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The spurious link between immigration and increased crime

In the era of Brexit attempts have repeatedly been made to associate recent immigrants with criminality; and despite all evidence to the contrary this slur continues.



Thames Valley – Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Anthony Stansfeld

Danny Dorling works at the University of Oxford. He was previously a professor at the University of Sheffield, and before then at Leeds. His earlier academic posts were in Newcastle, Bristol, and New Zealand. His most recent book, with Sally Tomlinson, is 'Rule Britannia: Brexit and the end of Empire'.

Sally Tomlinson was born in Stockport. Her first primary school job was teaching children from the Caribbean and Asian subcontinent in Wolverhampton in the year Enoch Powell was making his anti-immigrant speeches. She has worked in universities in Warwick, Lancaster, Goldsmiths London and Oxford'.

On Saturday 22nd December 2018, three days before Christmas, the Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire – Thames Valley – Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Anthony Stansfeld, was [reported](#) to still be standing by his very recent allegation that that 'foreign nationals' were one of the reasons for increasing demand being placed upon Oxfordshire's police officers in recent years . He had been quoted as claiming that "*A significant amount of the more serious crime is now being committed by foreign national offenders.*" (Photo above: Anthony Stansfeld, Thames valley Police and Crime Commissioner, reproduced with permission of the Oxford Mail).

Local members of parliament reacted angrily. The Oxford West and Abingdon MP explained that *"I am concerned that the PCC singling out foreign nationals as the perpetrators reeks of dog whistle politics and risks an increase in hate crimes to people from other nations who've made their home in our communities"* The Oxford East MP used statistics to explain that the number of people from abroad committing crimes was actually declining, yet still Anthony Stansfeld (pictured above) would accept no criticism, simply claiming that *"I tell the truth on these things."*

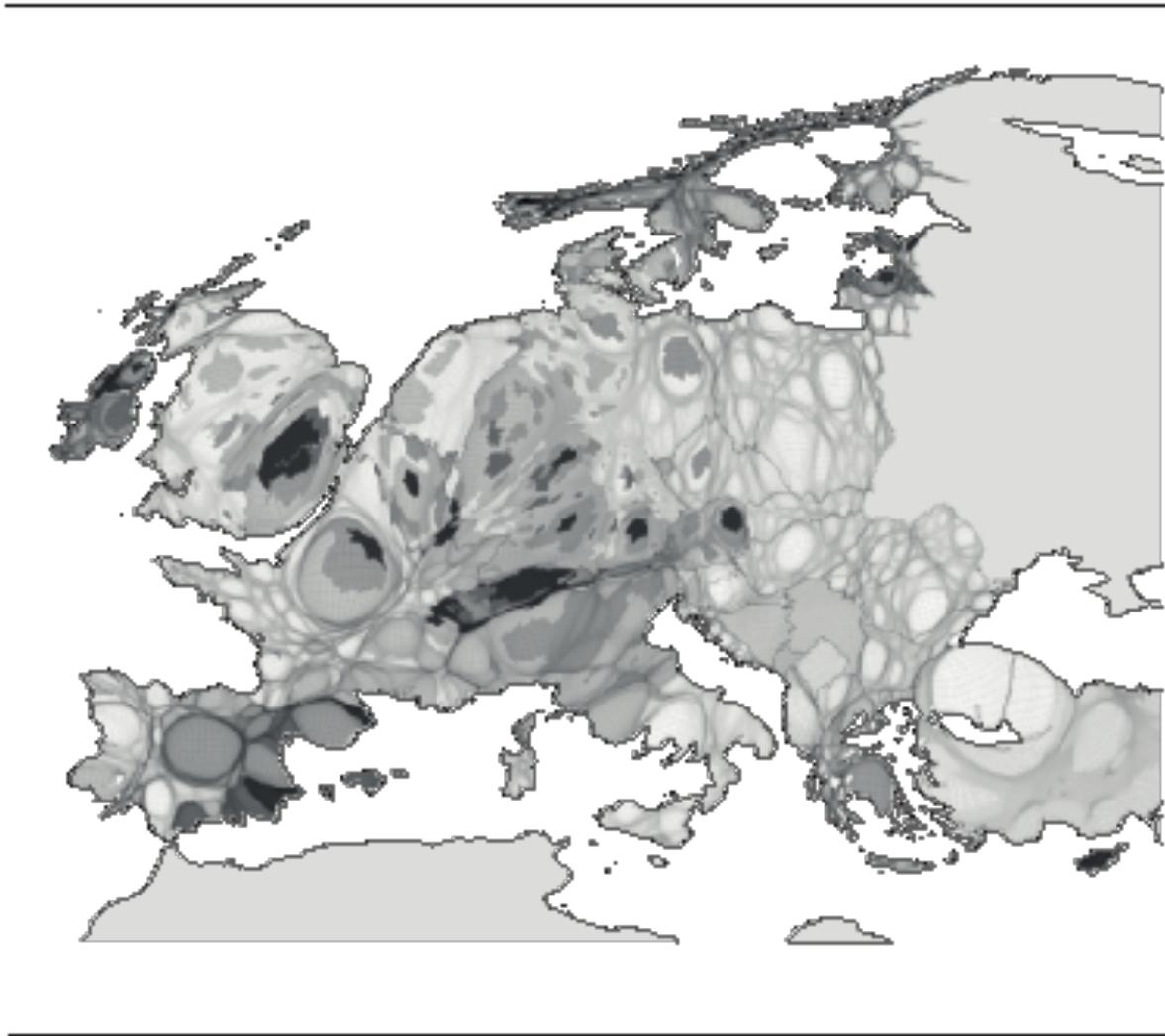
So where does this particular version of the 'truth' come from? And how does it manage to resist so much good sense, statistical evidence, or warnings of the potential consequences of repeating such accusations which are often echoes of a much older prejudice?

Students of criminology could request interviews with the Thames Valley PCC to ask him where his views come from, but he may not know. Few of us make good judges of our own motivations, beliefs, and what lead to our particular prejudices developing in the first place. Fear and mistrust of others is common worldwide, especially of people who are seen as different. However, the reactions of the two members of parliament for the city of Oxford in this case helps to illustrate that there is also now a strong movement to counter such stereotyping, and that fight-back also has a long history.

There is no correlation between immigration rates and crime. Meticulous research recently [revealed](#) that Wales has the highest rate of imprisonment of people to be found anywhere in Europe. Wales is hardly a favoured destination for immigrants, unless you count English people moving there in retirement. Wales suffers from one of the lowest immigration rates in all of Europe. In 2014 less than 5% of its population were [born abroad](#) (see the map below). This is a rate of in-migration that is amongst the lowest of any country or region in Europe. Outside of London and Northern Ireland the rate of migration from abroad into much of the UK very low. It is a low rate of immigration into a large home born population that is most comparable to that found in many Eastern European countries. Eastern Europe also tends to receive few people born abroad, and is very like the North of England and Wales in that respect. The highest rate of immigration from abroad in Europe is found in Switzerland, a country not known for its high crime rates. Next most attractive is the

Mediterranean coast of Spain, where a high proportion of the large number of immigrants were born in Britain (we often call them 'expats'). After those two areas it is central west London that attracts the most people born elsewhere.

Immigrants: The proportion of people living in each region of Europe born in another country (2014)



Key– in the darkest shaded areas over a fifth of people were born abroad, in the lightest areas less than one in twenty was. Areas in the map are drawn in proportion to their total populations.

Source, Figure 9.4 of Dorling, D. and Gietel-Basten, S. (2017) Why Demography Matters, Cambridge: Polity (reproduced with the kind permission of Benjamin Hennig)

We have recently written a [book](#) in which we try to explain that, people are apt to blame others when the relative position of their place in the world is falling, as it is currently in the Britain. There is a very real sense that things fall apart when empires crumble, and Britain remains, at the heart of what is a still contracting relic of a former world empire. The fear of outsiders in Britain has been stoked up in recent decades by newspapers whose owners want people to blame others, rather than the single political party [they almost all support](#). Above all else they do not want the blame placed on the economic inequality by income that has been allowed to grow to become the worse, to have become the highest, in all of Europe. Some even try to blame immigrants for that inequality too, claiming that their presence lowers wages, as if people choose to be badly paid! But the [highest median wages](#) in Europe are found in cities on the mainland with high proportions of immigrants (the dark areas in the map above).

We all too easily fail to see what is happening when the rich take more and more leaving less for the rest, especially for the poorest. We are encouraged to imagine ogres that are not there. These ogres include ever rising numbers of apparently 'criminal immigrants', the fictional supposedly quick-breeding migrants who are taking 'our' homes, 'our' partners' jobs, and claiming the best places in what should be 'our' children's schools, and at the very same time apparently committing so much crime. However, the most common serious crime in the UK is speeding in a car. It is also by far the most deadly. The vast majority of car drivers who speed are not immigrants, although the [Duke of Edinburgh](#), was recently involved in a collision and then found to be not wearing a seat belt, and he was born abroad. But the reason he chooses not to wear a seat belt, or to drive as he does, is unlikely to be related to some early experience he had as a child living in Greece, France and Germany.

FIGURE 4.2: 'JOHN BULL' LOCKING THE DOOR,
DAILY EXPRESS, FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1901



An early example of tabloid press xenophobia, stoking fear of those from Eastern Europe.¹⁸

Source, Figure 4.2 of Dorling, D. and Tomlinson, S. (2019) *Ruel Britannia: From Brexit to the End of Empire*, London: Biteback, Reproduced from the archive of the *Daily Express* (out of copyright).

Fear of immigrants tends to rise at times when economic fortunes are falling and people are questioning the political strength of their country; scapegoats are searched for. In 1899 the Second Boer war began in South Africa, a war in which the British suffered very bad losses . In 1901 there were racist campaigns against foreign immigrants in the [Daily Express](#). In 1903 [George Edalji](#), a Midlands solicitor with a mixed race background, was found guilty and sentenced to seven years hard labour for crimes he did not commit. His sentence was reduced and he was later found to have **not** been guilty of the most serious crimes of which he had been accused. However, he was never found completely innocent despite his sister,

Maud, campaigning to clear his name for nearly 60 years, right through to her death in 1961. His wrongful conviction did help bring about the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal for England and Wales which [first sat](#) on May 15th 1908, 111 years ago this year. We can adapt, so when will we learn to stop saying ‘*foreign national offenders*’?

The crimes people are least likely to be found out for are the common crimes of the rich: driving dangerously, evading taxes, and fraud. The crimes which are most often publicised are the crimes most strongly associated with the poor. Recent immigrants from poor backgrounds are often labelled as racially or ethnically different, living in urban squalor that is apparently of their making (despite the fact that they have only just arrived and have had no time to make it). In contrast, recent immigrants who are wealthy are rarely labelled as living in unusually higher concentrations, but most do. The segregation of the rich away from other people’s neighbourhoods is the most concentrated spatial segregation of all. The rich tend not to mix.

In 2007 it was shown through analysis of the national census that the greatest concentration of overseas born children living in the UK were to be found around affluent Hyde Park in London. They had been born in the USA, their parents most likely worked in finance. In the next year came the great financial crash, for which no banker in the UK was jailed, British, American or of any other nationality.

A century earlier, in 1905, as we recount in our recently book ([‘Rule Britannia’](#)) the MP Major Evans-Gordon was instrumental in bringing in the Aliens Act which ‘...gave the Home Secretary overall responsibility for immigration and nationality matters. Ostensibly designed to prevent paupers and criminals from entering the country, one of its main objectives was to stop Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. Campaigning in favour of the law, Evans-Gordon said, ‘Not a day passes but English families are ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders,’ and ‘The rates are burdened with the education of thousands of foreign children.’ Problems with health, housing and education were all claimed, as now, to be caused by immigration. A little later, the league was absorbed by Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists.’ [Note: This quote is an extract from *Rule Britannia: From Brexit to the End of Empire*, London: Biteback, published January 15th 2019, By Danny Dorling and Sally Tomlinson; and this article is mainly based on material brought together in that book]



Source, Cover of Dorling, D. and Tomlinson, S. (2019) *Rule Britannia: From Brexit to the End of Empire*, London: Biteback [an image from the Empire marketing board]

It is good to see MPs today behaving so differently. Less than three years ago one of their number, Jo Cox, was murdered by a man shouting ‘*Britain First*’ as he killed her, and who gave his name in court on being charged with her murder as ‘*Death to traitors. Freedom for Britain*’. Since the referendum, racist hate crime has increased by 16 per cent across Britain, and peaked at a 58 per cent rise in the week following the vote.

Hate crime is done to immigrants, not by them. Three weeks after the Referendum a 16 year old Polish girl was found hanged at her school. She had been [bullied](#) and told that she '[did not belong here](#)'. In September 2016 a Polish man was killed in Essex, the Polish Ambassador visiting the scene and expressing shock at the rise of racist and xenophobic behaviour. Long before the Windrush scandal there had been a hostile environment to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers of all kinds, and a rise of far-right fascist groups in the UK. But many politicians are fighting back against the racism, more than they have ever done so before. Police forces around the country are now better informed and despite cuts, are better equipped to deal with the expectations put upon them. They do not need the spread of untruths by an ignorant Police and Crime Commissioner, or the creation of hostile environments by politicians who appear to harbour a deep dislike of people they see as not like them. It is time we called out the lie of 'immigrant criminals' once and for all, for what it is: racism.

Contacts

Danny Dorling, University of Oxford

Email: Danny.dorling@ouce.ox.ac.uk

www.danny.dorling.org

Twitter: [@dannydorling](https://twitter.com/dannydorling)

Sally Tomlinson, University of Oxford

Email: s@stomlinson.net

<http://www.stomlinson.net/>

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