Mirror</i>  | 0%             | 14%             | 31%            | 25%            | 22%                     | 0%                 | 3%               | 12%   |
| <i>Times</i>   | 38%            | 14%             | 0%             | 25%            | 56%                     | 29%                | 3%               | 4%    |
| <i>Telegraph</i>   | 13%            | 0%              | 0%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 6%               | 8%    |
| <i>The People</i>  | 0%             | 0%              | 0%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 6%               | 0%    |
| <i>Independent</i>                                       | 13%            | 0%              | 6%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 14%                | 19%              | 4%    |
| <i>Daily Star</i>  | 0%             | 29%             | 0%             | 25%            | 0%                      | 0%                 | 3%               | 8%    |
| <i>Sunday Express</i>                                    | 0%             | 0%              | 6%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 0%               | 4%    |
| <i>Sunday Mirror</i>                                     | 13%            | 0%              | 0%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 3%               | 8%    |
| <i>Observer</i>  | 13%            | 0%              | 0%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 0%               | 0%    |
| <i>The Sun</i>   | 0%             | 0%              | 19%            | 0%             | 11%                     | 0%                 | 9%               | 24%   |
| <i>Mail On Sunday</i>                                    | 0%             | 14%             | 0%             | 0%             | 0%                      | 0%                 | 0%               | 4%    |
| <i>total</i>   | 100%           | 100%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%                    | 100%               | 100%             | 100%  |

[3.4] Fig. 4 above illustrates the distribution of the eight most used sources across the 15 newspapers which carried prison stories in March. For example, of the quotes attributed to the Home Secretary, 38% were printed in *The Times*. As noted in 3.2 above, *The Guardian* used significantly more quotes from current prisoners than any other paper. In contrast, a significant proportion of all quotes from criminal justice system representatives were printed in *The Express*: 19% of the prison service and prison officers and 29% of prosecution lawyers' comments. This pattern was followed by *The Mirror* who printed 31% of all quotes from the prison service, and 25% of all prison officers' statements.

Fig. 5 Who Is Quoted First in Prison Stories?



[3.5] Fig. 5 above shows those sources that journalists used first in prison stories. After the 'other' category (21%), it was current prisoners who were quoted first, amounting to 17% of all first sources used, followed by the prison inspectorate (8%), the Home Secretary, prison governors and the prison service (all 6%). The percentage of prison stories in which the Prison Inspectorate appears as the first quote is quite high due to the release of two high profile reports released in March as noted in 2.2 above. There is a stark contrast between prosecution and defence lawyers here too: prosecution lawyers (4% of all stories) were quoted first four times more often in prison news reports than defence lawyers (1%).

[3.6] Equally revealing is the percentage of a source's quotes that appeared first in a prison news story. In Fig.6 below, the principle sources used in prison reports are shown, with the proportion of first quotes expressed as a percentage. The table includes all

sources which were quoted by journalists five times or more in March's prison stories, as shown in *Fig. 3* above. For example, the table shows that where a prison officer was quoted in a story about prison, the quote will be the first source that appears in that story 63% of the time.

**Fig. 6 – What % of a Source's Quotes Appear First in a Prison Story?**

| source                       | %    |
|------------------------------|------|
| judge                        | 100% |
| hm prison inspectorate       | 75%  |
| prison governor              | 71%  |
| other                        | 64%  |
| home secretary               | 63%  |
| prison officer               | 63%  |
| prosecuting lawyer           | 57%  |
| other conservative MP        | 50%  |
| current prisoner             | 41%  |
| conservative shadow minister | 40%  |
| prison officers' association | 40%  |
| non-prison pressure group    | 33%  |
| prison service               | 31%  |

These figures substantiate earlier comments both in February's bulletin and in 3.2 above about the primary definers of prison stories. Of the 13 sources listed in the table, eight (62%) are from either the criminal justice system or represent the victim: these include judges, the Home Secretary, prison governors and officers, prosecuting lawyers and the prison service.

## Discourse Analysis

### 4. Undeserving Prisoners with Too Many Rights

[4.1] A prevalent theme in March's newspaper coverage of prisons was the granting of rights to undeserving prisoners. These 'unreasonable' demands made of the system by prisoners were constructed by newspaper reports within a prison-as-soft-touch discourse. Stories included PRISON LOST MY BURBERRY SHIRT (*Daily Mail*, 1<sup>st</sup> March), concerning a prisoner suing the Scottish Prison Service for losing his clothes; and NOW LAWYER FUMES OVER INMATES SMOKING IN JAIL (*Daily Mail*, 29<sup>th</sup> March) in which the paper reported on 'controversial solicitor' John Devane's class action against the Prison Service, challenging its exemption from the smoking ban in Ireland.

[4.2] Frequently, the rights claimed or awarded to prisoners were juxtaposed by sections of the print media with either the crimes committed by a minority of the prison population, or the lack of facilities and/or rights of groups outside of prison. Consequently, refurbishments, upgrading of facilities or rebuilding programmes were reconstructed as the provision of luxury prison conditions for the most notorious and violent prisoners. This was exemplified clearly in the *The Mirror's* story LUNATICS ARE MAKING OVER THE ASYLUM (13<sup>th</sup> March). It reported that Broadmoor, a secure hospital, was being renovated at a cost of £300 million, which the paper calculated was at a cost to the taxpayer of £750,000 per inmate.

The story highlighted that 'among the inmates likely to benefit are Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe, Stockwell Strangler Kenneth Erskine and paedophile John Leather'. It also named 'Cannibal killer Peter Bryan'. It is noticeable here how the paper depersonalised these men through the nickname and labels the media themselves had given them originally at the time of their crimes, thus shifting their identity away from individuals in need of psychiatric treatment. This allows the paper to indulge in its preferred agenda of taxpayers' money being spent on undeserving killers. Although the story does mention the Healthcare Commission's Report into Broadmoor's inadequate facilities published in 2003, it does so only briefly. The Clinical Governance Review of the West London Mental Health NHS Trust<sup>9</sup> which oversees Broadmoor Hospital was written by the Commission For Health Improvement before its remit was taken over by the Health Commission in April 2004. Among its findings was an indictment of conditions at Broadmoor. The Report noted that:

The overwhelming majority of ward areas at Broadmoor Hospital are totally unfit for the purpose and cannot be considered an appropriate, humane environment for modern mental healthcare delivery... it is difficult to see, in spite of the endeavours of staff at all levels, how healthcare of a sufficiently high standard can be provided in many of the current buildings, which are

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<sup>9</sup> CHI (2003) *The Clinical Governance Review of the West London Mental Health NHS Trust.*, available at <<http://www.chi.nhs.uk/Ratings/Reports/MentalHealthTrustDetail.asp?TrustCode=RKL>>.

poorly configured, decorated and maintained and lacking in basic standards of dignity, privacy, cleanliness and amenities'<sup>10</sup>.

[4.3] As a result of this report, the modernising and building programme of Broadmoor has been planned. *The Mirror* failed to mention the details of the Report's findings on Broadmoor in its story, instead making it appear that some of Britain's best known and most violent prisoners have been singled out for better prison conditions. An unnamed source, who also failed to provide any evidence for their claims, said "It's all about improving conditions for *people like Peter Sutcliffe*" (my emphasis). Thus, the substantial renovation programme of Broadmoor, undertaken in response to its stark failings as a provider of mental healthcare, is constructed by *The Mirror* as dangerous prisoners being rewarded with luxurious new conditions.

[4.4] A similar process was used by the *Daily Star* on 18<sup>th</sup> March, where it reported compensation payments of £10 has been given to prisoners at HMP Wakefield after its workshops were closed following an escape attempt. Payments were made to all 685 prisoners, yet the *Daily Star* chose to focus only upon the most dangerous. Under the headline KILLERS £10 BONUS TO DO NOTHING: PRISON PAYS CHILD MURDERERS 'COMPENSATION FOR BOREDOM', the implication was that the payment had been made to particular prisoners rather than all of them.

The paper named Ian Huntley, Roy Whiting and 'racist monster' Paul Taylor as benefiting from the payment, printing pictures of Huntley and Whiting with the caption MAKING A KILLING. That prisoners are entitled to payment for work, and the low levels of pay they receive, was not mentioned. Instead, *The Star* chose to quote 'an unnamed source' to voice its own agenda of excessive privileges for unworthy prisoners:

The inmates already have colour TVs, Playstations and yoga sessions. A senior source stormed: "Britain's most evil men are living in luxury – now they get pocket money too.

[4.5] The 'luxuries' of incarceration were also noted by *The Express* and *The Star* on 30<sup>th</sup> March, comparing the refurbishment at Hindley Young Offender Institution in Wigan to the 'crumbling rest room' occupied by officers. It is likely that such a story was generated by the Prison Officers' Association themselves. Both *The Star*'s LAGS OF LUXURY: INMATES GET MAKE-OVER and *The Express* story ANGER AT THUGS' LUXURY IN JAIL use prison officers at HMP/YOI Hindley to define the issue and the story. Both papers use virtually identical phrases in noting the new leather seats, plants and water coolers for prisoners compared to officers' broken fridge and uncomfortable chairs.

*The Express*, referring to the refurbishment of Broadmoor covered by *The Mirror* two weeks previously, used particular pressure groups to substantiate its position. Matthew Elliott of the Taxpayers' Alliance and Michelle Forbes of Mothers Against Guns were

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<sup>10</sup> Dyer, O. (2003) 'News Extra: Conditions at Broadmoor Come Under Attack From Inspectors', *British Medical Journal* 327, November, pp. 1250.

both invoked to voice their amazement at the “squandering of taxpayers’ money on luxury lifestyle for prisoners”. The paper did not offer any information on Elliott or Forbes’ knowledge of prison budgets, conditions at HMP/YOI Hindley nor of the refurbishment itself.

[4.6] Along with these specific examples, there were several more general attacks by newspapers on the toughness of prison regimes. *The Express* reported that JAIL OFFERS CLIMBING WALLS, GOLF COURSES...AND BETTER SPORTS CENTRES THAN WE GET ON OUTSIDE (9<sup>th</sup> March). It based its story on the National Audit Office Report, *Serving Time: Prisoner Diet and Exercise*<sup>11</sup> and noted that ‘...as well as swimming pools, playing fields, gyms and other sports facilities which put the majority of schools to shame, many prisons have special walls on which convicts learn mountaineering skills’.

The terms of reference of the National Audit Office Report were considerably different to the selective reporting in *The Express* story:

A high proportion of prisoners, are from socially excluded sections of the community with lifestyles more likely to put them at risk of ill health than the rest of the population. Many have, for example, never registered with a doctor or a dentist. Many have drug habits or mental illness and live chaotic lives without a stable home. Prison gives an opportunity to improve the health and lifestyle of prisoners to the benefit of all. Diet and exercise are major components of a healthy lifestyle and they are the subject of this report<sup>12</sup>.

[4.7] There are of course assumptions here made by the Audit Commission about the aim and role of prison. It is constructed within a New Labour discourse of the ‘working prison’, offering solutions and social betterment rather than the reality of prison as a place of pain delivery<sup>13</sup>. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the Audit Commission Report is concerned with exercise and nutrition provision within the penal estate of England and Wales. Its main findings concluded that:

While 43 per cent of prisoners participate in some form of organised physical education activities, there are wide variations ranging from eleven per cent of prisoners in Bristol Prison to 87 per cent in Huntercombe Prison. Low take up rates are affected **by the range of activities and facilities available** (many older prisons have gyms with restricted capacity and no outside sports pitches); **whether prisoners are given equality of access to activities**

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<sup>11</sup> National Audit Office (2006) *Serving Time: Prisoner Diet and Exercise: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*. HC 939 Session 2005-2006. 9th March 2006, London: HMSO.

<sup>12</sup> See note 11 above, p.7

<sup>13</sup> Mason, P. (2006) ‘Lies, Distortion and What Doesn’t Work: Monitoring Prison Stories in the British Media’, *Crime, Media, Culture* vol. 2 (3); pp.251-67. Ryan, M. & Sim, J. (2006) ‘Campaigning For and Campaigning Against Prisons: Excavating and Re-Affirming the Case for Prison Abolition’, in Y. Jewkes (ed.), *Handbook On Prisons*, Cullompton: Willan Publishing, *in press*.

(vulnerable prisoners, for example, do not always have the same level of access as others); **limitations on the availability of staff** (especially at evenings and weekends when prisoners who work or attend education classes during the week could exercise); and **the emphasis given to some activities at some prisons**<sup>14</sup> (original emphasis).

The Report's principal findings and recommendations were ignored by *The Express* and through misleading and inaccurate information the paper reconstructed them to fit its preferred discourse of prison as a soft option. Despite the Audit Commission report overtly stating that swimming pools and climbing walls were 'rare across the (prison) estate' (p.34), the *Express* widened this statement, pluralizing prison facilities, thus referring to 'sports centres' and golf courses, where only one existed in the 139 prisons in England And Wales. The Report also stated that two prisons have climbing walls, but *The Express* preferred to describe this as 'many prisons'.

[4.8] *The Express* and the short piece in the *Sunday Mirror* three days later (12<sup>th</sup> March) relied upon the stereotype of prisoners escaping over the prison wall to bind alleged lax regimes to themes of security. This was achieved primarily through continual references of the two climbing walls as part of the prison exercise regime, despite their rare occurrence across the prison system as a whole. Both papers drew upon a mix of prison comedy stereotypes like those in TV dramas such as *Porridge* or prison caper films like *Two Way Stretch* (1961, dir. Robert Day), *The Pot Carriers* (1962, dir. Peter Graham Scott) and *Lucky Break* (2001, dir. Peter Cataneo). This was supplemented by a cynical tone in the papers' criticism of prison exercise provision. The *Sunday Mirror* suggested that the provisions of climbing frames was 'So much more enlightened than those silly old-fashioned prisons that insisted on walls you couldn't climb'. *The Express* suggested that climbing skills were tantamount to aiding escape, and to training burglars how to break into homes.

*The Express* backed up its argument by quoting the same pressure groups it used in its story about the refurbishment of HMP/YOI Hindley on 30<sup>th</sup> March<sup>15</sup>. Again, there was nothing to suggest that any of those interviewed were familiar with the Audit Commission's report. Those quoted include the Conservative Prison Spokesman, Edward Garnier, Matthew Elliott of the Taxpayers Alliance, Michelle Forbes of Mothers Against Guns and the ubiquitous Norman Brennan of the Victims of Crime Trust<sup>16</sup>. All appeared to accept the *Daily Express*'s partial reading of the Report: Michelle Forbes was quoted as saying "I draw the line at golf courses and swimming pools" and Mathew Elliott referred to "five-star prisons". The paper appeared to contradict itself in its final paragraphs however, noting that the only small pitch and putt golf course at Standford Hill, a category D open prison, was now closed; and that prisons with swimming pools were also used by prison staff, and community groups, as well as prisoners.

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<sup>14</sup> See note 11 above at p.3

<sup>15</sup> See 4.5 above.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of Brennan's intervention in penal debate in the national press, see the PMMU's February Bulletin - Mason *et al.* (2006).

## 5. Muslim Prisoners

[5.1] There was considerable overlap between stories concerning prisoners' rights and religious identity, specifically Muslim prisoners. Several news reports constructed Muslim prisoners as having special privileges at the expense of the rest of the (non-Muslim) prison population. The Scottish edition of *The Express*, which ran the story PRISON GIVES MUSLIMS THEIR OWN TOASTERS (6<sup>th</sup> March), was indicative of this theme. Here, HMP Noranside provided Muslim prisoners with separate sandwich makers which had not been used to cook pork, ham or bacon. *Prison Service Order 4550: Religion Manual*<sup>17</sup> is a 150 page document which provides guidelines and background on a variety of religions, including Islam. It notes the fundamental importance of Halal food for Muslims and references *Prison Service Order 5000: Prison Service Catering Manual*<sup>18</sup> which states that 'all necessary measures are taken to prevent any contact between Halal and non-Halal foods' (p.51). Both Prison Service Orders have been in existence for six and seven years respectively.

*The Express*'s story did not mention either of these orders but reported that 'Prison chiefs have been accused of "petty apartheid" after banning Christian inmates from using toasters reserved for Muslims'. The quote in the headline was attributed to 'a prison source' but *The Express* gave no further indication as to whether the source was a prisoner, officer or any other prison employee. The paper here chose to recontextualise prisoners' fundamental religious freedoms, as recognised by the Prison Service and suggested that it was Christians who were being treated prejudicially. The article also noted that 'HMP Noranside has provided separate grills for Islamic inmates to avoid "contamination" by Western food'. By problematising the word 'contamination', *The Express* invites its readers to question the necessity and validity of Muslim traditions and beliefs, and feeds into broader discourses around fear, ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam, so prevalent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

[5.2] Several papers carried stories about HMP Belmarsh following the release on 9<sup>th</sup> March of the Chief Inspector of Prisons Report on its visit to the prison in October 2005<sup>19</sup>. It is interesting to note that four days before the Report was published, the *Mail On Sunday* ran a story about the lax nature of the regime at Belmarsh, a claim in sharp contrast to previous reports on the prison<sup>20</sup>. The story appeared to be generated by the Prison Officers' Association; or at least to be defined by them. The headline, WOMAN GOVERNOR RUNS BELMARSH 'LIKE A PINK FLUFFY HOLIDAY CAMP' (5<sup>th</sup> March) quoted POA Chairman Colin Moses, who was further extensively referenced in

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<sup>17</sup> HM Prison Service (2000) *Prison Service Order 4550: Religion Manual*, London: HMSO.

<sup>18</sup> HM Prison Service (1999) *Prison Service Order 5000: Prison Service Catering Manual*, London: HMSO.

<sup>19</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2006) *Report on an Unannounced Full Follow-Up Inspection of HMP Belmarsh 3rd-7th October 2005*, 4 - 8 October, London: HMSO, available at <[http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect\\_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh.pdf](http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh.pdf)>.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Independent Monitoring Board (2005) *HMP Belmarsh Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board July 2004/June 2005*, London: HMSO; and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2003) *Report on a Full Announced Inspection of HM Prison Belmarsh 26 May - 4 June 2003*, London: HMSO, available at <[http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect\\_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh-may2003/belmarsh032.pdf](http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html/belmarsh-may2003/belmarsh032.pdf)>.

the article. He suggested that the decision to delay baton training at Belmarsh was evidence of governor Claudia Sturt running the prison “like a flaming holiday camp”. Moses’ claims are then bolstered by the paper using Conservative Shadow Home Affairs Minister Edward Garnier who suggested that the decision was “bizarre”. The governor was further delegitimised through suggestions that her gender was part of the problem. Moses’ reference to ‘pink, fluffy’ was then developed by the paper who noted that ‘Ms Sturt first came to prominence while she was governor of Dartmoor prison. She attracted wolfwhistles from inmates when she wore a short skirt and staff questioned whether her dress style was appropriate’.

One could suggest that the POA may have generated the story before the release of the Belmarsh report four days later to deflect criticism away from themselves and on to the governor. Shortcomings about treatment of Muslim prisoners in particular were highlighted by the Report.

[5.3] The Report also noted the recent improvements at Belmarsh since the previous inspection in 2003, but listed a number of serious deficiencies in the prison which still remained. These included no effective custody plans for the short-term and remanded prisoners who formed the bulk of the population, extremely poor reception and first night procedures; little time out of cells and low quality and quantity of education and training.

However, it was the Report’s comments on Belmarsh’s Muslim prisoners that newspapers picked up on, particularly those prisoners held under The Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005. The Report stated that Muslim prisoners ‘did not believe that staff understood their concerns or behaviour; and said that other prisoners, given recent events, were suspicious of them’<sup>21</sup>. It also noted that despite a large population of Muslim prisoners, there was insufficient staff understanding of their interactions and needs<sup>22</sup> and that relationships between prison staff and Muslim prisoners was poor.

[5.4] *The Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* all ran stories which highlighted the Inspectorate’s comments about the lack of staff understanding of Muslim prisoners at Belmarsh. However, all three papers also framed the story within a wider discourse of overcrowding and threat. The *Daily Mail*’s story was headlined PRISON ‘STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH MUSLIMS’ (8<sup>th</sup> March) and while it detailed some of the issues raised in the Report, it remained silent on the question of detention without trial, or why over 25% of the prison population in England and Wales are from an minority ethnic background compared to 9% in the general population<sup>23</sup>. Further, it recontextualised the problems for Muslim prisoners at Belmarsh within a discourse of danger and fear: ‘A Jail (sic) holding some of Britain’s most high-profile terror suspects is struggling to cope with its Muslim inmates, a report claims today’.

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<sup>21</sup> Note 19 above, p.6.

<sup>22</sup> Note 19 above, p.11

<sup>23</sup> Home Office (2005) *Population in Custody: Quarterly Brief April-June 2005*, available at <<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/prisq205.pdf>>.

[5.5] *The Mirror* which also chose to problematise the Inspectorate's findings in its headline JAIL 'DOESN'T UNDERSTAND' MUSLIMS, focused on just the four prisoners held in connection with the London bombing attempt on 21<sup>st</sup> July. It briefly noted the Inspectorate's concern over the four prisoners' ban from communal prayers, describing the prisoners as those held 'on terror charges', but quoted a number of sources countering the Prison Inspectorate's criticisms. These included Prison Service Director Phil Wheatley, who was quoted as saying "What is important for Belmarsh is not to be diverted by issues specific to a small number of prisoners". Although clearly commenting on the four prisoners held in segregation at Belmarsh, the quote was juxtaposed with 'a source at the jail' who noted that "We cater for their (Muslim prisoners) special diet needs and accommodation every religious festival in the Islamic calendar. But when prisoners asked for a Midnight Mass service at Christmas they were told we didn't have the staff".

[5.6] *The Sun* too framed its report around the overcrowding of Muslim prisoners and relied upon the same othering and separation of Muslims that the *Daily Mail* and *The Mirror* used. Its headline, 'MUSLIM JAIL ALERT' bore little relation to either the story below it, or the Inspectorate's Report on HMP Belmarsh. The Report made no reference to Belmarsh as a 'Muslim Jail' nor of an 'alert'. *The Sun* here re/presented the story within its own favoured agenda, based around Islamophobia, generating fear of the Islamification of Britain's prisons in much the same way February's papers did in stories of the Muslim Boys and Abu Hamza<sup>24</sup>.

[5.7] *The Mirror* ran a trailer for their JAIL 'DOESN'T UNDERSTAND' MUSLIMS story on the front page, concerning the prisoners detained under the Terrorism Act 2005. Under the headline LAPTOPS FOR TERROR SUSPECTS, the paper reported how prisoners who were compiling cases against their unlawful detention without trial were using laptop computers. Noting that 'Suspects included those accused of the 21/7 attempted bombings, al-Queda suspects and members of the Muslim Boys Gang' it quoted yet another 'source' who claimed that it was "outrageous" and that such prisoners could use the computers for criminal activity. There was no information concerning the human rights law of detaining prisoners without trial; nor of prisoners' rights to appeal.

[5.8] This othering of Muslim prisoners, seen also in February's news coverage of Abu Hamza's sentencing and the Muslim Boys' is again at work here, locating Muslim prisoners within an islamophobic discourse generated by broader fears of terrorism, post 9/11 and the London bombings. It is interesting to note that earlier in the month, *The Sun* reported that a prisoner had been 'caught throwing ham into halal curries' and had been disciplined. Arguably, *The Sun* is also bringing difference to the attention of its readers, although it stopped short of the anti-Islamic tone of *The Express*.

<sup>24</sup> See the PMMU's February Bulletin for more on this, note 16 above.

## 6. Security Lapses and Dangerous Inmates

### [6.1] Beasts, Fiends and Pervs.

As in previous months, a dominant discourse of prison and prisoners in news reports was of danger and risk to the public. Hence headlines such as GUN HUNT AS BULLET FOUND AT WEST'S JAIL (*The Sun*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March), PRISONS UNSAFE: ATTACKS SPARK SECURITY FEARS (*The Mirror*, 10<sup>th</sup> March) and SCANDAL OF PAEDO WHO WAS LET FREE (*Sunday Mirror* 6<sup>th</sup> March). This was communicated in several ways in news reports on prison in March: lax regimes and security lapses, an emphasis on violence in prison; and, in March specifically, several stories about sex offenders contacting or attempting to contact former victims.

[6.2] *The Sun*, for example, in its story PAEDO TAUNTS HIS VICTIMS FROM JAIL (7<sup>th</sup> March) reported that Lawrence Petch, a prisoner at HMP Acklington had been sending letters to women and girls including some of those he had assaulted. The paper described Petch as 'a fiend' and 'sex beast'. The story, built around fear, suggested that Petch's victims continue to be vulnerable even while he remains in prison.

[6.3] A similar story, constructed within the same discourse appeared in the *Sunday Mirror* two days previously. PERV'S SICK PLOT TO TERRORISE VICTIM FROM PRISON CELL (5<sup>th</sup> March). The paper reported that Simon Moore, convicted of sexual offences against children, had asked another prisoner on probation to deliver a letter to one of his victims. Like *The Sun* story, the *Sunday Mirror* referred to Moore by a number of pejorative phrases which dehumanised him – 'pervert', 'sex beast' and repeating the judge's description of him as "a dangerous predator". The story fed into the panic around early release of prisoners, arising from high profile cases such as the murder of John Monckton by Damien Hanson, who had been released on parole after seven years of a twelve year sentence for attempted murder<sup>25</sup>.

The *Sunday Mirror* recalls its 'fury' when Moore attacked a second girl while on bail in February 2004. The fear of sex attackers being freed, bailed or released early from prison was used by the paper to support its argument concerning Moore's ability to contact his victim. It also used one of the victims' fathers to express this concern more overtly and to further question the efficacy of the prison system:

When is the system going to start protecting us properly? Or are we supposed to keep putting up with this for ever...He is making our life a misery even though he is behind bars. Prison life seems to have no impact on this pervert. Nothing, it seems, will stop him. He knows where we live – and we are living on a knife edge.

[6.4] The palpable sense of danger felt by a victim's father echoed that expressed by one of Petch's victims in *The Sun*'s story. She said she was "terrified because he knows

<sup>25</sup> See the PMMU's February Bulletin for more on this, note 16 above.

where I live". The use of such sources is not balanced by other more objective criminological or psychological opinion, and further escalates emotive and unfounded fears around the perceived frequency of sex attacks. Such opinions also bolster support for the publication of the sex offenders register. Both stories also suggested that prison is failing to contain or rehabilitate prisoners such as Moore and Petch. But rather than suggest such prisoners would be better served in secure hospitals rather than prisons, the papers' emphasis was on security.

[6.5] The *Daily Mail* further contributed to this argument in its report that sex offenders may have their sentences cut. Its story however, SHORTER JAIL TERMS FOR SEX OFFENDERS TO EASE OVERCROWDING (13<sup>th</sup> March), was misleading. The headline suggested that sentences had already been reduced when in fact the Sentencing Guideline Council's (SGC) proposals on domestic violence and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 were being circulated for consultation.

The *Daily Mail's* headline however suggested immediacy and certainty. In its opening paragraph it reported that:

Rapists and sex offenders could have their jail terms substantially cut under controversial plans revealed yesterday. New guidelines could see 15% shaved off sentences, meaning a rapist given the current average jail term would walk free after only 37 months.

The paper deals in conjecture and speculation here rather than fact. Its statistics concerning rape sentences were also misleading. The average sentence for rape is seven years and three months. A 15% reduction would reduce the sentence to six years and one month<sup>26</sup>.

*The Daily Mail's* calculation may have included probation, but neither this, nor the average sentence length was made clear to readers. It is only later in the article, and somewhat strangely, that the correct figures were stated. The paper's agenda here – one of longer sentences and more prisons - was made apparent through its problematising of the SGC's proposals: 'they claim custodial sentences had become 'more demanding'' and 'sex offenders could be allowed to have 'mitigating circumstances' taken into account in sentencing'. Further, the *Daily Mail* used a number of sources to support their argument, but offer none with a counter perspective on prison populations, populist sentencing and so on. Thus, quotes are attributed to Rape Crisis for England and Wales; the domestic violence charity Refuge and Shadow Home Secretary David Davis. All provide comment framed as if the guidelines were already law. Nicole Westmoreland of Rape Crisis was quoted as saying "To reduce sentences sends out the wrong message to future offenders" and David Davis suggested, offering no evidence for his claims, that the proposals "give licence to men to rape and batter women".

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<sup>26</sup> Hansard (2006) *House of Commons Hansard Written Answers for 11 July 2006* (pt 1575), Westminster Hall Debates for 12 January, Col. 73 WH, 429, no.20, London, available at <[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060712/text/60712w1602.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060712/text/60712w1602.htm)>.

[6.6] In its final paragraph, and in something of a non-sequitur, the *Daily Mail* sought to broaden its argument, suggesting prison conditions for sex offenders were unduly lenient. It stated that ‘Prisoners are being allowed to watch Sky TV in their cells as a reward for good behaviour’. Despite referring to the whole prison population, the *Daily Mail*’s implication was that not only were sentences for sex offenders being reduced but such prisoners were receiving a further ‘reward’ of satellite television. The comparison with victims’ rights, as previously discussed in section 4 above, ends this report. Another Conservative MP asks “How many of their victims would love to have Sky in their homes but simply cannot afford it?”.

[6.7] Three stories in March carried reports on Ian Huntley, all framed around the continuing dangerousness of the prisoner. *The Mirror* reported on HUNTLEY’S CHILD SEX CD PROBE; EXCLUSIVE: SOHAM KILLER QUIZZED ON PORN SMUGGLED INTO JAIL (24<sup>th</sup> March), while *The Sun*’s story JAIL CHIEFS SCOUR CCTV OF HUNTLEY (31<sup>st</sup> March) followed a similar pattern to those about Petch and Moore above. Huntley is alleged to have sent flowers and a rest in peace message to the graves of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

[6.8] The *Daily Star* reported on Huntley’s apparent relationship with ‘a pretty jail worker’ on 28<sup>th</sup> March. Under the headline COOL IT; JAIL BLONDE COSIES UP TO KILLER HUNTLEY, the story, which detailed Huntley’s obsession with ‘the blonde in her mid-twenties’ juxtaposed his dangerousness and the woman’s supposed vulnerability. The origin of the article appeared to be ‘a senior jail source’ and the report’s narrative resonates with cinematic representations of serial killers such as *Silence of the Lambs* (1991, Jonathan Demme). For example, the prison source was quoted as saying:

The woman is very inexperienced and doesn’t realise what she’s dealing with. She doesn’t have experience in handling high-profile prisoners. They try to get inside your head to form a bond – then they can play with your mind to their own advantage.

The *Daily Star* provided no evidence of the relationship beyond their unnamed source, and the source itself appeared to simply speculate and generalize about prisoners based on their notoriety.

[6.9] This kind of reporting simply perpetuates the myths and notoriety, which the media themselves have originally created, around prisoners like Huntley. It frames prisoners across the penal estate within the discourse of dangerousness such that, to the readers of such reports, to be a prisoner means being a highly dangerous threat to society.

#### [6.10] Violence

A second strand stressing the threat of prisoners arose from stories about prison and prisoners which primarily emphasised violence. A widely reported story concerned six prison officers’ compensation award following their discovery of a dismembered body in

a prisoner's cell at HMP Cardiff in April 2000. The Home Office admitted liability in not allocating Jason Ricketts, the prisoner responsible for the murder, a secure hospital place. However, four of the five papers that carried the story chose to dwell on the detail of the murder and subsequent dismemberment rather than the Home Office negligence and failure of the prison system.

[6.11] It is perhaps unsurprising that *The Express* adopted this viewpoint. Its inaccurate headline, PRISON OFFICERS GET £1M FOR DISTRESS OF FINDING CONVICT EATING CELLMATE (16<sup>th</sup> March) referred to Rickett's telling prison officers, on their entry into his cell and discovering the body of prisoner Colin Bloomfield, that "I was just about to eat his heart". The article extensively quoted counsel for the prison officers in detailing the dismemberment, allowing it to make another overt reference to *Silence of the Lambs*. *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* (both 16<sup>th</sup> March) were only marginally less explicit. Both reports also carried numerous descriptions of the attack, *The Daily Telegraph* using the officers' solicitor's description of the case as "a scene of gothic horror" and *The Times* quoting Rickett's comment about eating his victim's heart. *The Independent* story, JAIL CELL 'HORROR' OFFICERS GET £1M (16<sup>th</sup> March), although less graphic, detailed the attack and weapons Ricketts used: 'Using a plastic spoon with a razor blade embedded in it and a sharpened tooth brush handle, he unleashed the brutal attack'. Even *The Guardian's* prison correspondent Eric Allison, a prison campaigner and respected journalist could not resist a tabloid-esque opening to his report on the case:

Six prison officers who discovered the aftermath of a Hannibal Lecter-style execution, in which the victims' organs had been removed, were yesterday awarded damages and costs said to be in excess of £1m for the "severe psychological injuries" they suffered as a result" (*The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> March).

[6.12] In all the reports on this case there was an emphasis on the violence of Ricketts rather than on the negligence of the Home Office in its provision of a secure hospital place. The stories were all court reports, taken from the case brought by the prison officers against the Home Office. Yet, in all five newspapers, the central issue of repeated failings by the prison service leading to the death of another prisoner was overshadowed by lurid and gratuitous details of the killing itself. Consequently, the case against the Home Office was reconstituted as a story about extreme prisoner on prisoner violence, where the killing was framed within an existing discourse produced in cinema rather than in prison. The reality of a failed prison system was largely ignored in these reports, seemingly beyond the dominant news discourse of violence, inhumanity and dangerousness in the prison system, caused by prisoners rather than by prison.

## 7. Support for Prison

[7.1] A number of newspapers offered overt support for imprisonment, either through calls for longer sentences or the building of more prisons. *The Sun* launched a campaign 'to stop the early release of criminals who were paroled despite being recognized as long term dangers' (21<sup>st</sup> March) and printed 11 letters from readers to support it. Several of these referred to particular cases including the early release of Damien Hanson

[7.2] Both the *Daily Mail* (27<sup>th</sup> March) and *The Daily Telegraph* (26<sup>th</sup> March) reported on government statements regarding sentencing and probation, both suggesting the criminal justice system was too lenient. *The Daily Telegraph* inevitably contrasted specific cases of violence with what it considered to be the inadequate length of sentence served. To underscore its argument further, it emphasized the violent nature of the crimes and described the sentences in months rather than years – 'Among those sentenced to life but with recommended terms of 30 months or less are a serial hammer attacker, David Barclay, and a violent rapist, Daniel Worthington'.

*The Daily Mail's* article THE LIFE SENTENCE THAT CAN MEAN ONLY A YEAR IN JAIL (27<sup>th</sup> March) also called for longer sentences. Its argument too concentrated on the most violent crimes, recalling the Damien Hanson case once more, as well the sentencing of Worthington. Like *The Daily Telegraph*, the Worthington case was labeled by the *Daily Mail* as 'typical', but it too offered little substantive proof of its claim. The only source used in support was the Shadow Home Secretary David Davis whose soundbites on tougher sentencing were given credence by the paper: "Muggers, rapists and murderers who should be behind bars are free to roam the streets. How many more people have to die before the Government ends this scandalous system?". One could well apply Davis's second point to the prison system.

[7.3] *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Express* in its article KEEP CRIMINALS LOCKED UP (26<sup>th</sup> March) attempted to generalize from discrete and specific examples with little evidence to support their claims. Their emphasis on the exceptional and most violent crimes skew the crucial arguments around the aim and role of prison towards ones about fear, risk and dangerousness. The wider questions around the overcrowding of prison, which underpin government moves towards shorter sentences and greater use of releasing prisoners on licence are overlooked. The perspective of such reporting is bolstered through the use of pro-prison sources, such as Conservative MPs and pressure groups.

## 8. Prison Criticism

[8.1] There were ten stories which were critical of, or reported failings in the prison system. These made up 11.3% of all stories for March and appeared in either *The Times*, *Independent* or *The Guardian*. One story also appeared in the *Daily Mirror*. Three of

these concerned the release of the Chief Inspector of Prisons' Annual Report<sup>27</sup>. All highlighted the Inspectorate's findings that:

...too many prisons record unrealistic and undeliverable amounts of activity time and time out of cell in order to meet key performance targets. These figures are apparently neither checked nor verified by senior managers'<sup>28</sup>.

*The Guardian's* headline was PRISONS FIDDLING FIGURES TO MASK FAILURES, SAYS INSPECTOR (4<sup>th</sup> March). *The Mirror's* short article emphasised the overcrowding issues raised by the Report, while *The Times* quoted the Inspectorate's concern about the number of prisoners given an indeterminate sentence with no clear strategy for managing such prisoners.

[8.2] Overcrowding was also a concern for *The Independent*, which was the only paper to report on actress Michelle Collins' backing of the SmartJustice campaign to imprison less women (7<sup>th</sup> March). Despite the apparent preoccupation by much of the British press with sentence lengths, none of the papers reported on a Court of Appeal decision in March. Only *The Times'* court report on 28<sup>th</sup> March noted the Court's decision to uphold the sentence imposed upon Thomas Scarth at Teesside Crown Court for possession of a class A drug with intent to supply. The Attorney General had sought to have the sentence increased from a suspended sentence and 100 hours community service. The appeal questioned the trial judge's decision to take into account prison overcrowding when sentencing. The Court of Appeal held that in deciding between a community and custodial sentence, prison overcrowding could affect the chances of rehabilitation and was thus a relevant factor in sentencing decisions, 'where the sentencer's decision was on the cusp'.

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<sup>27</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2006) *Annual Report Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales 2004-5*, London: HMSO, available at <<http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprison/docs/annualreport2004-5.pdf>>.

<sup>28</sup> Note 20 above, p.29

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: CODING CATEGORIES

#### Newspapers

- The Guardian
- The Express
- Daily Mail
- The Mirror
- The Times
- Daily Telegraph
- The People
- Independent
- Daily Star
- Sunday Express
- Sunday Mirror
- Sunday Times
- Financial Times
- The Observer
- The Sun
- Independent on Sunday
- Mail on Sunday
- News of the World
- Sunday Telegraph

#### Prison story topics

- deaths in custody
- prison overcrowding
- prison conditions other – including stories about prison regimes, exercise, education and work opportunities
- violence – carried out by pris on staff on prisoners, prisoners on staff or prisoners on each other
- escape - actual or attempted
- prisoners' rights - both 'positive rights', for example the right to vote; and rights denied, suspended or withdrawn, such as pregnant women transportation
- race
- prison policy - government penal policy, legislation, white papers and so on
- other

Sources Used

- Home Secretary
- Home Office
- Government minister
- Other Labour MP
- Conservative shadow minister
- Other Conservative MP
- Lib Dem MP
- Other MP
- Local government
- Prison Officer's Association
- Prison governor
- Prison Service
- Prison Officer
- Other prison employee
- HM Prison Inspectorate
- Probation Service
- Police
- Judge
- Magistrate
- Prosecuting lawyer
- Defence lawyer
- Victim
- Victim's family
- Victim support groups
- Church
- Ex-prisoner
- Current prisoner
- Prisoner's family
- Prison Reform Trust
- Howard League
- NACRO
- Prison pressure group other
- Non-prison pressure group
- Academic
- Resident
- Child / person under 16
- Family
- Other
- Not stated

Function

- Not stated -person's function is not clear.
- Subject - story is about this person, or about something the person has done, said
- Spokesperson - person represents, or speaks on behalf of another person, a group or an organisation
- Expert or commentator - person provides additional information, opinion or comment, based on specialist knowledge or expertise
- Personal experience - person provides opinion or comment, based on individual personal experience; the opinion is not necessarily meant to reflect the views of a wider group
- Eye witness - the person gives testimony or comment, based on direct observation (e.g. being present at an event)
- Other

## PMMU Staff



### **Paul Mason, Unit Co-ordinator**

Paul Mason is Director of Postgraduate Research in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University. He is Editor of [jc2m] *Journal for Crime, Conflict and Media Culture* and a member of the prison abolition movement, No More Prison. He is author of *Captured By The Media: Penal Discourse in Popular Culture* (Ed., Willan Publishing 2006), *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice* (Ed., Willan Publishing, 2003) and *Policing and the Media: Facts, Fictions and Factions* (with Frank Leishman, Willan Publishing, 2003).



### **Bernhard Gross**

After working as a print and broadcast journalist in the USA and Germany, Bernhard returned to the academic world in the autumn of 2005 to work on a PhD at Cardiff University. His research focuses on Europe as the "Other", the discourse of Europe in non-European, English-language media. He has an MA (English-German Joint Honours) degree from Aberdeen University, Scotland and a MA (Newspaper Journalism) from Syracuse University, New York.



### **Kaity Mendes**

Kaity Mendes studied her Bachelor of Journalism at Carleton University, Canada. She is currently a PhD student in the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University. Her thesis examines how the print media in the US and the UK covered the women's liberation movement in the 1960s-1980s.