

# *Public Dissent and Governmental Neglect: Isolating and Excluding Macquarie Fields*

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The outgroup becomes a scapegoat for the troubles of the wider society: they are the underclass, who live in idleness and crime. Their areas are the abode of single mothers and feckless fathers, their economies that of drugs, prostitution and trafficking in stolen goods. They are the social impurities of the late-modern world ... victims of sanitising and moralising geographies ... (Jock Young 1999:20).

## **Introduction**

From February 25<sup>th</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 the suburb of Macquarie Fields in Sydney's South West became the site of violent clashes between a group of one hundred or more young people and NSW police. The so called Macquarie Fields 'riots'<sup>1</sup> became the focus of considerable moral outrage and panic with politicians, conservative media commentators and others emphatically blaming the trouble on 'bad' individuals, a growing lack of respect for authority, the breakdown of decent family values, and 'softly-softly' approaches to policing. The 'riots' followed the deaths of two teenagers, Dylan Raywood, 17, and Matthew Robertson, 19, in a motor vehicle that left the road and crashed during a police pursuit. A third man, the driver of the car Jesse Kelly, escaped serious injury and fled the scene. This resulted in a week-long police man-hunt which itself became a major news story and which finally resulted in Kelly's arrest. Kelly was, at the time of writing, awaiting trial on manslaughter charges. NSW Police laid 186 charges and arrested 59 people following the unrest. Charges included; assaulting police, malicious damage, malicious wounding, possession of an offensive weapon, possessing illegal drugs and rioting (NSW Police 2005:4,5). Both the fatal car crash and the 'riots' occurred on Eucalyptus Drive in the Glennquarrie Estate, a large public housing estate in a socio-economically disadvantaged, and geographically isolated area of Sydney's sprawling South West.

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1 I place the term 'riot' in inverted commas not only because it tends to be an overtly emotive descriptor for the events that unfolded at Macquarie Fields, but also because both NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney and visiting New York police chief William Bratton suggested that there was a big difference between these events and more serious civil unrest like the LA and Paris riots (SMH 05/12/2005).

## Method

This article draws on two sources of data. First, it employs textual material to assess the construction of the 'riots' in public and political discourse. This material consists of media reportage, press releases, police inquiries and other public documents. Secondly, it draws on qualitative research conducted at the Glennquarrie Estate in 2002 and 2003. Although this research<sup>2</sup> was conducted two years prior to the 'riots' it provides many valuable insights into the underlying conditions that led to such a public display of dissent. The data explores the perceptions of community, disorder and crime of a group of Macquarie Fields residents. The deployment of this data highlights many themes of discussion silenced at the level of the authoritative public and political discourse that followed the riots, particularly the profound sense of social isolation or exclusion expressed by residents (see Fairclough 1992).

All interviews conducted during the course of the research were 'in depth' and 'semi-structured'. The research instrument used here consisted of up to 20 questions and 30 prompts and was designed to allow respondents to speak broadly about what risks to safety they believed could be identified in their local area. Respondents were encouraged to present their own stories, interpretations, and experiences about what they liked, and did not like, in their community. This pilot study involved 21 respondents (n=21). The sample was made up primarily of residents in a public housing estate (n=14) but was triangulated with local service providers (n=4) and local area police (n=3). The sample consisted of men (n=8) and women (n=13) over the age of 18 years. Interviews were tape recorded and conducted in locations on the estate convenient to respondents. Initially, participants were contacted through service providers and participation was expanded using snowballing techniques. Statistical data was compiled giving the researchers a socio-demographic and crime profile of the community and geo-spatial area. Interviews were transcribed, thematically and discursively coded using the Nvivo 6 program as a qualitative tool. This process attempted to tap into how and in what context crime and related issues were discussed and which themes and discourses reoccurred consistently in the interviews.

Theoretically, the discussion that follows is informed by Jock Young's (1999, 2002) work around the dynamics of *social exclusion* in late modernity. This framework enables a revaluation of the 'riots', and factors that may have led to them, in ways that go beyond either questions of uncontrollable kids, irresponsible parents, or even simply poor policing. I also draw on the work of Oscar Newman (1972, 1996) and critical work in the field of 'environmental criminology' (Bottoms & Wiles 2002) in order to discuss the geo-spatial design implications of the public housing area at Macquarie Fields and its surrounding developments. The interviews themselves are compiled in a manner Pat Carlen (1996) has termed 'jigsaw'. This attempts to provide the reader an insight into the lives of the respondents.

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2 The project was funded by a University of Western Sydney internal grant. I would like to take this opportunity to thank John Gaffey and Kelly Richards who helped conduct field work on this project. I thank also the anonymous referees for their constructive feedback on the earlier version of this paper and Michael Kennedy for his views during our numerous conversations on the topic. Most of all I thank the Macquarie Fields residents who volunteered to take part in this research.

## Contextualising the Macquarie Fields ‘Riots’

Before proceeding, the violent public dissent at Macquarie Fields in 2005 needs to be placed in a broader sociological and historical context. Let me do this by highlighting a number of points which are both important to the argument that follows and a counter to the notion that we have simply entered a period of decline in the social and moral order — although we’ve no doubt entered a period of a new economic order and this has its effects on the former. As such, history suggests to us that the type of dissent evidenced at Macquarie Fields is likely to be a symptom of some deeper social problem or failure of public policy.

First, NSW and Australia more broadly has a well-documented history of public displays of dissent and/or rioting triggered by issues such as disadvantage (Finnane 1994:26), inequity, social isolation, poor governance, and community breakdown. These have sometimes involved race or ethnic politics as we saw in Redfern in 2004 — and before that in Bourke and Brewarrina in the 1980s during which time the TRG<sup>3</sup> were deployed (Cunneen 2001). At other times such action has involved more explicit political dissent as demonstrated in the 1930s (Moore 1987),<sup>4</sup> 1960s (York 1987)<sup>5</sup> and dating back to disturbances on the goldfields (Finnane 1994). Indeed, the Sydney New Years Day riots of 1850 were partly responsible for the development of a centralised police force in NSW (Finnane 1994:27). Thus, we should reject altogether the idea that these recent disturbances are somehow out of character, un-Australian, or indicate a new moral low point. Rather, they and the moral outrage that usually follows them are recurring — if relatively infrequent — events (Hogg & Brown 1998) that often reflect some form of deeper social or governmental change that should not be downplayed or ignored.

Secondly, many of the more recent disturbances have had similar events as immediate catalysts — the recent Cronulla riots aside. In particular the death of a member of a community and some form of police involvement in the death has acted as a catalyst. I am not suggesting that the police involvement was necessarily untoward. Rather, at times of heightened tensions between communities and those that police them, such events are likely to be interpreted by the community as untoward. Death of community members with police involvement was evident in the Redfern 2004 riots following the death of TJ Hickey, and in the Palm Island riots with the death of Cameron Doomadgee. The 1987 Brewarrina riots also began with the death in custody of Lloyd Boney. As noted above, in the case of Macquarie Fields it was the deaths of the two teenagers on the estate during a police pursuit on Eucalyptus Drive (the estate’s arterial road). Thus, each episode has involved the exercise of police powers in a way that was perceived to —and in some cases did — occasion death. Moreover, each has occurred in a context where relations between the community and police were already strained.

Thirdly, in most cases the media and politicians have actively constructed rioters as *always* bad, but in many cases the passing of time — and often subsequent independent inquiries — have suggested something much more complex (see Cunneen et al 1989). We should be reluctant to immediately reduce forms of public dissent to the *us* and *them*, to *good* and the *bad* and to being simply an apolitical breakdown in law and order. And yet, this seems to have been the overwhelming and populist response to the Macquarie Fields dissent from the public, politicians and the media.

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3 The Police Tactical Response Group, now disbanded.

4 The political upheavals of the depression period which witnessed sporadic acts of insubordination by the unemployed (Moore 1987:115).

5 Protests during the Vietnam war.

Fourthly, contemporary Australian cities and suburbs have been extraordinarily civil and peaceful places when we consider the huge population densities, the diversity and heterogeneity of populations, and the close physical proximity in which we live (Hogg & Carrington 1998). Indeed, we tend to take this relative civility almost for granted. Moreover, it is through complex 'civilising processes' (Elias 2000) including a variety of mentalities, rationalities and practices of government that this relative stability has been achieved; the development of a welfare state, the deployment of Keynesian economics and the development of expertise in social government amongst these (Hogg 2002). Indeed, these processes of civility have emerged gradually ever since the nineteenth century discovery of the 'sociality' or 'the social' as a site of governance (Donzelot 1979:xxiv). If we want to explore the 'causes' of episodes of violent public dissent, we might first look at the rationalities of government and the subsequent development of policy and practice (the *technologies* of government). Moreover, any thorough analysis of the Macquarie Fields 'riots' should take account of the changing nature of Australian suburban life under the late modern pressures of globalisation and the market economy.

Lastly, recorded crime rates in NSW in most offence categories have exhibited downward trends over the past five years (Moffat et al 2005) with some important localised exceptions. So the public disturbances cannot — at least on quantitative face value — be constructed simply as a consequence of any general growth in criminal activity. However, increases in the recorded rates of offending in specific localities — including particular types of offending in the Macquarie Fields area — indicate specific and localised processes of criminalisation that require closer scrutiny.

With these five contextualising points in mind let me now turn to the response of politicians and media commentators to the 'riots' at Macquarie Fields.

### **Moral Panic and the Macquarie Fields Riots**

The public show of dissent at Macquarie Fields was captured by often graphic and dramatic media reportage. Indeed, the 'riot' became a media event where the often-live coverage not only reported on events but also actively helped construct them with the rioters obviously responding to and encouraging the media coverage. While this live coverage is not the focus of this article it must be emphasised that media involvement in such events is not simply benign and objective. Rather, the media actively construct many of the narratives that will signify the event.

The overwhelming public and political response to the 'riot' was one of apportioning blame squarely with the 'lawless rioters'. There was also an explicit denial that social exclusion, disadvantage or poverty could in any way be even partially responsible for the mayhem. Those that drew attention to such factors were customarily dismissed as 'do-gooders'. The then NSW Premier Bob Carr was active in attempting to direct the political, media and public mood when he proclaimed at a press conference during the height of the violence:

There are not excuses for this behaviour and I am not going to have it said that this behaviour is caused by social disadvantage ... A lot of people grew up in circumstances of social disadvantage and they did not go out and attack police with bricks and light fires in the streets ... There is one blame here and that is the people who went out and threw bricks and caused riots. ... (Jopson et al *SMH* 01/03/05)

The then NSW opposition leader John Brogden went further blaming a 'softly softly' approach to policing fostered under Mr Carr's watch and suggesting that this had 'sparked lawlessness across Sydney' (*SMH* 07/03/05). Such responses are illustrative of the long-

running politicisation of law and order in NSW. Through this politicisation it has become all but impossible for either major party to present anything but a 'tough' punitive public face when it comes to crime. This has resulted in an environment where reasoned rational public debate about crime and order is rare.

The events also provided much appreciated fuel for the 'moral entrepreneurs' and talkback demagogues. The *Herald's* regular conservative columnist Miranda Devine was able to blame the 'do-gooders' and argue for a 'zero tolerance approach' to the rioters and crime generally (Devine 2005), while talkback radio hosts Alan Jones and John Laws also lined up to join the fray. Arguing for a tougher response Jones lamented, '... don't we have teargas? Don't we have mace'? Laws berated a Macquarie Fields resident on-air who had had the audacity to argue that the police provoked the riot:

Caller: The reason why it is was because a few mates were around the pole ...

JL: Well, I'll have to go back to what I said before and we'll leave out being as bad as they are. You're just plain stupid, and I wouldn't like to be in charge of your future, my dear.

(hangs up)

JL: Unbelievable — unbelievable. Stupid little tart. I mean, to say someone who steals a car is not bad, somebody who's spent most of their life in detention centres since the age of 12 is not bad ...<sup>6</sup>

The John Laws approach perhaps best sums up much of the public discourse on the matter. Not only were these *bad* kids, but they were also 'stupid'. Such beliefs manifested themselves in opinion pages published in the major newspapers and were also evident on the numerous internet 'blogs'<sup>7</sup> that emerged following the 'riots'. Indeed, the pillorying of the Macquarie Fields community even extended to the electronic circulation of a mocking version of 'Macquarie Fields Monopoly' where, amongst other things, one visits centrelink to 'collect \$400 welfare benefits' and every second square on the board reads 'go directly to jail'. In much of this discourse there is of course a contradiction. One is both 'stupid' and yet capable of rational calculating action. Young (1999:108) describes this 'othering' as a form of 'essentialism' providing grounds for the differentiation of particular populations and cultural forms. Here the 'habitual' unemployed are constructed as a threat to and strain on the nation's economic fibre and standards of decency, 'culturally impoverished' and 'socially deviant' (Cunneen & White 1995).

While the political discourse was slightly more sophisticated it still fed the public blaming, shaming and naming. The then Premier Bob Carr later pointed the finger at parental 'values that are there in the home' and a 'lot of families [in Macquarie Fields] that are near dysfunctional' (Norrie 2005). In short, the official discourses were of bad kids, irresponsible parents, and police having the 'hands tied' by the legal system.

Thus, authoritative political and media discourse sought, not only to construct the rioters as bad, completely blameworthy, but also to silence any alternative discourse and analysis. That is not to suggest that *all* politicians and *all* media commentary took this position. They did not. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published a number of opinion and investigative articles that offered counter arguments from academics, leading public servants and others along with the fore mentioned pieces by regular conservative columnists. However, those in positions to exercise the most power in influencing public debate on the issue directed this debate to questions of individual responsibility, criminality, and social control. David

6 Repeated on ABC Stateline program 04/03/2005, text at: <<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nsw/content/2005/s1316622.htm>>.

7 See for example <<http://au.messages.yahoo.com/news/top-stories/1460>>, accessed 12/05/05.

Garland's (2001:175) characterisation of authoritative responses to crime in late modernity has resonance here:

...[O]ffenders are now less likely to be represented in official discourse as socially deprived citizens in need of support. They are depicted instead as culpable, undeserving and somewhat dangerous individuals.

In short, what we saw was the development of an authoritative set of discourses and narratives that sought to silence dissent, and importantly, to depoliticise and individuate the events at Macquarie Fields.

The findings of a police internal inquiry into the police response, at least on the face of it, seemed to give some credence to the words of the conservative commentators and NSW opposition in particular. The then Police Minister Carl Scully, for example was forced to admit that police had made 'tactical errors' and were 'not as tough as they could have been' (Gee & Saleh *SMH* 29/6/05). Likewise, NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney suggested: 'It would have been ... better that a more proactive and firmer approach had been taken sooner ...' (Gee & Saleh *SMH* 29/6/05).

However, whatever the outcome of this enquiry, we need to remind ourselves that discussion about the police response — and the inquiry's terms of reference were to 'investigate the Police response' — does not tell us anything about the underlying social factors that led to the 'riots'. Nor does it tell us anything about police activity or the style of policing being practised in the area up to the time of 'riots'. One would think these were rather important concerns omitted from the terms of reference. In June 2006 the NSW Parliament Upper House (Legislative Council) Standing Committee on Social Issues released a more broad-reaching report titled *Public Disturbances at Macquarie Fields* (NSW Parliament Standing Committee on Social Issues 2006). While this 109 page report rightly identifies and discusses many of the underlying social issues I discuss below, and makes many recommendations that are to be applauded, it is conspicuously silent on the roles of both the NSW government and opposition in politicising the 'riots' and marginalising the residents, and the roles of all levels of government in the failure of public policy to provide a framework for civil community/police relations in Macquarie Fields. In stark contrast to this parliamentary report, at the time of the riots former Premier Carr specifically talked-up the level of social and material infrastructure available to residents of Macquarie Fields in what can only be seen as an attempt to divert attention from problems of policy, infrastructure and resourcing.

To begin understand the problems at Macquarie Fields we need to consider broad questions of the social and spatial planning that has defined everyday life on the estate, although this too provides only a partial analysis. We also need to account for the effect of the housing market on both the depth of socio-economic disadvantage on the estate and the mix of tenants. Finally, we need to look at public policy more generally and the effects of the market economy and globalisation on employment opportunities in the area. When we add to this the discussion with residents, we begin to get a clearer picture of how the March 2005 disturbances catalysed.

## Geo-Spatial Isolation, Crime and Disadvantage

Glennquarie Estate at Macquarie Fields was built in the 1970s as part of a then progressive new style of public housing development for Sydney's South West. Over the following decades the estate has increasingly become a mix of public and private housing as stock has been sold off in line with Department of Housing (DoH) policy. The estate was originally

built on the ‘Radburn’ design planning principles. This design sees the houses essentially set backwards on the block; the rear of the house faces the street while the front of the house faces communal ‘green’ areas. At Macquarie Fields there is a mixture of townhouses and free-standing dwellings built on these principles — indeed it was one of the first NSW DoH projects to include town houses on a large scale. In addition the Radburn design provided for a network of linking lanes and alleyways designated for expedient bicycle and pedestrian access between streets on the estate. The estate was originally designed as publicly provided housing for a population mix that would consist largely of the working poor. However, since the 1980s public housing has been increasingly targeted toward the most disadvantaged groups as the stock of housing decreases proportionally to a rising demand. This is perhaps best illustrated by the DoH themselves, who articulate clearly this refocusing of policy:

1980s... Housing priorities re-focussed away from just public housing as ‘blue collar workers’ housing to housing those most in need.

1990s... The targeting of housing assistance to those in priority need increases in response to continued reduction in Federal funding (<<http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/>>).

Oscar Newman, in his ground breaking *Defensible Space* (1972), notes that the needs of low-income families, in terms of spatiality of residential design, are very different from upper-middle income families — not least because of the limitations of choice as a result of socio-economic circumstance. While Newman’s critique is squarely directed towards the multi-story public housing ‘projects’ built in the US in the 1950s, many of the principals he outlines resonate strongly with developments in Sydney’s West such as Macquarie Fields. He suggests that four elements act in concert to produce secure yet liveable community environments in public housing:

- The territorial definition of space in developments reflecting the areas of influence of the inhabitants. This works by subdividing the residential environment into zones toward which adjacent residents easily adopt proprietary attitudes.
- The positioning of apartment windows to allow residents to naturally survey the exterior and interior public areas of their living environment.
- The adoption of building forms and idioms which avoid the stigma of peculiarity that allows others to perceive the vulnerability and isolation of the inhabitants.
- The enhancement of safety by locating residential developments in functionally sympathetic urban areas immediately adjacent to activities that do not provide continued threat (Newman 1972:9).

While Newman — unlike many of those who have selectively developed his ideas around CPTED<sup>8</sup> (e.g. Felson 2002) — would be at pains to note that design is not a panacea for social inequities, it is instructive to note that developments such as Macquarie Fields adhere to none of Newman’s four spatial design principles. Rather the estate is potentially aesthetically stigmatising (the peculiarity of the Radburn design), anti-territorialising (communal shared spaces and laneways), geographically isolated, and lacking natural surveillance (due to the Radburn design).

Newman further notes that ‘security design for a low-income is very difficult’. Economic restraints are coupled with a high concentration of potential victims and offenders. Daily experience reinforces a sense of impotence and removes any fantasy of improving one’s conditions. ‘Closed out of the game financially, politically, educationally, and in virtually every other way’ those who have not accepted their own impotence are rare

(Newman 1972:19). It may be unrealistic to expect individuals to assume positive social attitudes in the family and residential environments when they have learned clearly in other facets of life and existence that one is powerless. Following Newman we can see how a number of exclusionary and marginalising processes are intensified by the poor planning and design at Macquarie Fields.

Bottoms and Wiles (1988)<sup>9</sup> also draw our attention to how the housing market and the processes of allocation are likely to affect crime rates in public housing areas. DoH policy at Macquarie Fields, it could be argued, has produced a community of profound disadvantage as the mix of tenants has narrowed over the past 20 years:

The interactive effects within and between groups, and/or the development of particular cultural patterns may be more criminogenically important than any initial propensity to offend. Furthermore, once the population is allocated, and its community crime profile established, this will be further influenced by the wider social response to that community (Bottoms & Wiles 1988:87).

Recorded crime rates in the Macquarie Fields area are above state average, particularly recorded rates of domestic violence and motor vehicle theft. The area has also experienced a significant increase of malicious damage to property in the 2004 figures. However, like much of NSW the rates of many categories of offending have decreased over the past few years.<sup>10</sup> A socio-economic profile of the area confirms its relative low socio-economic status (ABS 2002). Unemployment in Macquarie Fields is 11.3% (over twice the Australian average). Average weekly family income in Macquarie Fields<sup>11</sup> is \$700–799 as compared to greater Sydney's \$1000–1199 (ABS 2002).

What we have in Macquarie Fields, despite efforts to privatise parts of the estate and so increase the housing mix, is an estate housing a large number of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and families; many already experiencing acute social and mental health problems before they are housed on the estate; many long-term unemployed and unemployable; all housed at a site which is geographically isolated and increasingly losing services and the scarce job opportunities that accompany them. Many residents are not simply outside the labour market but actively excluded from it. Young people in the area experience long-term unemployment, acquire inadequate work histories, and end up with a declining motivation to compete in apparently hopeless circumstances ensuring this exclusion (Cunneen & White 1995:129). I will now turn to how the residents themselves articulate these issues.

## The Residents

What is instructive about these interviews is not just how articulate residents were in identifying risks — many of which were borne out in subsequent events — but also how they were able to identify many socio-spatial factors underlying these risks. I will now discuss a variety of themes that emerged from the interviews providing examples of the way residents expressed these themes. The themes explored here are those of boredom, public transport, services, community renewal, education, police, and community violence.

9 Drawing on the work of Newman (1972) and Coleman (1985)

10 For example Assault 1603.9 per 100,000 > 1088.5 (NSW), 931.6 (Sydney Statistical division SSD). Murder 2.0 per 100,000 > 1.5 (NSW), 1.4 (SSD); Sexual Assault 101.6 per 100,000 > 56.6 (NSW); 44.9 (SSD); Break enter dwelling 1254.7 per 100,000 > 1054.8 (NSW), 1063.1 (SSD) (NSW BOCSAR 2003). Note however that the target locality for this research, within the above Local Government Area (LGA), has higher reported crime rates again according to the Local Area Police Command (COPS system 2002).

11 Not just Glennquarrie Estate.



## Boredom

Almost without exception the residents identified risks to (and in some cases from) youth in the area. Issues around boredom, lack of public transport, and problems with schooling were raised. This response by the father of a teenager was typical:

And that comes back to a major problem ... the infrastructure for the children of the area and the teenagers there's none, not a thing. ... our kids have got nowhere to go. ... Governments can keep going on that the kids have got to behave and all that but unless you give them something to do ...

And from a mother:

OK they have a blue light disco once a month, that's fine but that's it. Other than that there's the pub where they're not allowed to go, and they go and hang around there and cause trouble or McDonalds.

Boredom, and particularly the boredom of young people, is obviously seen by residents as a problem. However kids having nothing-to-do, as many of the conservative commentators frequently reminded us following the 'riots', is not a problem exclusive to Macquarie Fields. Indeed many respondents also made this point. Rather, the discourse of boredom is symptomatic of a much deeper malaise (and that is not to denigrate the response of my interviewee).

This exchange between the researcher and a female resident about her son (followed up by a male respondent) begins to tap into this:

Female: My boy's home now, I left him in bed, he hasn't been up, there's just nothing to do. I'm not getting up, that's his attitude.

Researcher: How old is he?

Female: 16 ... [ ]

Male: There's no escape at all, not at all for them.

This idea of there being 'no escape' came through strongly in the interviews. 'No escape' from the physical environment, 'no escape' from the culture of apathy and boredom, 'no escape' from cycles of neglect and violence that span three generations in some cases. This theme of boredom is no doubt symptomatic of the great sense of isolation and social exclusion being experienced by many residents on the estate, particularly young people.

Residents were fully aware of the stigma attached to living in Macquarie Fields and how this might affect their children. As one male respondent noted in regard to news coverage of youth:

...when we were children the news was once a day if you were lucky. Today it is just full of news [blaming] the children, no matter whether you're on the radio, on the TV... paper, the whole thing is a put down to the lot of them [the kids].

Another resident noted that young people in the area could not conceptualise a life outside of the area:

Even the thought of getting out, not actually being able to live in this area like, being able to move from here into civilisation.

Yet even physically leaving the area has its challenges with an expensive and infrequent public transport system — run in Sydney's West by private operators.

## Public Transport

Lack of physical mobility was magnified by the problems residents repeatedly identified concerning the area's public transport system. The following exchange in one small focus group interview was typical of the issues raised:

Male 1: It's more expensive in this area ...

Male 2: It's getting your family out and then back home, on an average, if we take our family out for the day it's up to \$20 just in fares, if we've got to catch a bus or whatever from the other end.

Female 1: Sometimes you wait for the bus for two hours, or an hour or so, in the sun.

Female 1: We don't have many sheltered bus stops.

Male 2: Because it comes back to the kids have got nothing else to do so they wreck them.

The geo-spatial isolation and social exclusion feed into boredom for young people on the estate. Subsequently, the boredom can result in anti-social behaviours that actually magnify the isolation in quite demonstrable ways, such as the vandalism of infrastructure. Exclusion impacts on the self-image of young people on the estate, constructing identities and cultural forms which might be recognised as anti-social on one level, but which may well have resonance with one's peers (Cunneen & White 1995:131).

As one woman noted:

They tend to put these places in the middle of the sticks where it is hard for us to access the public transport ...

As I will discuss below, the geo-spatial planning of the estate has many shortcomings, and while not causally responsible for the dissent expressed on the estate or indeed rates of crime, it is most definitely a factor that exacerbates problems.

## Services

The geographic isolation was compounded by the loss of services in the local area. This respondent articulates the views of many we spoke to in lamenting the lack of local services:

Female: Take the Shopping Centre, we had four banks, two butchers, greengrocers, sewing shops, we could always go and buy anything we wanted. ... now we've got nothing, we don't even have a bank. If you want to do any proper banking you've got to go all the way to Ingleburn.

Another noted:

I have trouble going and getting my account out from the ATM and I've got a disability, I can't work them.

And the perception of a lack of services extends to things like telephones as is evidenced in this exchange by three respondents:

Female: How many phone boxes are left on the estate?

Male: One, one.

Female: Yeah we've got no public phones.

We see that, from the experience of residents, the commercial heart of the area has gone — relocated to Ingleburn.<sup>12</sup> Globalisation and market deregulation has hit hard in places like

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12 A neighbouring suburb.

Macquarie Fields. No doubt this relocation also takes with it local employment opportunities. Not only has the changing labour market led to a drop in the demand for unskilled labour, it has also led to the rationalisation of services like banks, telecommunications and even retail stores, as locally based operators succumb to competition provided by the big chains. As well as the relocation of commercial centres, we've also seen the demise of much of the manufacturing sector as cheaper production is sought offshore. This is a dire situation, particularly in areas where a large number of non-skilled workers reside, and where the will to re-skill has been all but stripped away. At Macquarie Fields the working poor have been transformed into the unemployed and unemployable and socially isolated. Not just through DoH policy, but via these broader shifts in global capital and a political rationality which does little to tame its effects. 'The functional dynamic of exclusion is a result of market forces which exclude sections of the population from the primary labour market', and changes in crime and disorder are linked to this material base (Young 1999:26).

Yet while Macquarie Fields languishes, other estates in nearby areas expand with the economic injection of a growing number of middle-income earners. The 'gated community' of Macquarie Links constitutes a 'privatopia' separated from Macquarie Fields by little more than an array of 'interdictory spaces'<sup>13</sup> of gates and private security. Its 'community' transport bus shuttles those residents without a car to service centres. Meanwhile, the expanding 'edge city'<sup>14</sup> style developments south and west of Campbelltown relieve the late-modern suburbanite of the need to venture into an area such as Macquarie Fields (or indeed the city) while local sites of consumption such as mega-malls are kept under the ever watchful eye of the CCTV constituted 'scanscape'.<sup>15</sup>

## Community Renewal / Regeneration

Residents responded positively to moves by the DoH to 'de-Radburnise' parts of the estate as part of the 'community renewal program'. One service provider perhaps patronisingly suggested this had increased the 'pride in their houses and pride in themselves'. Nonetheless, such changes are in line with what Newman refers to as creating territoriality and indeed residents credited such changes for making the streetscape feel somewhat safer.

Male: Oh big difference since we've been in the area. All the walkways have gone ...its taken the broken glass out and the hooligans in them.

Female: [there used to be] the police chases of a night (down the laneways).

There is no doubt that from the CPTED perspective the 'defensible space' in the area has increased as the communal spaces have been 'territorialised'. As one woman noted:

... see now they've got to actually jump into peoples' yards to get away and the police can get them a lot quicker and easier that way.

As another man argues:

The changes from how we had it with the backs of the houses coming to the road ... it's been a ten fold improvement on community spirit. Neighbours seem to be talking more

13 A canopy of suppression and surveillance (Dear 2000:146).

14 Gerreau (1991:9) suggests edge cities are new urban centres created at the intersection of an urban beltway and a hub-and-spoke lateral road. The edge city is 'the place in which the majority of Americans live, learn, work, shop, play, pray and die'.

15 Davis (1998:366) defines a *scanscape* as 'space of protective visibility that increasingly defines where white-collar office workers and middle-class tourists feel safe ...'.

openly. When we had the fences up, the old back fences, you'd shut your back fence and that was it, you wouldn't talk to anyone.

Such positive responses to these measures mirror the results of other studies (Samuels et al 2004). But even these positive urban renewal changes had a sting in the tail according to some residents. The physical changes to the dwellings themselves were mainly cosmetic, leaving some strange results:

Male 1: I [now] get into the house through the laundry.

Male 2: ...they started [the renewal] at the bottom of the hill, and as they got around they ran out of money so it [the changes] gradually got less and less.

Thus, economic restraints still left residents feeling disempowered by the 'de-Radburnisation' process. As another woman noted, 'we face nothing. We face our back fence'. Thus, some residents still felt a sense of isolation, even within their own homes, despite the positive elements of the Community Renewal Program. Moreover, they felt they had little control over these processes and that they were constituted in a haphazard fashion.

## Education

Despite suggesting that things had improved at the local public primary school — '... we have a better principal now but it's going to take a long time' as one woman put it — respondents had many concerns about the level of education their children were receiving:

Female 1: Then they get their drop kick little teachers straight out of university who don't know what they're doing and they've got to come here because ...

Female 2: They've got come here because that's where they've been placed ...

Another respondent noted: 'In one year we lost 16 staff members, it was horrific'. This 'churn' factor was seen to be detrimental to any continuity in their children's education and compounded a sense of powerlessness in improving their children's lot. The mobility of the teaching staff contrasted greatly to the residents' feeling of 'no escape'.

Residents were also highly concerned by the level of truancy from both the primary school and the local high school, and the reluctance of authorities or parents to do anything to address this.

Female: ...I think they need to concentrate on these kids that just roam the streets. ... now whether they've been expelled, suspended whatever ... [ ] Putting them on the streets is causing a hell of a lot [of trouble] ...

And again, the sense of isolation, the problem of seeing no escape, emerged in these discussions about education.

Female: You know there's just no ambition ... mum and dad are doing the same old thing so they do the same old thing ... and they're stuck in the area, they're not getting out and seeing the world sort of thing. ...

Another woman noted:

These kids ... don't attend school because their parents just don't care whether they go or not ... now these kids are going to be unemployed, they're going to be roaming the streets, they're going to steal cars, it's just not appropriate.

These observations stress the link between social isolation, education, and a cultural landscape largely devoid of positive role-models. Here unemployment and underachievement become normalised, a way of life. A cycle continues with little opportunity to improve one's lot through conventional means. It is perhaps no surprise then

that recorded offence rates of vehicle theft are high in the area. Meanwhile, high fences are erected around the boundaries of the school grounds. One service provider suggested the local primary school now resembled a 'fortress'; somewhat at odds with programs such as 'Schools as Community Centres' which had been credited with positive effects on the estate. Mike Davis in *Ecology of Fear* has commented upon how 'schools have become more like prisons', where spending on education has been 'absorbed in fortifying school grounds' while overcrowded classrooms become 'detention centres for an abandoned generation' (Davis 1998:380). This might be overstating the situation at Macquarie Fields but there is no denying the resonances; it has become easier to securitise the school ground than to develop its capacity as a site of education and community.

## The Police

The experiences of residents with local police added to their sense of powerlessness. Despite an explicit recognition by respondents of the difficult job of policing the estate respondents repeatedly reported the problem of police inaction to incidents on the one hand, and an over-reaction to other incidents:

Female: ... that's another thing the break and enterings around the suburb, you complain to the police and they'll tell you take 'em down the bush and bash 'em yourself.

Here there was a sense that police might not be there when they were most needed leaving some residents feeling vulnerable. This inaction, we were told, often extended to speeding drivers on the estate:

Female: People are speed demons, there's speed limits all round here but the police don't worry about them.

Others spoke of drag races held on the streets of the estate, made more harrowing with the retrospective knowledge of the death of the two teenagers. One woman noted:

Female 1: We have actually got a start and finish line up on Eucalyptus for the drag races to go around Eucalyptus.

Female 2: ... everyday you'd see a near miss or something, and you'd see the kids screaming round the corners.

The consensus seems to be summed up in the following:

Female 1: That's like the house next door to me got broken into and I rang up, I said 'look they're still in the house', and he says yeah we'll be there. They come six hours later, and I said to them 'you didn't expect them to still be there?'

He goes well 'what did you do'? I said what did you want me to do go and make a house arrest?

Residents did not feel part of 'community oriented policing' despite evidence of a number of community policing projects being undertaken in the area. Rather, they suggested to us that policing in the area was erratic and recited cases of both aggressive 'zero tolerance' policing practices on the one hand and an unwillingness to respond to call-outs on the other. Indeed, 'zero tolerance' seems to have been more characteristic of the policing practices in recent years with special high-profile task-forces such as Operation Viking overlaying the operational work of Local Area Commands in some cases. At the time of the 'riots' in 2005, coinciding with activities of Operation Viking in the area, the Police Youth Liaison Officer stationed at the Macquarie Fields LAC had been made 'unavailable' to young people for a period of five months (NSW Parliament SCOSI:50). Such inconsistencies seem to support the residents' complaints about 'not knowing where they stand' with police.

Another story circulating in the community at the time of our research centred on how a group of residents had used scanners to monitor police call-outs and that cars would attend less serious incidents elsewhere rather than attend more serious call-outs on the estate. Perceptions such as this left residents feeling cut off, and removed from any notion of consensual policing.

The successful policing of a community requires the consent of the community. There has obviously been some question over consent for some time prior to the 'riots'. It also requires some semblance of community to police (Skogan 1989) but with the demoralisation of residents there is no doubt a lack of the form of 'social capital' required to constitute a notion of community. In this sense successful policing is also only likely to succeed when it is coordinated with other governmental service provision aimed at building on community capacities (Lee & Herborn 2003) encouraged by successful governance and subsequent forms of active citizenship.

Spatially, the policing of Macquarie Fields has its own challenges, as I have outlined above. The sense of social isolation and disorganisation adds to this challenge. Residents need to feel like they have an active stake in the good governance of the community and this is unlikely to be achieved when they feel let down by broader systems of governance including the police. Community policing cannot be achieved without a community to police and policing strategies need to be consistent. However, police should not necessarily be seen as the central problem here — schizophrenic policing strategies and policy aside. Rather, the police constitute the first line of contact between the residents and the state apparatus and bodies governing the estate. It is not so surprising that when things unravelled in February 2005 dissent should be directed at police in the absence of other state representatives.

## Community Violence

While recent focus on the 'riots' has highlighted some of the underlying problems on the estate, it is the hidden forms of violence that are both the most damaging and most pervasive. Police told us that call-outs to the estate are overwhelmingly to attend domestic violence incidents and this is borne out in both recorded crime statistics (NSW BOCSAR 2006) and data collected in the COPS<sup>16</sup> data system.<sup>17</sup> In addition, service providers repeatedly identified spirals of bullying and interpersonal violence between young children as being illustrative of the dysfunction being reproduced in both inter- and intra-familial relationships on the estate.

Service provider: My view would be that people were disturbingly well aware of the dynamics of domestic violence either from their own experience or the experience of their extended families. So it's almost, normalised might be too strong a term, but it's like ... that's something that happens.

So while public debate focuses on the 'rioting' teens, the more troubling and pressing problems remain largely obscured. The discourse of individual responsibility allows government to largely ignore these problems while advocating tougher policing practices towards events that are simply symptomatic.

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<sup>16</sup> The police database.

<sup>17</sup> NSW Deputy Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione gave evidence during the NSW Parliament Upper House Inquiry that the Local Area Command (LAC) attended 'almost 200 domestic violence disputed per month' (NSW Parliament 2006:40)

One service provider pointed to the excessive amount of verbal abuse normalised amongst residents. He suggested:

In this community fifty percent ... don't even really think of it as being violent. He's just havin' a go or whatever.

Other service providers recited lengthy narratives of abused and neglected children, intra-neighbourhood violence, and a propensity to resort to violence as a problem solving technique. For some residents the norms of civility have been so impaired that anti-social behaviours have been normalised. This is not a sign of moral decline but of social exclusion and governmental neglect.

## Discussion

The 'riots' at Macquarie Fields did not occur in a political void. Indeed, the situation resonates with Jock Young's (1999) model of transformation in late modernity towards what he calls an 'exclusive society'. He suggests that market forces are creating a more unequal and less 'meritocratic' society. The accompanying ethos of 'individual responsibility' generates an 'everyone for themselves' mentality. This combination, Young argues, is inherently criminogenic. These processes combine with, and encourage a decline in informal forms of social control. Meanwhile, capital finds more profitable areas in which to invest. This combines with a decline in state support and further fragments and stresses families. Pressures increase which lead to crime, and informal forces that control it decrease as civil society fragments. Order becomes problematic, and ironically, the state is forced to spend more on formal modes of control such as the police (who in NSW have just tendered for a water cannon following the public dissent of the past two years). More rules are broken and questioned as they are increasingly enforced thus creating uncertainty, a suspicion of others, and a general sense of ontological insecurity (Young 2002:459-460).

... Late modernity generates a resonance of exclusion throughout its structure, with the main motor being the rapidly developing pitch of market relations. Such changes are rooted in the market place, yet their impact is ... experienced by human actors' (Young 2002:460).

One service provider summed up this situation succinctly:

What I've also noticed on the estate is that life has, in the past three or four years, and I'm not an economist, has perhaps under the current federal government become more difficult. Situations with families being unable to make ends meet are becoming more and more frequent than they were seven years ago. It's always been tough economically on the estate for people but ... welfare is harder to get, things are more expensive and we have the lovely GST. So things economically have become harder ...

Apportioning blame to *bad* or *stupid* individuals involved in the 'riots', or indeed on the crime that occurs in and around the estate, will not rectify the underlying problems that have been being internalised for, in some cases, over three generations and compounded by the progressive withdrawal of welfarist governmentalities. Problems which, as I have suggested, are rooted in governmental and market ambivalence and neo-liberal rationalities, more than they are in localised dysfunctional processes of socialisation. There are 'dysfunctional' families at Macquarie Fields, perhaps disproportionately so. That is only to be expected when large numbers of society's most marginal are located in one geographic location and subjected to social pressures largely beyond their control that disempower and demoralise. There are also offenders who need to be dealt with by police and the justice system when necessary — as the residents (including some involved in the 'riots') agree.

Policy makers need to understand the underlying discontent, where it stems from, how the sense of isolation and disempowerment is manifested, and then work up strategies to combat these. Some mid-range solutions might be found in a more concerted multi-agency approach to delivering services and an all-of-government 'place management' approach to the area (Samuels et al 2004; Lee & Herborn 2003), something that service providers indicated was still lacking. The continued community rejuvenation of the area is no doubt also welcomed by residents despite research that questions the short-term crime reduction capacities of such work (Samuels 2004; Bottoms & Wiles 1988). Longer funding cycles are needed for successful community based programs; coordinated and supported life course intervention aimed at elevating the life chances of young people may be required in the short- to mid-term; a return to a community orientated policing and a strengthening of police community relationships; and the addressing of the lack of infrastructure in the area including public transport.

While early lifecourse/childhood programs are advocated by many and may be necessary in the short term, I am struck by the irony of such individualistic and individuating interventions. Here government becomes much more of a 'nanny' than it would if it were to more actively civilise the ways in which market forces impact upon areas like Macquarie Fields. The more even distribution of wealth, and more meritocratic opportunities to earn it, would seem to be much less interventionist rationalities than the specific identification and disciplining of particular 'at risk' categories of children and young people.

If all this paints a bleak picture, there are of course also many positives which require highlighting. The resilience of many residents and their activity in a variety of community building initiatives, and community based projects should be acknowledged. If these forms of 'active citizenship' can be further fostered and the processes which constantly undermine their good work mitigated, the perceived necessity to engage in public shows of dissent may well be reduced.

## Conclusion

The majority of residents we spoke to at Macquarie Fields felt isolated, geographically, economically and socially. They feel disempowered by every level of government and bureaucracy they see as ignoring their plight. The so-called 'riots' were not simply a result of bad, criminal or misguided young people choosing to attack police, as our politicians, moral entrepreneurs and talk-back radio commentators would have it. Rather, discontent on the estate had been simmering for years. That is not to suggest that those involved did not act badly, nor is it to excuse other destructive behaviours manifest on the estate. It is merely to suggest that these actions and events have their own genealogies that require analysis. Poor planning (both socially and spatially) and subsequent poor policy has fuelled discontent as many of the constants of community life have been stripped away due to economic and social transformations and the cycles of powerlessness that have followed. More recently exclusive estates like Macquarie Links, a 'gated community', have been constructed within a couple of kilometres from Macquarie Fields. For the Macquarie Fields residents this has only highlighted their sense of isolation, disadvantage and exclusion. In this sense they feel they have been bypassed by Australia's much lauded economic growth. The public and political response to the public dissent at Macquarie Fields tells us much about the social milieu in which we live, when blame can be so easily and uncritically apportioned to many of society's most disadvantaged under the guise of 'individual responsibility'. Equally, this response has drawn on discourses that attempt to de-politicise



the dissent, making it only 'criminal', while politicising the police response to it — it being 'softly-softly' or appropriately 'tough' depending on your political hue. When technical and operational arguments over the police response to dissent become the central debate we are no doubt missing the point.

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