

## Crime, ethnicity, and social inequality: Controversies and ethics in forensic science and practice

Brunel University, West London, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

*Organised by Barbara Prainsack (Brunel University, UK), Helena Machado (University of Minho, PT) and Robin Williams (Northumbria University Centre for Forensic Science, UK)*

The growing expansion of criminal investigation databases containing bioinformation has been presented to the general public as a powerful contribution to crime prevention, detection and deterrence. The supposed ‘truth-telling’ capacity of DNA and fingerprints have been celebrated also by the media, and reiterated by politicians, forensic experts, and representatives of law enforcement agencies. The infallible power attributed to DNA technologies in particular has supported the belief that the expansion of DNA databases could increase the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, and that science and technology provide the foundation for a more objective, just, and cost-effective application of the law.

While the legal and criminological implications of forensic and police uses of DNA analysis and databasing have received ample attention from social science scholars in recent decades, views of other stakeholders, including citizens, ethnic minorities, and convicts, have not been extensively explored. Moreover, while a wider political discussion has started to emerge on the governance of DNA databases, not much attention has been paid to the study of operational practices or the utility of technological innovation in the bioforensic realm. Some of these practices and technologies remain controversial, especially those of phenotypic profiling and familial searching. Many authors have argued that the use of these technologies may exacerbate existing racial and social biases in policing and forensic databasing. Other practices such as DNA dragnets, selective arrests, the sentencing and incarceration of individuals from the poorest communities also highlight the relationship between social inequality and the use of DNA intelligence and evidence in the criminal justice system.

Our workshop will address these current controversies and dilemmas from empirically informed social science perspectives. We will invite social science experts from different national jurisdictions who have led, or are leading, research efforts in this field.

### Programme

- 09.00 Welcome and introduction (Barbara Prainsack, Brunel University, UK)
- 09.30 Yulia Egorova (Durham University, UK)
- 10.00 Robin Williams (Northumbria University, UK)
- 10.30 Discussion
- 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.30 David O’Dwyer (University of Limerick, IE)
- 12:00 Discussion

12:30 Lunch  
13:30 Victor Toom (Northumbria University, UK)  
14:00 Chris Lawless (University of Edinburgh, UK)  
14:30 Discussion  
15:00 Chris Maguire (Northumbria University, UK)  
15.30 Discussion  
16.00 Coffee break  
16:30 Final remarks (Helena Machado, University of Minho, PT)

17:00 *Tracing Technologies. Prisoners' views in the Era o CSI* by Helena Machado and Barbara Prainsack: Book Launch (Welcome by Dany Nobus, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Brunel University; comments by Thomas Lemke, Goethe University Frankfurt, DE, and Reinhard Kreissl, Institute for legal and social criminology, Vienna, AT)

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The book launch is supported by: Brunel University

