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Chapter 12

Homicide

Fiona Brookman

Introduction

Homicide is a relatively rare yet high-impact event. Its consequences are deadly for the victim but also devastating for those intimately connected to the victim and offender and, often, the offender too. At the same time it is an act that captivates many and is the subject of sustained media attention and of numerous popular works of fiction. These depictions rarely reflect the reality of homicide. Rather, they tend to focus on the more (statistically) unusual forms of homicide such as those with a sexual or unknown motive, serial or spree killings or those involving young children (see Peelo *et al*. 2004; Soothill *et al*. 2004). In stark contrast, homicides among intimates and those involving young men in fights are much more prevalent, while deaths caused by corporate negligence or neglect (corporate homicide – albeit often not officially recognised and recorded as such) dwarf all of these other forms of homicide combined (see Brookman 2005; Tombs this volume).

I begin this chapter by briefly considering the legal categories of unlawful homicide in England and Wales, paying particular attention to some of the limitations of the legal framework and recent proposals to amend the law surrounding homicide. This is followed by a consideration of patterns and trends of homicide before moving on to an evaluation of some of the most important theoretical explanations of homicide and some reflections upon how homicide has been tackled in the UK context.

Deconstructing Homicide

The term 'homicide' refers to the killing of a human being, whether the killing is lawful or unlawful. Examples of lawful homicide would include the killing of another human being during wartime combat, the implementation of the death penalty or the accidental killing of a boxer by his opponent. Unlawful homicide is legally classified, in England and Wales,[1] as murder, manslaughter or infanticide.[2] Each of these categories share a common *actus reus* (guilty act).

What distinguishes them is the extent to which the offender is deemed to have *intended* to cause the death of the victim or, in legal terminology, the perpetrator's *mens rea* (guilty mind).[3]

The most serious category of unlawful homicide is murder in the UK and carries a mandatory penalty of life imprisonment.[4] The classic definition of murder, generally accepted both academically and in practice, is that of Lord Chief Justice Coke from the early seventeenth century:

> When a person of sound memory, and of the age of discretion, unlawfully killeth within any county of the realm any reasonable creature in rerum natura under the kings peace, with malice aforethought, either expressed by the party or implied by law, so as the party wounded, or hurt, etc., die of the wound or hurt, etc., within a year and a day after the same.[5] (Card 1998: 184).

The phrase *rerum natura* refers to the notion that one can only be held to have killed someone who is 'in being' (as opposed to an unborn child for example) and the term 'malice aforethought' refers to the notion that a conviction for murder requires proof of intention to kill. However, what is not clear from the above extract is that intent to cause grievous bodily harm (that ultimately results in death) is also sufficient for a conviction for murder.

The liability to conviction for murder may be reduced to manslaughter if the killing stemmed from provocation, diminished responsibility or a suicide pact (Homicide Act 1957). These are commonly referred to as forms of 'voluntary manslaughter'. Alternatively, where there is no apparent intent to murder, an individual may be liable to conviction for 'involuntary manslaughter' if it is shown that they acted in a reckless or grossly negligent manner or that death resulted from an unlawful and dangerous act (adapted from Ashworth and Mitchell, 2000). Finally, the defence of infanticide applies when a woman causes the death of her biological child (who is less than twelve months old) while suffering from some kind of psychological imbalance linked to childbirth (e.g. postnatal depression). The Infanticide Act 1938 provides that a woman found guilty of infanticide should be dealt with as though guilty of voluntary manslaughter. Manslaughter and infanticide carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment though often attract much lower sentences.

The circumstances surrounding homicide vary enormously, as does public, media and ultimately the criminal justice response to them. In England and Wales during the last decade (1998–2008) 35–40 per cent of suspects indicted for homicide offences were convicted of murder and around a third received a conviction for manslaughter (figures for infanticide are negligible). The bulk of the remainder of cases resulted in acquittals (20 per cent) with a small number resulting in convictions for lesser offences (see Povey *et al*. 2009: 26). Hence, while around 800 individuals are indicted for homicide each year in England and Wales, approximately 60 per cent are seen to have done so under some sort of mitigating circumstances or not to have committed the homicide at all.

Although legal categories of homicide may appear clear cut, in reality a fine line separates 'murder' from 'manslaughter' or 'accident' or, as Croall (1998: 179) notes, 'licensed killings' by law enforcers or euthanasia. As I have pointed out elsewhere (see Brookman 2005), the divide between acceptable and unacceptable killings is socially, historically and culturally constructed, and what 'counts' (both literally and metaphorically) as murder or unlawful homicide is the product of a complex legislative history.

It is pertinent to acknowledge at this point the introduction in April 2008 of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007. This Act introduced a new offence across the UK for prosecuting companies and other organisations where there has been a gross failing throughout the organisation in the management of health and safety with fatal consequences (see http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/corporatemanslaughter2007.htm). The introduction of this legislation is promising in that it recognises the importance of holding corporations to account for their lethal actions. Nevertheless, the maximum penalty, if found guilty, is an unlimited fine. This contrasts starkly with the maximum penalty for other forms of manslaughter in the UK of life imprisonment and seems to indicate that corporate crime is still not viewed as 'real crime' (see Box 1983; Toombs this volume). It is too early to determine whether the legislation will have any real impact upon the number of prosecutions launched or their success. It will, nevertheless, be interesting to see if corporate homicides begin to find their way into the annual homicide statistics in future years.[6]

For many years there has been criticism of the law surrounding homicide, often directed at the very broad category of manslaughter which, it has been argued, ranges in gravity from cases that only just fall short of murder right down to cases that are difficult to distinguish from accidental death (Law Commission 1996). In addition, scholars have pointed to the complexities in establishing the presence or absence of 'intent' (critical to determine whether the defendant should be found guilty of murder) and the difficulties of interpretation surrounding the defences of provocation and diminished responsibility.

Most recently the Law Commission called for an overhaul of the law governing homicide in England and Wales suggesting that it is a 'rickety structure set upon shaky foundations' with several rules 'unaltered since the seventeenth century' (Law Commission 2006b: 3; see also http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/murder.htm). The current proposal is to create a three-tier law of homicide that would comprise:

- First degree murder:[7] (a) intentional killings; (b) killing with intent to cause serious injury where the killer was aware that his/her conduct involved a serious risk of causing death (mandatory sentence of life imprisonment).
- Second degree murder: (a) killings intended to cause serious injury; (b) killings intended to cause injury or fear or risk of injury where the killer was aware that his or her conduct involved a serious risk of causing death; (c) the result of a successful partial defence plea to first degree murder (discretionary life sentence, with guidelines).

- Manslaughter: (a) causing death by gross negligence; (b) causing death through a criminal act intended to cause injury, or in the awareness of a serious risk that injury may be caused (discretionary life sentence).

(Adapted from Law Commission, 2006b: 172–6, and Horder 2007: 19)

There is insufficient space here to deal in any detail with the potential benefits and limitations of the proposed new structure, suffice it to say that second degree murder would incorporate the worse kinds of killing by recklessness (that currently fall under manslaughter) as well as those committed as a result of provocation or diminished responsibility. It would also capture some offenders who would currently be convicted of murder.

A number of the more specific proposals for reform include extending the provocation defence to those who have overreacted in response to a fear of serious violence. Advocates of this reform suggest that it 'arises out of longstanding concerns that the law is too generous for those who kill in anger and too harsh for those who kill out of fear of serious violence' (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 2008: 4). Moreover, the defence of provocation has been seen to be gender biased in that it requires evidence of a sudden loss of self-control that often characterises circumstances where men kill (and in particular when a man kills an intimate partner). In contrast, female victims of domestic violence who kill their abusers often do so as a result of cumulative provocation or long-term abuse and there may be a 'cooling-off' time between provocation and reaction to it – which has undermined the case for using this defence. At the other end of the spectrum is a proposal to reconsider the law on complicity in relation to homicide. The Commission recommends that individuals be found guilty of complicity to murder if they have helped or encouraged a fatal attack, provided that they realised murder might be committed by the perpetrator. This proposal aims to tackle some of the difficulties involved in successfully prosecuting all members involved in a lethal joint-venture attack – notably gangs of young men (see Law Commission 2006a).

As Horder (2007: 29) points out, "[T]here are no easy or perfect solutions to be found in this hinterland between murder and lesser homicide offences." For him, however, the creation of the three-tier structure 'takes some heat out of the debate'. To what extent and precisely when the new legislative powers will come into being is currently unknown. What is clear, however, is that – if and when it comes into law – this will be the first substantial overhaul of the legal framework of homicide in England and Wales for over 500 years.

Patterns and trends of homicide

Compared to most other forms of violent crime, homicide is relatively rare. There were, for example, less than 800 homicides recorded in England and Wales in 2007/8 (see Table 12.1 below) compared to almost 10,000 recorded cases of threat or conspiracy to murder, over 15,000 acts involving serious wounding or endangerment to life, over 17,000 offences involving a firearm,

Table 12.1 The number and rates of homicides in the UK in 2007/8

Jurisdiction	Number	Rate per 100,000 population
England and Wales	763	1.4
Scotland	114	2.2
Northern Ireland*	30	2.0

Source: Tavares and Thomas (2008). The Northern Ireland figure is an average for the three-year period 2004–6.

84,000 robberies, and over 41,000 serious sexual crimes (see Kershaw *et al*. 2008: 25). Provisional data for 2008/9 show the police recorded 648 incidents of homicide, a decrease of 17 per cent on the previous year and the lowest recorded level in the last 20 years. The number of attempted murders also decreased (Walker *et al*. 2009).[8]

As Figure 12.1 illustrates there has been a steady increase in the number of homicides in England and Wales since the mid-1960s. There was also a sudden spike in 2003, with over 950 homicides recorded. However, this peak is almost wholly artificial – the result of 172 homicides attributed to the serial killer Harold Shipman being coded to this time period.[9] This and other unusual events can artificially inflate the overall figures and particular characteristics of homicide for that period. For example, the vast majority of Shipman's victims were elderly females whom he killed by administering lethal doses of (in the main) morphine and diamorphine and so for 2002/3 the proportion of female victims of homicide is unusually elevated, as is death by poisoning (see Cotton and Bibi 2005). Overall, the offences attributable to Shipman artificially inflated the homicide rate by 20 per cent during 2002–3. While this one-off peak is artificial, the general upward trend is not. Homicide has increased since the mid-1960s in Britain and this is characteristic of homicide across Europe (see Spierenburg, 2008: 208).[10] For example, the homicide rate has almost doubled from 7.3 per million population in 1967 to 14.1 per million

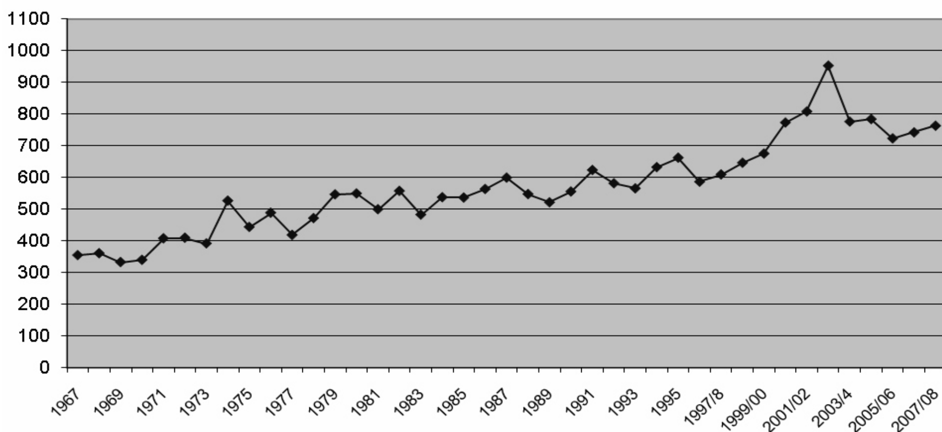

Figure 12.1 Annual totals of recorded homicide in England and Wales, 1967–2007/8

population in 2007/8 in England and Wales. On the other hand, the rise appears to have been abating across some parts of Europe and the US (see Miethe and Regoeczi 2004, regarding US rates). This pattern has not yet been reflected in England and Wales, unless the above-mentioned fall in homicides in 2008/9 represents the first signs of a trend reversal.

International homicide rates

Comparative analysis of homicide statistics needs to be approached cautiously due to differences in legal definitions of homicide across countries and differences in the criteria adopted to collect and record homicide. For example, some jurisdictions include attempted homicide in their figures while others, such as Japan, exclude robbery homicide (see Finch 2001). In terms of recording homicide, this is partly dependent upon the capacity of national institutions to gather data and accurately record events (Aebi, 2004). Moreover, there is some evidence that variations in crime reporting rates are strongly related to measures of institutional stability and police presence and, in some instances, to 'a subjective index of corruption' (see Soares 2004, cited in Krause *et al*. 2008: 69).

There are also numerous difficulties in explaining homicide trends. For example, despite a proliferation of lethal weapons in developing countries since the 1960s, the lethality of assaults has decreased due to developments in medical technology and care (Krause *et al*., 2008). Hence, assessment of long-term trends needs to take account of improvements in health care and, when drawing international comparisons, one needs to be mindful of differences in healthcare systems across countries and regions. With these caveats in mind, Krause *et al*. (2008) indicate that the world average homicide rate for 2004 is 7.6 per 100,000 population. The highest homicide rates are concentrated in Africa (excluding North Africa) and Central and South America (20–30,000 homicides per 100,000 population). East and South East Asia and West and Central Europe (which includes the UK) exhibit the lowest levels – with rates generally lower than 2 per 100,000 population (see Table 12.2 below).

Reiner (2007: 367) argues that international patterns of homicide rates correspond systematically to variations in political economies. Specifically, 'neo-liberal' countries have the highest homicide rates (in particular South Africa and the USA) followed by 'conservative corporatist' countries (such as Italy, Germany and France) and finally 'social democracies' with the lowest rates (such as Sweden, Denmark and Norway). Reiner draws upon the work of a number of authors (e.g. Currie 1998; Hall 1997) in arguing that neo-liberal economies foster violence through high levels of inequality, relative deprivation and involuntary, exclusionary unemployment.[11] However, the association is not perfect and there are several anomalies to this pattern – for example, social-democratic Finland (see Savolainen *et al*. 2008, for an interesting discussion). Jacobs and Richardson (2008), like Reiner, have noted the importance of economic inequality and homicide rates but also acknowledged the importance of the proportions of young males in the population – an issue that becomes particularly salient when we consider homicide in Japan.

Table 12.2 Homicide rates per 100,000 population, selected countries of the world by region, 2004–6

Country	Rate	Country	Rate
Southern Africa		**Near & Middle East/South West Asia**	
Botswana	21.5	Afghanistan	3.4
South Africa	69.0	Iraq	6.7
Zimbabwe	32.9	Israel	4.7
North Africa		Pakistan	6.3
Algeria	9.6	Saudi Arabia	3.2
Egypt	1.3	India	5.5
Morocco	1.1	Sri Lanka	7.2
East Africa		**East & South East Europe**	
Kenya	20.8	Russian Federation	29.7
Mauritius	2.7	Ukraine	12.0
Uganda	25.2	Albania	6.6
West & Central Africa		**Bulgaria**	**2.6**
Cameroon	16.1	Croatia	1.8
Gambia	13.5	Serbia	1.4
Senegal	14.2	Turkey	6.2
Americas – Caribbean		**West & Central Europe**	
Bahamas	22.5	Austria	0.7
Barbados	15.1	Belgium	1.8
Cuba	6.0	Cyprus	1.9
Dominican Republic	24.2	Czech Republic	2.2
Jamaica	55.2	Demark	1.1
Trinidad & Tobago	19.6	Estonia	7.3
Central America		France	**1.6**
El Salvador	57.5	Germany	1.0
Panama	13.4	Greece	1.0
North America		Iceland	0.7
Canada	2.0	Ireland	1.5
Mexico	11.2	Italy	1.2
United States of America	5.9	Netherlands	1.2
South America		Norway	0.7
Argentina	5.5	Poland	1.5
Brazil	30.8	Spain	1.1
Colombia	61.1	Sweden	1.0
Uruguay	6.0	England & Wales	1.5
Central & East Asia		Northern Ireland	1.8
Kazakhstan	16.2	Scotland	2.3
China	2.2	**Oceania**	
Japan	0.5	Australia	1.5
Thailand	9.0	New Zealand	1.5

World average homicide rate: 7.6 per 100,000 population.

Source: Adapted from UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) (2008), International Homicide Statistics and (for EU countries) Table 2, Tavares and Thomas (2008) Crime and Justice Statistics. The former cover the period 2004 only and the high estimate has been included here.

Japan has fewer homicides per capita than almost any other nation and the rate has dropped some 70 per cent in the last 50 years (Johnson 2008). Moreover, the demographic group most responsible for the dramatic decline is young men aged 20–24; the murder rate among them is now one tenth of what it was 50 years ago. The 'vanishing young male killer' (Johnson 2008) has been described as unprecedented (Uchiyama 2003). There are no clear answers yet as to what factors have brought about the dramatic decline of homicide in Japan. Johnson speculates that Japan's postwar commitment to antiwar values (including a pacifist constitution) may have strengthened inhibitions against killing in Japanese culture. Alternatively, growing affluence in Japan in the absence of pockets of poverty and, thereby, relative deprivation (that often characterises other developed nations) may be significant. What is also striking about Japanese culture is that it has the highest suicide rates in the developed world. Males commit almost three-quarters of suicides in Japan and it is now the second leading cause of death among young Japanese people aged 15–24 and the leading cause of death amongst those aged 25–39 leading Johnson (2008: 155) to urge that the possible links between suicide and homicide be explored.

Moving to the other extreme, Krause *et al*. suggest that the high homicide rates in Africa may be associated with a series of social and economic indicators often linked to crime including 'a low overall Human Development Index[12] (HDI), low economic performance, high levels of income inequality, a youthful population, rapid rates of urbanization, poorly resourced criminal justice systems, and a proliferation of firearms, related in part to the recurrence of conflict in all regions of the continent' (UNODC 2005: ix, cited in Krause *et al*. 2008: 72). Moreover, there is a plausible link between armed conflict and homicide rates both during and after hostilities in that the psychological, social and economic impact of war combined with an increased availability of weapons may contribute to homicide levels (UNODC 2005).

McAlister (2006) has found some evidence to suggest that international variation in homicide rates may be attributable to cultural differences in acceptance of moral justifications for killing. In combined data from four surveys of young people and adults in 19 nations, McAlister found that national and regional attitudes toward killing were strongly related to homicide rates. Association does not, of course, mean that the two are causally related. Rather, a third (unknown) variable might explain the presence of both high rates of homicide and high levels of acceptance of killing. Moreover, even if there is a causal connection, it is not clear in which direction it works. For example, high homicide rates in a particular jurisdiction may affect residents' acceptance of homicide (they may become desensitised for example), or pro-violence sentiments may indeed affect levels of homicide (see subcultural explanations later).

Offender, victim and offence characteristics[13]

This section will include brief consideration of the socio-demographic characteristics of those who become involved in homicide as well as some

details of the homicide event.[14] It is important to note that while the data available on homicide are more comprehensive than is generally the case for other offence categories, certain kinds of killings are not routinely included in the Home Office homicide statistics – such as those that arise as a result of dangerous driving or corporate negligence or neglect (Brookman 2005). This has important implications regarding the overall shape or picture of homicide and skews it in certain directions – not least in terms of the social class and ethnicity of those involved.

Offenders and victims

Gender and Age

One of the most significant 'facts' about homicide is that it is dominated by males or, to be more precise, young men. Over 90 per cent of offenders are male, over 70 per cent of victims are male and, as illustrated in Table 12.3, 60 per cent of homicides over the last decade were male-on-male. In stark contrast, only 3 per cent of homicides occur among females. Forty-four per cent of *all* homicides in England and Wales between 1998 and 2008 (for which age and gender of suspect are known) were committed by young males aged less than 30.

Both gender and age also have a considerable impact upon the likelihood of falling victim to homicide. For example, males are three to four times more likely to fall victim to homicide than females and comprise 70–80 per cent of the victims in an average year. Somewhat peculiar to homicide, the age group most at risk are infants under one year old (at 36 per million population). This group are followed by young adults aged 16–29 (at 24 per million population) (Povey *et al*. 2009: 13).

Ethnicity

It is now well established that black and Asian people are over-represented as both victims and offenders of homicide. For example, for the period 2003–5, black people were 5.5 times more likely to fall victim to homicide than whites and Asian people were 1.8 times more likely than white people to become victims of a homicide (CJS Race Unit 2006: 7).[15] Black individuals comprise 14 per cent of homicide victims despite them comprising less than 3 per cent of the population of England and Wales (Census 2001). Whites make up over 90 per cent of the population but only 73 per cent of homicide victims. Homicides involving a black victim exhibit some distinct qualities.

Table 12.3 Gender 'mix' of suspect and victims of homicide in England and Wales: 1998–2008

Main suspect	Main victim	
	Male	Female
Male	60% (4,900)	29% (2,359)
Female	7% (589)	3% (228)

For example, during the last decade (1998–2008) almost a third of black victims were shot, compared to 5 per cent of white victims, 9 per cent of Asians and 7 per cent of other ethnic groups. Blacks are also more likely than other ethnic groups to be killed with a sharp instrument (40 per cent of black victims compared to around a third of all other groups). Finally, it is more common for homicides involving black victims to remain unsolved (28 per cent) in comparison with white or Asian victims (11 per cent) (CJS Race Unit 2006). This may be a reflection of particular difficulties associated with investigating shooting incidents or, as is widely perceived within minority ethnic communities, because such cases are investigated less rigorously (see Phillips and Bowling 2007).

Finally, non-white people are over-represented as homicide offenders, with blacks comprising 12 per cent of offenders, Asians 7 per cent and other non-white groups 3 per cent. More than one-fifth (21 per cent) of all homicide suspects between 1998 and 2008 were non-white males. We will explore later in the chapter the possible reasons for the over-representation of ethnic minority groups in homicide.

Social class and occupation

There is little reliable information in the UK regarding the social class and employment status of offenders and victims of homicide. What is clear from the limited data available on the Homicide Index is that at least 28 per cent of victims of homicide over the last decade were unemployed at the time of their death (this figure excludes students and retired individuals) and a quarter were in employment. The employment status of a quarter of victims was unknown/not recorded and it is likely that many if not most of these cases involved unemployed victims (see Brookman 2003).

Dobash *et al*. (2002), in their Homicide in Britain study, discovered that almost 70 per cent of the 786 male offenders that they studied were usually unemployed and that most had left school without qualifications. Overall, the available evidence indicates that homicide is dominated by offenders from the lower classes and a significant number are unemployed at the time of the offence. However, this finding is, in part, a reflection of the kinds of killings that are routinely included in the statistics and those that are generally not (as outlined earlier).

Victim-offender relationship

Around a quarter of homicides occur among friends or social acquaintances, 16 per cent among intimate partners/ex-partners and 15 per cent among strangers. Seven per cent involve the murder of a son or daughter and a further 5 per cent involve the killing of another kind of family member (e.g. an in-law or sibling. Business and criminal associates comprise a further 7 per cent (see Figure 12.2).

Unsurprisingly perhaps, these patterns vary by gender. For example, of the 208 females killed in England and Wales in 2007–8, 35 per cent were killed by a partner or ex-partner (compared to just 6 per cent of male victims), 22 per cent by another family member (compared to just 11 per cent of males) and only 13 per cent of female victims were killed by a stranger (compared

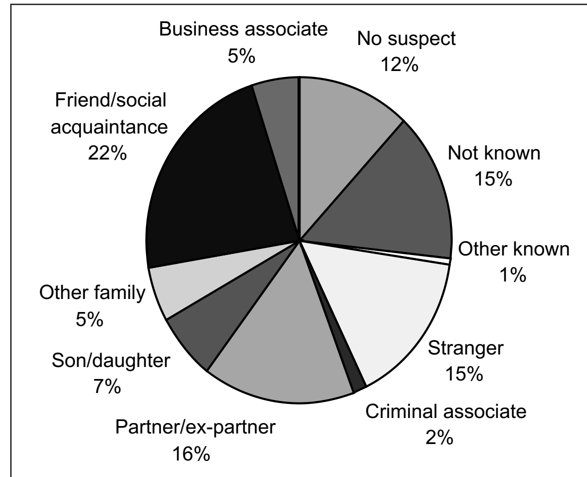

Figure 12.2 Victim–offender relationship, 1998–2007/8

to 36 per cent of male victims). Clearly, homicides involving females (as killer, victim or both) tend to occur between intimates, whereas male-on-male homicides are more likely to involve strangers or acquaintances. The basic patterns of victim–offender relationship have remained relatively stable over the last decade with just two exceptions; the number of 'no suspect' cases has increased over time (more than doubled in ten years from 7 per cent to 15 per cent) and homicides among 'partners/ex-partners' have decreased from 20 per cent to 13 per cent.

Features of the homicide event

The homicide event refers to the micro-environment in which the homicide takes place and includes 'the social context that unites offenders and victims' (Miethe and Meier 1994: 3) and the 'setting and props' (Block 1977: 74) that facilitate homicide. These include temporal and spatial features of homicide, the characteristics of a particular social setting, the availability of weapons and the role of drugs and alcohol – to name but a few. Due to the limitations of space, I will deal here only with weapons and the role of drugs and alcohol.

Weapons and method of kill

In the UK, homicide is most likely to be perpetrated with a knife or other sharp instrument (around a third of cases in England and Wales and almost 50 per cent of cases in Scotland). The number of homicides perpetrated with a sharp instrument in England and Wales in 2007/8 was the highest recorded during a financial year since the Homicide Index was introduced in 1977. The use of sharp instruments is perhaps unsurprising given that knives are routinely found in people's homes and, therefore, easily accessible. At the same time, there is some evidence of an increasing 'knife culture' (Eades *et al*. 2007) so that both indoors and outdoors knives become a readily available weapon of choice. Stabbings are followed in frequency by lethal fights involving hitting

and kicking (an average of 13 per cent over the last decade) and assaults with blunt instruments (8 per cent average). An average of 6 per cent of victims are strangled (generally female victims of male attacks) and a further 4 per cent of victims are suffocated (generally infants).

Despite increased concern and attention to shooting incidents, there has not been an upward trend in the number of fatal shootings in the UK. Firearms-related homicides ranged between 6 and 12 per cent in the last decade in England and Wales (an average of 8 per cent and 64 cases each year). Most recently fatal shootings accounted for 7 per cent of homicides in England and Wales (and 4 per cent in Scotland) (Povey *et al*. 2009; and Scottish Government 2008). While there has been a certain level of exaggerated media (and government) coverage of fatal shootings, this should not distract from the fact that lethal weapons permeate sections of certain cities in the UK and particular contexts much more than others, thereby making it more likely that minor disputes end lethally. Shootings almost always occur among young males and sometimes emerge in the context of rival gang activity (whether in relation to the protection of lucrative drug dealing 'turf' or 'status' and reputation confrontations – see section on making sense of seemingly senseless acts below). Despite the high profile of such killings they present the police with particular challenges in terms of identifying suspects – i.e. suspects have not been identified in one-third of fatal shootings recorded during the last decade. In stark contrast, suspects remain unidentified in just 8 per cent of homicides that were not perpetrated with a firearm.

Drugs and alcohol

Evidence from a range of studies illustrates that both alcohol and/or drugs play a significant role in homicide events and, often, the lives of offenders and victims. For example, Shaw *et al*. (2006) found that over half of the 1,579 homicides that they examined involved offenders who were misusing either alcohol or drugs in the 12 months prior to the homicide and that overall in 45 per cent of cases that they examined, alcohol or drugs contributed to the homicide in that the offender was intoxicated in some way at the time of the offence (Shaw *et al*. 2006: 1119–20). Brookman (2003) found that alcohol had been consumed (often to excess) by either the offender or victim in over half of all cases of male-on-male homicide that she examined in England and Wales, while Dobash *et al.* (2002) found that 38 per cent of male homicide offenders were drunk or very drunk at the time of the offence and 14 per cent were using illegal drugs. Furthermore they discovered that a quarter of the men in their study (786 in total) had problems with alcohol before the age of 16 and 17 per cent had abused drugs. By adulthood these figure rose to 49 per cent for alcohol and 25 per cent for drugs.

While alcohol and/or drug consumption permeates many situations in which homicide occurs, it is nevertheless rare for people to become violent every time they consume such substances. Hence, while alcohol and/or drug consumption is doubtless frequently implicated, it is not on its own a sufficient or necessary explanation for violence. There are various ways in which the consumption of drugs and alcohol may be related to homicide (some of which will be explored in the following section). For example, in the case of drugs

and violence, Goldstein (1985) suggests that there are at least three distinct levels at which one might uncover a relationship; (a) psychopharmacological (i.e. the effects upon one's mind and body); (b) economic compulsive (the notion that individuals commit violent crimes, such as robbery, to secure the funds to sustain a drug habit); and 'systemic' (which refers to the violence associated with the often very lucrative supply and distribution of drugs that can lead to territorial disputes within the drugs trade (see Bennett and Holloway, this volume). Moreover, the links between alcohol and homicide and drugs and homicide are somewhat distinct. For example, recent research by Chapple (2008) indicates some interesting differences between alcohol-related homicides, drug-related homicides and non-substance related homicides in England and Wales. Alcohol-related homicides were more likely than other homicides to involve a friend or former friend, no weapon use and some kind of quarrel or dispute. Drug-related homicides were more likely than other homicides to involve an acquaintance, shooting the victim and economic motivation.

Making sense of seemingly senseless acts

There is a vast range of explanations of homicide which is unsurprising, given the diversity of homicide itself (e.g. infanticide at one extreme, serial killing at another) and the different sorts of questions posed regarding its aetiology (e.g. a focus on patterns and trends on the one hand or the situational dynamics of a particular case on the other). It is not possible to do justice to the plethora of theories here.[16] I am going to pay particular attention to structural, cultural and situational explanations of male-on-male homicide and will end this section with a consideration of gang-related homicide in a UK context. I will suggest that in order to understand homicide it is crucial to recognise the combined importance of all three approaches.

In focusing upon structural, cultural and situational factors, I pay no real attention to explanations that look 'inside' the offender. While there is no doubt that some homicides are committed by individuals with some enduring or transient individual pathology (e.g. a neurological or biochemical dysfunction or a personality disorder), and some evidence that certain people simply enjoy hurting and killing other people and commit violence for violence sake (see Schinkel 2004) most criminologists would agree that these represent the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, there is clear evidence that any individually based factors that play a role in homicide must be understood in combination with environmental precursors or facilitators – otherwise such individuals would presumably be violent most or all of the time. Hence, the most pertinent work in this area acknowledges the link between the individual and environmental stimuli and cues (see, for example, Denno 1990; Niehoff 1999; Freedman and Hemenway, 2000).

The seeds of homicide: structural forces

Structural theorists have been concerned primarily to explain certain striking patterns to be found in the social characteristics of offenders (and sometimes

victims) of both violence in general and homicide in particular. They try to unravel, for example, how and why certain factors or conditions such as poverty, deprivation and inequality or social disorganisation may explain homicide patterns. To these ends, structural researchers often rely upon the statistical analysis of aggregate data. As discussed earlier, when considering international homicide patterns and trends, there is a great deal of evidence correlating poverty (Pridemore 2008), inequality and social disorganisation (Messner and Rosenfeld 1999; Jacobs and Richardson 2008), population turnover and population demographics (Jacobs and Richardson, 2008) with homicide rates. Most recently, McCall *et al.* (2008) highlighted a number of contemporary social and economic factors relevant to the sharp increase in US homicides (from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s) followed by its equally dramatic decline – including, recession, illicit drug market activity, incarceration rates and police presence.

Cultural influences

While structural theories focus upon the social conditions that can foster crime, cultural theorists focus upon the ideas and values that particular groups hold and how these can generate involvement in crime. For example, the 'subculture of violence' theory (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967) starts from the premise that homicide predominantly occurs among individuals from the lowest socio-economic groups in society and that the lethal encounters in which they become embroiled often arise from trivial incidents – such as minor insults or scuffles. These findings can apparently be explained by the fact that the vast majority of these people share beliefs that are conducive to the use of force and violence when insulted or challenged such an exaggerated sense of honour, courage and manliness (see Curtis 1975). Research in this area has burgeoned recently with various criminologists exploring 'codes of the street' (Anderson 1999) and how these codes demand violent responses to interpersonal confrontation and vengeance and retaliation for certain infractions (Anderson 1999; Hochstetler and Copes 2003; Jacobs and Wright 1999; Wright *et al*. 2006). These accounts provide rich descriptions of the circumstances under which such violence is approved or even demanded and, to varying degrees, acknowledge that such cultures are formed as a result of the marginalisation of certain sections of society. For the most part, the theories that have developed focus upon street cultures and fit well with Bourgois' definition of street culture (2003: 8): 'a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values and ideologies that have emerged in the opposition to exclusion from mainstream society'. For Bourgois, street culture is an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity where power in mainstream society has been denied (see also Sandberg 2008). These accounts, then, recognise the critical link between structural forces and the development of violent street cultures.

Both cultural and structural explanations suffer from the age-old problem of over-prediction. Explanations of relative deprivation or poverty and homicide, for example, cannot account for the fact that most people suffering from economic inequality do not engage in violence. This point is particularly

pertinent when gender is entered into the equation. How might we explain the very low rates of female homicide while acknowledging that women are among the most disadvantaged of citizens (see Wilson 1993)? Similarly, not all members of a violent subculture engage in violence all of the time and few become embroiled in lethal violence (leading some critics to challenge the notion of a distinct violent subculture that approves of violence in general – see Corzine *et al*. 1999). As Levi (1997: 860) notes, such accounts 'seldom generate anything close to a causal account which makes sense of non-violence as well as of violence'. This is because, in isolation, both cultural and structural approaches fail to specify the situational conditions that channel particular dispositions for violence into concrete lines of action. Incorporating situational analyses into the equation helps to overcome this weakness. As Luckenbill and Doyle (1989: 421) state: 'Violence is performed by individuals in the context of face-to-face interactions and therefore involves a number of psychological and interpersonal processes.'

Foreground factors: the micro-environment and situational dynamics

The micro-environment of crime can be defined as 'the social context that unites offenders and victims and comprises both physical and social dimensions' (Miethe and Meier 1994: 3). Research into the micro-environment of homicide is vast and includes studies exploring victim–offender relationships (Wolfgang 1958; Polk 1994a; Decker 1996), the interactional dynamics of offenders, victims and third parties where relevant (Luckenbill 1977; Decker 1995), the lethality of situations dependent upon temporal and spatial aspects of the environment, the routine activities of those who inhabit particular locations (Weaver *et al*. 2004; Pizarro, 2008), the lethality of situations dependent upon access to weapons (Phillips and Maume 2007) and the situational role of drugs and alcohol (Parker 1995; Parker and Auerhahn 1999). The overall aim of this approach is to provide a 'contextualised account of homicide in action' (Chapple 2008: 20). What this approach, more than any other, acknowledges is that homicide is a dynamic and evolving event where the 'actors' mould each other's behaviour.

The major substantive approach that has guided this work comes from symbolic interactionism that stresses the role of situational identities or self-images in interaction (e.g. Becker 1962; Goffman 1967; Toch 1969; Athens 1977; Tedeschi and Felson 1994). One illuminating analysis of lethal interactions is Luckenbill's (1977) paper 'Criminal homicide as a situated transaction'. Luckenbill's research, based on the analysis of 70 murders, documents the dynamic interchange of moves and counter-moves between offenders, victims and oftentimes bystanders of homicide. During these interactions (which he places into six major stages) the key players develop lines of action shaped in part by the actions of each other and predominantly focused towards saving or maintaining 'face' and reputation and demonstrating character.

More recently, Polk (1994a 1995) has built upon this work drawing upon qualitative data from homicides in Australia in the 1980s. Most notably, he manages, through the use of discrete homicide scenarios (disaggregated by victim–offender relationship and situational circumstances), to unravel

the dynamic nature of homicide situations while also acknowledging the importance of social class and masculinity in the evolution of homicide events (see also Brookman 2003). For example, Polk argues that confrontational homicide (where the offender and victim become involved in a spontaneous dispute and engage *together* in a violent confrontation) has its source 'in the willingness of males, first, to lay down challenges to the honour of other males, and second, the masculine readiness to engage in physical violence in response to such challenges' (Polk 1994b: 169). He notes, however, that such violent encounters are much more likely to occur among young, working-class (or underclass) males, which he relates to the manifestation of a particular kind of masculinity in response to economic marginality:

> Males who are well integrated into roles of economic success are able to ground their masculinity through methods other than physical confrontations and violence. For economically marginal males, however, physical toughness and violence become a major vehicle for the assertion of their masculinity and a way of defending themselves against what they see as challenges from other males. (Polk 1994b: 187)

Other researchers, particularly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, developed ideas around the relationship between social class, race and age and the development and expression of particular kinds of masculinity in explaining violence (see Messerschmidt 1993; Segal 1990), though this line of research seems to have abated recently with a resurgence of interest in street (or 'corner'[17]) cultures.

Despite this important body of work, there is still very little research that helps us to unravel why particular acts of homicide occur at particular moments in time – i.e. why here? why now? why this victim? Someone who has made an important contribution to this conundrum is Athens (1980 1997), a symbolic interactionist who carefully analysed the accounts of violent offenders focusing upon the interpretations they made of situations in which they committed violent acts, their interpretations of situations in which they almost committed such acts, the self-images that they held and their violent criminal careers. Athens discovered that individuals who had committed violent criminal acts (including homicide) formed one of four possible interpretations of the situation: (a) physically defensive; (b) frustrative; (c) malefic; or (d) frustrative-malefic. On those occasions when these same individuals almost resorted to violence they formed a 'restraining judgement', escaping the tunnel vision that characterised the violent events and redefining the situation as not requiring violence. There were various reasons for the change of interpretation and sentiment such as: perceiving that the attack would fail, fear of jeopardising an important intimate or social relationship, deference to the other person or fear of legal sanctions. Finally, other individuals indicated that they re-evaluated the situation in light of a change in the course of action of the other person (e.g. the potential victim conceded in some way or apologised). Athens' work moves us much closer to the moment of the interaction than most other research in this area.

> Unsurprisingly, people form restraining judgements far more often than they form overriding ones or become locked in fixed lines of indication. Consequently – and fortunately – far more violent criminal acts are begun than are ever completed. (Athens 1997: 52–3)

Integrated Approaches

It is not possible to do justice to the complexity of homicide without acknowledging the interplay of structural, cultural and situational factors. For example, Luckenbill's work, while valuable in unpacking the micro-situational dynamics of homicide, failed to look outward from the encounter to the social and economic forces that set the context for such lethal violence to occur. What occurs in specific settings, while in part a product of that particular environment, is also a product of wider structural forces that themselves pave the way for the development of particular cultural adaptations and values that may support violence as a way of dealing with conflict; in short, arenas of interaction are not hermetically sealed from the outer world. Untangling the relative effects of structure, culture and situational factors is a complex business but increasingly researchers are moving away from uni-dimensional approaches. Bernard (1990), for example, charts the mechanisms that mediate between negative structural conditions and expressions of 'angry aggression' among the 'truly disadvantaged'. Bowling (1999) similarly linked the macro-structural forces of economic recession and poverty to the emergence of despair and relative deprivation at the community and individual level while also acknowledging the importance of the development of lucrative crack and heroin markets and the widespread availability of guns (situational) in his exploration of the dramatic surge in New York murder in the 1980s. Furthermore, some theorists focus upon particular types of homicide, allowing them, arguably, to be more context-specific (Polk 1994a; Brookman, 2005). For example, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) examined the intersection of structural and cultural influences upon retaliatory homicide in St Louis, Missouri, while Williams and Flewelling (1988) found that different cultural and structural factors had varied impacts upon different types of homicide. Finally, recent analysis of the emergence of gang-related homicides in particular parts of the UK also provides a clear illustration of the value of adopting an integrated approach.

Gang-related homicide: the influence of structural, cultural and situational factors

Gang-related homicide refers to homicides committed by or among gang members. A gang is taken to mean 'children and young people who see themselves and are seen by others as affiliates of a discrete, named, group with a discernable structure and a recognised territory' (Pitts 2008: 6). It is difficult to determine, with any degree of accuracy, the proportion of homicides attributable to gangs. The Home Office (2009) recently suggested increases in gang violence and shooting incidents linked to gangs and organised criminal groups (see also McLagan 2006). However, analysis of data from the Homicide Index indicates that no more than 3 per cent of all homicides are linked to gangs.[18]

There is a good deal of evidence from international research that street gangs emerge and flourish where inequality and marginality prevail. Vigil (2006: 22), for example, argues that 'the street gang is an outcome of marginalization, that is, the relegation of certain persons or groups to the fringes of society where social and economic conditions result in powerlessness'. He used the term 'multiple marginality' to express the extent and complexity of the forces that set the context for the emergence of street gangs. These include macro-historical forces (racism, social and cultural repression and fragmented institutions) and macrostructural (immigration and migration and the development of migrant poor barrios/ghettos) (pp. 22–3).

Pitts' (2008) research into armed youth gangs in London neatly illustrates the powerful role of structural changes in Britain in the emergence of violent gangs. Pitts (2008: 56) suggests that there have been 'seismic economic and political changes' in the UK in the past two decades that have led to the emergence of US-style armed youth gangs. These changes include: (a) the widening gap between rich and poor; (b) the concentration of the poorest sections of the population in social housing; and (c) structural youth unemployment (due to the decline of Britain's industrial base). Ultimately, segregation, marginalisation and the creation of 'discredited populations' (Baum 1996, cited in Pitts 2008: 63) set the scene for the development of gangs and gang violence. How, precisely? Some theorists have suggested that frustration and rage born of injustice (see Bernard 1990) breed 'norms and narratives supportive of gang violence' (Kennedy 2007, cited in Pitts 2008). Other researchers focus more upon the psychological strain that negative neighbourhood conditions foster noting that stress strips those affected of their coping skills and can impact negatively upon their assessment of risk; minor insults are seen as major threats (see Bernard 1990; Niehoff 1999; Vigil 2006) and a 'soldier mentality' characterised by heightened sensitivity to threats and a constant preparedness for action prevails (Sampson and Lauritsen 1994). Still others make reference to competition over scarce resources, observing that individuals raised in impoverished environments learn that they must be aggressive in their efforts to compete for scarce resources (see Sánchez-Jankowski 2003; see also Daly and Wilson 1988, 1990, for an evolutionary twist on this position). What each of these theorists agree upon is that material conditions establish the foundations for a 'culture of force' that can ultimately be labelled a 'culture of violence' (Sánchez-Jankowski 2003: 209). Specific situational contexts then promote the enactment of these cultural codes or, as Copes and Hochstetler (2003: 301) put it: 'Certain settings and activities trigger cognitive frames that make offending seem reasonable.' An example of such an activity would be drug dealing and the setting would include particular housing estates or neighbourhoods where gangs compete to control the sales of drugs. Involvement in drug dealing inevitably heightens the risk of gang violence and victimisation as members' routine activities expose them to volatile and unpredictable situations (Maher this volume; Chapple 2008). Where firearms or other lethal weapons are readily available the chances of minor disputes ending fatally is, of course, considerably enhanced. Moreover, the nature of their illicit activities (e.g. drug dealing and the carrying of firearms) places gang members outside formal avenues of redress so that they are not in

a position to call upon the criminal justice system to assist when they fall victim to violence – even if they wanted to. As Topalli *et al*. (2002: 341) state: 'As drug dealers conduct their trade outside the limits of legal protection, a reputation for formidability represents one of the only mechanisms available to them for deterring victimization.' In short, a 'menacing and capable' street reputation is especially critical for men inhabiting this social setting and they are particularly sensitive to challenges to their courage and character (pp. 340–3). What these kinds of accounts clearly demonstrate is the intersection between structural disadvantage, cultural adaptations and micro-action on the street (see also Rosenfeld *et al.* 2003).

In conclusion, making sense of homicide requires that we unravel the structural, economic and social forces that constrain individuals' chances and choices (Pitts, 2008) as well as the cultural and micro-situational pushes and pulls towards violence. Putting all the pieces of the puzzle together is a complex task. However, there is little doubt that such endeavours lead to richer and more meaningful accounts of homicide (and violence generally) than those that remain more narrowly focused.

Responding to homicide

Just as explanations of homicide are many and varied, so too are responses to it. Moreover, there is something of a debate regarding the extent to which homicide should be conceived as a distinct phenomenon (requiring very specific kinds of explanations and control strategies) or whether, on the other hand, it can be understood as an extreme manifestation of serious violence. It has been argued by a number of writers that the dynamics of homicide are basically identical to those of other forms of violence (Fyfe *et al*. 1997), differing in outcome rather than process. Whether the victim dies, according to this viewpoint, is often happenstance. Others note that there are some homicides in which the perpetrator fully intends to kill (as opposed to injure) the victim and ensure his or her death (see Fyfe *et al*. 1997; Felson and Messner 1996). Ultimately the two arguments are not incompatible. Clearly, there are homicides which are similar in dynamics to other acts of violence and homicides which are not (Brookman and Maguire 2005).

Broadly speaking, approaches to reduce or prevent homicide fall into one of the following categories:

1. Strategies to reduce the overall frequency of interpersonal violence (the assumption being that a decrease in violence will automatically bring about a decrease in homicide). Examples would include efforts to reduce domestic violence (see Robinson this volume) or violence in the context of the night-time economy (see Winlow this volume) or, more broadly, programmes to tackle poverty and social exclusion.
2. The identification of people, locations or situations with an exceptionally high risk of serious violence/homicide in order to 'target' these for preventative interventions (the basic assumption similar to that above, however, with the potential benefit of a greater reduction in homicide

through a more focused use of resources). Examples include 'risk factor' research to identify infants most at risk of being killed by a parent or specialist strategies to target gang-related shootings (such as Operation Trident in London).

3 The use of measures that reduce the likelihood that an assault will end lethally (the aim being to reduce the degree of violence or its impact upon the victim without necessarily aiming to reduce the overall numbers of violent incidents). Examples include the use of toughened or plastic drinking vessels in pubs and clubs or improvements in the speed and efficiency of emergency medical treatment for victims of serious violence.

Given the relative infrequency, diversity and apparently low predictability of homicide incidents, reducing or preventing it is no simple task (Brookman and Maguire 2005). For example, domestic violence has been the subject of sustained Home Office attention and funding with a number of multi-agency programmes flourishing across the UK (see Robinson this volume). A key plank of the work in this area revolves around trying to identify and intervene with the women or men who are especially vulnerable to lethal violence. However, despite considerable energy having been expended to identify 'risk factors' for domestic homicide it remains a very difficult offence to predict (category 2 above). The presence even of those factors that appear particularly salient as risk factors (and which may be good predictors of violence), such as threats to kill or the recent termination of the intimate relationship, do *not* lead to homicide in the great majority of cases (Brookman and Maguire 2005). Nevertheless, as noted earlier, domestic homicide has decreased over the last decade and it is possible that this is the result of the growth of a number of innovative multi-agency initiatives to combat domestic violence more generally.

Specific efforts to reduce homicide are relatively rare in the UK – rather there are efforts to reduce particular kinds of violence – from which lethal violence can emerge (category 1 above). A recent example of one such strategy is the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP), which was launched in response to a number of high-profile knife-related murders and serious stabbing among young people. This Home Office-led intensive ten-month initiative aimed to reduce the carrying of knives, related homicide and serious stabbings among teenagers aged 13–19 (Ward and Diamond 2009). Interventions, implemented initially in ten police force areas, included increased use of intelligence-led patrolling of weapon-related violence 'hot-spots' and increased use of stop and searches, the targeting of gangs and the return of at-risk, unsupervised children to their homes. Police forces also ran weapons-awareness courses and many produced posters or DVDs highlighting the dangers of knives. Focus groups, youth crime forums and youth conferences were used to engage young people and involve them in the programme (Ward and Diamond 2009). The evaluation of phase 1 found that while the programme led to a decrease of sharp-instrument related violence generally, there was no change in the number of provisionally recorded sharp-instrument-related homicides among victims aged 19 and under and a slight increase among victims aged 20 and

over. Clearly, even fairly intensive interventions that combine enforcement with education and youth engagement are only partially effective.

A unique example of an initiative specifically developed to reduce and prevent homicide is Operation Trident (see http://www.stoptheguns.org/index.php), a major coordinated strategy based in London but with a national brief, which was launched in 1998. This has both an intelligence-gathering and analysis function and an operational arm. Although there has been no independent research conducted to date to assess the work of Operation Trident, there are indications that it is performing well in terms of detecting offenders. This apparently high level of success has been attributed by officers, in part, to the close working of key members of the black community in London with the police, which has permitted officers to bridge gaps with black victims and witnesses who were previously afraid to give evidence against offenders (see also the Manchester Gun Project, modelled on the Boston Gun Project – Bullock and Tilley 2008).

While it could be argued that efforts to reduce homicide are multifarious, critics point to a failure to invest in long-term strategies, such as programmes of social and economic change, in favour of short-term 'fixes' that have more political appeal (Buvinic and Morrision 2000).

As Polk (1994a: 210) aptly noted over fifteen years ago:

> A society which is serious about the reduction of violence should look above all else to its economy, and to ways of providing for the deflection of individuals from the economic traps involved in under-class life.

This message is all the more pertinent given the current climate of global economic recession and the widening gap between rich and poor.

Concluding comments

Our journey began, in this chapter, by considering the legal definition of homicide through to its patterns, characteristics, causes and, briefly, responses to this crime. It should be apparent at this juncture that homicide comes in numerous guises. Understanding why around 900 people die each year in the UK and around 490,000 worldwide (Krause *et al*. 2008: 71) as the result of unlawful homicide requires careful consideration. There is a growing recognition among homicide researchers of the need to disaggregate homicide into conceptually meaningful subtypes if one is to develop worthwhile explanations. Simultaneously it is necessary to consider both offenders and victims of homicide and to explore their actions in relation to both the physical and social contexts within which they interact and the broader social and cultural environment that they inhabit (Chapple 2008; Brookman 2005). The 'official' picture of unlawful homicide is clearly just the tip of the iceberg of actual lives lost due to interpersonal violence. The moment we include deaths due to corporate negligence and neglect or genocide the figures increase dramatically. It is, therefore, something of a puzzle as to why the bulk of homicide research, media and government attention focuses on relatively

uncommon homicide situations – such as gang shootings, fatal knife attacks among children or teenagers, and stranger, serial and female killers (Miethe and Regoeczi 2004). As Box (1983: 9) aptly notes:

> We are encouraged to see murder as a particular act involving a very limited range of stereotypical actors, instruments, situations and motives. Other types of avoidable killing are either defined as a less serious crime than murder, or as matters more appropriate for administrative or civil proceedings, or as events beyond the justifiable boundaries of state interference.

This is not simply a matter of distorted public consciousness. Rather, as Miethe and Regoiczi (2004) acknowledge, it can lead to the misdirecting of criminal justice and other resources away from the most deserving.

Suggested further reading

Until relatively recently there was not a great deal written by the academic community about homicide in the UK. Rather, the literature was dominated by research and theory from the USA and, to a lesser extent, Australia and some parts of Europe. The most recent comprehensive overview of homicide in the UK can be found in Brookman's *Understanding Homicide* (2005). Polk's (1994) *When Men Kill* is also a valuable text to consult and is broader than the title suggests while Spierenburg's (2008) *A History of Murder* is an essential read for those wishing to locate murder in its historical context – he charts the changing patterns of homicide across Western Europe since the late Middle Ages. The annual homicide statistics published by the Home Office and available online provide a useful overview of patterns and trends on homicide in England and Wales. The most recent are available at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb0209.pdf (they tend to be released in February each year). The Scottish Government provide a similar set of annual statistics on their website (http://www.scotland.gov.uk). The most recent are available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/12/15155727/0. In terms of the investigation and detection of homicide, by far the best text is Innes' (2003) *Investigating Murder: Detective Work and the Police Response to Criminal Homicide*. A useful overview of the scope for reducing and preventing homicide can be found in Brookman and Maguire (2005) *Reducing Homicide: A Review of the Possibilities.* Finally, the journal *Homicide Studies* (Sage) is worth consulting on a regular basis and is the only journal dedicated to research papers from various parts of the world dealing specifically with homicide.

Notes

1 Of the four countries that make up United Kingdom, England and Wales share a common legal system and are treated as a single entity for the purposes of recording crime. Scotland has a very different legal system based on Roman law whereby offence definitions are often inconsistent with those of England and Wales. Northern Ireland has a separate criminal justice system that has been profoundly affected by terrorist troubles. Due to these anomalies, and for the sake of clarity, it will be necessary to deal mainly with the law related to homicide in England and Wales, referring separately to Scotland and Northern Ireland where necessary.

2 Scottish law makes a similar distinction between murder and common law culpable homicide but does not have separate legislation for the killing of infants.
3 Deaths caused by dangerous or careless driving or while under the influence of alcohol or drugs are dealt with by separate legislation (see Road Traffic Acts 1988 and 1991).
4 Prior to 1965, with the passing of the Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Act, murder was a capital offence.
5 Until 1996 an individual could not be prosecuted for murder if the individual they had harmed died after a year and a day of the original attack. One of the original rationales for this rule lay in the difficulty in proving a causal connection between old injuries and subsequent death. However, this rule came under increasing criticism, especially as modern medicine and life-support machines meant that a murderer could avoid liability simply because of lengthy medical attempts to save someone's life. Hence in 1995 the House of Commons' Select Committee on Home Affairs and the Law Commission produced papers recommending the abolition of the rule, and Parliament did so in the Law Reform (Year and a Day Rule) Act 1996.
6 There have been just five recorded cases of corporate manslaughter since 2000 in the homicide statistics for England and Wales which bears no resemblance to the number of lives lost due to corporate negligence and neglect (see Toombs this volume).
7 In their original proposals the Law Commission restricted first degree murder to intentional killings only (see Law Commission 2005: 249–58).
8 Caution is needed when interpreting these preliminary figures because deaths that are not initially believed to be suspicious may be recategorised as homicides at a later date. Hence these unconfirmed data have not been included in Figure 12.1.
9 Harold Shipman was convicted in January 2000 of murdering 15 of his patients while he was a general practitioner in Hyde, Greater Manchester. The independent public inquiry identified a further 172 victims – believed to have been killed over an estimated 25-year period. These additional homicides were recorded by Greater Manchester Police in 2002/3 and thus appear in the 2002/3 homicide figures (see Smith 2002). Other events of note include the 52 victims of the 7th July London bombings (recorded in 2005/6) the 20 cockle pickers who drowned in Morecambe Bay (recorded 2003/4) and the 58 Chinese nationals who collectively suffocated in a lorry en route in the UK (recorded 2000/1).
10 That said, current homicide rates are insignificant when compared to the incidence in the Middle Ages or 1700s (see Spierenburg 2008).
11 For further discussion of longer-term homicide trends and their links to the political economy see Eisner (2001) and Spierenburg (2008).
12 The HDI combines measures of life expectancy, literacy, education and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as a means of measuring the comparing levels of human development (Krause *et al*. 2008: 72).
13 This section focuses principally upon England and Wales and includes analysis of the Home Office Homicide Index 1998–2008 as well as relying upon the most recent homicide statistics published by the Home Office (see Povey *et al*. 2009).
14 The Home Office and Scottish Government publish annual homicide statistics that are generally much more detailed and informative than those that are available for other offences. The reader is referred to these publications as well as Brookman (2005) for further detailed analysis of offender, victim and offence characteristics.
15 This excludes 172 homicides of white people killed by Harold Shipman and the 20 Morecambe Bay homicides as these cases unusually skew the data.

16 More detailed coverage can be found in Brookman (2005).
17 Simon and Burns' (1997) The Corner is a highly illuminating depiction of an inner-city drug culture.
18 The Home Office began recording gang-related homicides on the Homicide Index in 2007. However, the data are not comprehensive due, in part, to incomplete returns made to the Home Office and an inevitable lack of certainty in some cases as to whether gang members were involved, e.g. unsolved shooting incidents.

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