



Facultade de Filoloxía

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

**“By Order of the Peaky Blinders”:
A Comparative Analysis of the Real and Fictional
Birmingham Gang**

Autora: Ángela Gómez García

Titira: Cristina Mourón Figueroa

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“Every human being
has a bit of gangster in him”

Binyavanga Wainaina

Acknowledgments

For me it is important to do this brief section as I have had so much help during these months. I could have never ended what today is my final dissertation and an ending point for this stage of my life without these people. So, for all of you who are here explicitly mentioned and those who were here and not in this paper, THANK YOU.

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“Hey look ma, I made it!”
(Pan!c at the Disco, 2018).

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TITOR/A:	CRISTINA MOURÓN FIGUEROA
LIÑA TEMÁTICA ASIGNADA:	HISTORIA E CULTURA DAS ILLAS BRITÁNICAS


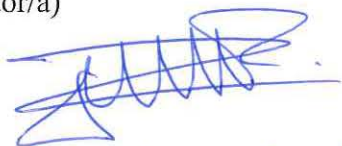

SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: “By Order of the Peaky Blinders”: A Comparative Analysis of the Real and Fictional Birmingham Gang.

Resumo: The fact that we are living in a golden age of the TV series cannot be overlooked. Almost one hundred new shows per year are being released and more than three hundred and fifty are still broadcasting. Among them, productions with a historical strand stand out both on TV and online channels. *Peaky Blinders* (2013-) is one of such TV series, which portrays the history of a gangster family in the 1920's. The show is categorised as historical fiction and claims to have based its plot on the real Peaky Blinders gang which was active mainly in Birmingham from the 1890's to 1930.

The aim of this dissertation is a comparative and contrastive analysis between the historical, social and cultural background of the real Peaky Blinders and the reinterpretation of these aspects in the TV show. For this purpose, an introduction to the historical and social background of Birmingham at that time will be included as well as a detailed study of the differences and similarities between the real world of the Peaky Blinders and its adaptation to the screen, which will be illustrated with examples from the series and supported by a comprehensive reading of the most important bibliography on the subject. A second objective will tackle the reasons which led the screenwriter to adapt the history of this gang in one way or another and the issue of how much is real history and how much is fiction.

Santiago de Compostela, 5 de noviembre de 2018.

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I. Introduction

There is something about the nineteen twenties that somehow attracts everybody. It may be the partying, the alcohol, the disinhibition, the freedom... people seem to be interested in any characteristic from that period. This may have been what Steven Knight, the creator, director and screenwriter of *Peaky Blinders* (2013-), thought when creating the show.

This historical drama distributed by the BBC portrays a fictional narrative based on a true story: the story of the Peaky Blinders gang from Birmingham. In this show, the main characters are the leaders of a family gang, settled in the nineteen twenties in Birmingham, which is in the West Midlands of England. This family run an illegal betting house mostly focused on horse races. But the most interesting fact of this family is not that they are bookmakers, but that they are the leaders of a very dangerous gang in Small Heath, Birmingham: The Peaky Blinders.

In this era in which violent multitudes were all over the country, organisation was needed. Not only did the police try to stop what was being created, but also the government. First, I think it is important to know what ‘slogging’ is, and “slogging, defined by the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* in 1873 (...) [is referred to] ‘mercilessly stoning passers-by’” (Gooderson, 2010: 18). Both, the police and the government, saw in slogging a new problem showing up and together with the already existent revolts among workers in the industrialised cities, it was becoming something to be scared of. But police could not do much. It was them, the gangs, who became more and more organised over the years.

In this dissertation I am going to offer a thorough analysis on what it was really happening during those years in Birmingham and what it has been portrayed in the tv-show.

The first thing is to introduce the socio-historical context of the real gang, which is the eighteen-eighties, the years when they were operational. And then, an introduction of the nineteen twenties, in which the series is set, will be explained. This major change in the time period has become an issue for me to analyse and understand, because as the basis of this dissertation is a comparative analysis, it is difficult in a way to try to understand why a specific director would change something as basic as the historical time.

Without interfering so much in the historical context of this research, which will be explained in chapter two, I can point out that one of the most important –if not the most important— differences found when comparing the real gang and the one portrayed by the TV show is indeed the time. The differences are going to be analysed further on, but first I want to highlight the main facts in history, firstly between the 1860s and the 1890s, and then the relevant facts of the 1920s. With these brief socio-historical contexts about time, it should be easy to have a general understanding of the situation. Having things clear in mind, it should be possible to compare these different decades with one another and then, to compare both of them with the real nineteen twenties which are portrayed in the show.

Whereas the real mob existed since the 1860s and was almost ended by the nineteen-twenties, Steven Knight, the creator of the TV show, said in an interview for BBC History Extra in 2016 that what he was trying to do was to “end the story with the first air raid sirens in Birmingham in 1940, so it’s truly a ‘between-the-wars’ story”

(<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-steven-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

He has chosen to do so because he is basing his historical drama series on his own family: the Sheldons, who eventually will turn into the Shelbys. As he himself has explained to *BBC History Magazine*, his dad used to tell him stories about his Birmingham gangsters ancestors and

one of the stories that really made me want to write *Peaky Blinders* is one my dad told me: he said that when he was eight or nine, his dad gave him a message on a piece of paper and said 'go and deliver this to your uncles'. His uncles were the Sheldons, who eventually became the Shelbys [in *Peaky Blinders*]. (...) My dad was told to go and deliver this message, so he ran through the streets barefoot, knocked on the door, the door opened and there was a table with about eight men sitting around it, immaculately dressed, wearing caps and with guns in their pockets. The table was covered with money –at a time when no-one had a penny—and they were all drinking beer out of jam jars because these men wouldn't spend money on glasses or cups. Just that image – smoke, booze and these immaculately dressed men in this slum in Birmingham –I thought, *that's* the story (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-steven-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

When he decided to work on *Peaky Blinders*, he started to search for information so that he would know what really happened. And while doing so, he learnt that “it was much more violent than I'd been told. When you're a kid they keep bad things away from you” (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-steven-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). Mr. Knight has also said that he

always gave priority to the stories I'd been told rather than what the books said, because I think people who write history look for patterns and they look for order, and they look for things that would make sense. In reality, a lot of the stuff that happens makes no sense; there is no pattern (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-steven-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

In addition to his lineage, he is a firmer believer of the 'secret history' of England, which has more to do with the real people, this

another history of England and the English, which is ten times more interesting. The working-class weren't hanging around either being comical or tragic; in these communities there were kings and queens and there were movements and monarchs and

fashion (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-stein-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019)

that mattered more to the people than those who ruled the country. Because what mattered in the cities was the families, the neighbourhoods, and that is what *Peaky Blinders* tries to highlight: the importance of the family and the city.

For me, it is important that a TV series catalogued as historical should be based on true facts, because as a viewer, I try to learn things while enjoying. Thus, I liked *Peaky Blinders* because of my personal interest in the nineteen-twenties. And then I learnt that The Peaky Blinders gang existed indeed. However, I was surprised to learn that the real Peaky Blinders belonged to the 1880s and not that much to the nineteen twenties. Intrigued, I began to inquire about this reality we are not being told in the show. That was my first approach to a comparison of this kind. Now that I have read specialised bibliography on the time, and on the gangs –not only on the Peaky Blinders, but also on some other gangs mentioned in the show—, talked to experts on the subject and watched the first two seasons of the show, I am going to do a thorough analysis of what I have found in all these sources and I am going to offer a comparison of this information with the analysis of the show in chapter three. Some aspects of this comparison will be supported by the appendix, which is at the end of this dissertation. After this comparison, conclusions will show whether the creator of the series portrayed the nineteen-twenties and the reality of the gang correctly or not.

II. What Era Are We Living in?

A true Peaky Blinder would answer this question with a reference to the Victorian Era, because they started their job as a gang approximately in 1880s. Yet, if a TV Peaky Blinder was questioned, he would reply with some reference related to King George V's time, almost forty years later. If the TV show is supposed to be telling the real story of

the gang, why would they answer something from different ages? In order to answer this new question and in connection with the previous one, I thought that opening this chapter by questioning in what time they lived was a good starting point. Therefore, we shall proceed from the beginning.

During the major part of the nineteenth century, Great Britain was ruled by Queen Victoria (1819 – 1901), and her reign lasted for sixty-seven years (1837 – 1901). Historians divide this long period into three parts: “early, middle and late periods” (Briggs, 1985: 268). For this dissertation I will focus on the late period (1870-1901), when “there was a divergence of interests, even a sense of rebellion” (Briggs, 1985: 269). This very long period was full of changes due to “the technological advancements (...) [and] to the massive urbanisation (...) [which] completely transformed the structure of the British society” (<https://blog.findmypast.com/the-criminal-gangs-of-18th-century-britain-1406151569.html>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). Yet these changes were not only historical but also sociological. Briggs (1985: 226) wrote that a

new and *parvenu* civilization questioned the triumphs of communication and the industrialization with which it was associated. (...) [And] complained of ‘this strange disease of modern life with its sick hurry, its divided aims’. England was always something more than an industrial society.

There was a boom in the late 1860s. That is the reason why the 1870s were considered to be the breaking point between the middle and the late period (Briggs, 1985: 273). These late years shocked a new generation due to the fact that a lot of things did not fit into them. These things were not considered ‘common’ anymore, because as it has been said, the British was a “changing society” (Briggs, 1985: 273). For instance, there were

change in the appearance of the countryside (...) [where] foreign competition was driving some farmers to demand (...) protection (...) [due to] the threat from abroad (...) [, plus] local government reorganization[,] (...) changes in taxation (...) [and] trouble in the streets as well as in the mind, [which would lead them into] a ‘general revolt against authority in all departments of life which is the note of an unsettled, transitional, above all democratic age’. [In addition to that,] essential elements of Victorianism, began to be questioned (...) such as industry, abstinence and thrift[.] (...)

These were the bridge years in the making of the ‘modern movement’ (Briggs, 1985: 274-275).

This modern movement not only offered a change within these scenarios, but also within people’s lives. Working class people who used to live in agricultural places had the necessity to move to the industrialised new cities, creating a whole new organisation in these spaces. For those “of a more predatory nature” (<https://blog.findmypast.com/the-criminal-gangs-of-18th-century-britain-1406151569.html>. Last accessed 06.12.2019), crime became so much easier to perform due to an increasing number of people living in the cities. Crime also became more profitable and successful (<https://blog.findmypast.com/the-criminal-gangs-of-18th-century-britain-1406151569.html>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

Since Oscar Wilde’s trial (1895), in a time in which “sexuality, even when repressed, emerged from a conspiracy of silence and became part of social consciousness” (Briggs, 1985: 284), people waged “all forms of ‘decadence’ and all attacks on ‘respectability’(...) [to be] pilloried” (Briggs, 1985: 281). But it is important to highlight that even though these changes were taking place, gangs existed long before. During the 1860s and the 1870s, those industrialised cities “became breeding grounds for violent young gangs of a kind never seen before” (Gooderson, 2010: 11). These bands caught the police completely unaware, and they became more and more dangerous while their number was growing fast. These young population had survived all those years and sought for “comradeship, protection and, above all, excitement in the few hours not taken up by earning a living” (Gooderson, 2010: 11). People became more aware of their social environment and these gangs became part of the city’s life, gaining importance among the civilians, until they achieved to overpower those cities and their citizens through fear. These cities demanded an utmost exhibition of toughness

from the youngest, both men and women (Gooderson, 2010: 11-12). This, together with the vast intake of alcohol they consumed in order to dull the sufferings of everyday existence, opened up a “temporary escape or pleasure, but it also fuelled the violence” (Gooderson, 2010: 11).

The nineteenth century had as well so much to do with immigration. Not only did these people bring cities on, but also linked communities and regions through a cultural, social and economic process. Migration had, and still has, a profound impact on the citizens’ way of live, mostly because those who arrive to the new places usually come from an area of totally different characteristics. Therefore, their way of living and interacting is not completely the same as that of those who were already there. Another factor is that generally, people did not move individually but with their whole families. This contributed to the tendency for families to live in the same areas. Thus, a high number of relatives could live in the same street or neighbourhood, creating a type of bonding which would be impossible to have with the rest of the people living there. For this reason, families could dominate alleys or streets, although not entire neighbourhoods. These relationships among those of the same kin helped to build a specific identity, and the interactions with those different from them added some particularities to those identities (Whyte, 2004: 273-284).

The creation of these specific identities in specific parts of a town led to the formation of several groups, which usually clustered the members according to the streets they lived in. Sometimes, the “need to belong, as much as a need for protection, (...) brings young men, and sometimes women, together in a gang” (McDonald, 2010: 9). The differences between these groups could create “hostility towards other streets and neighbourhoods” (Gooderson, 2010: 13) and this hostility, along with “religion and

ethnicity, rather than politics, (...) provoked the most street violence in [cities as] Birmingham in the late 1860s” (Gooderson, 2010: 29). This happened all over the country:

In Manchester, these gang members became known as scuttlers, perhaps from the sound their clogs made as they ‘scattered’ or ran across the cobbles. In Liverpool they were called cornermen, for their habit of congregating on street corners. London would produce the hooligans, named after a particularly Irish family. And in Birmingham they were called first sloggers –a ‘slog’ was a fight – and later peaky blinders, for the fringe of hair or cap peak they typically wore over one eye (Gooderson, 2010: 11-12).

Focusing the attention on Birmingham, the Peaky Blinders were the most famous gang, but it is interesting that the name did not come up until 1890, when *The Birmingham Post*, a newspaper, addressed the gang as guilty of a violent assault. They said that the attack was carried out by the ‘Small Heath Peaky Blinders’. Previously, the gang had been called several names, as Sloggers, but the new-given name¹ gained much popularity throughout the country (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders> (00: 33’-01: 15’). Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

The twentieth century, in contrast with the “time of prosperity enhanced by overseas warfare” (Gooderson, 2010: 284) mostly caused by the employment the industries in Birmingham produced, began with a time of tension in which a great deal of guns and war machinery were being made as a prelude of what would explode in 1914: World War I (Briggs, 1985: 290-292).

First, it is important to know that World War I (1914 – 1918) brought much struggle for the people. Not only did it generate an enormous loss of lives on the front lines, but it also brought about a good number of psychological disorders, occasioned by

¹ The name, as it will be explained in chapter III, is supposed to have come from “the fashion for wearing flat caps which started to take over with young men in Birmingham and Manchester and other big (...) cities from the 1880s (...). These lads wore flat caps with short peaks. Hence: peakies” (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders> (01:33’-01:55’). Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

fighting at the battles, such as the PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder²). Another front for the struggle was the economical investment which had been made in order to produce war machinery.

People in Europe and America thought “that science was going to solve everything. Everything was getting better (...) and the same technology was suddenly blowing people to pieces” (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-stein-knight/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). Wars have always been part of history, as Winston Churchill would say: “[t]he story of the human race ... is war’ -and he was writing before the Second World War [(1939 – 1945)] during which he emerged as one of the greatest twentieth-century war leaders” (Briggs, 1985: 292). We will see later that there was warfare as well amongst mobs during the early years of the twentieth century, so this quote is quite accurate for our situation. But, going back to the First World War, or the Great War, people wanted heroes and “Great Britain produced a race of heroes” (Briggs, 1985: 293). War was nothing like literature, since “the reality of war in the trenches soon dispelled all hints of romance (...) [and they] began to get used to the deaths” (Briggs, 1985: 298-299). This familiarisation with death is well portrayed in the series, as it is shown in episode two of season one, when the main character, who is a war veteran, says that “you know, in France... in France I got used to seeing men die. I never got used to seeing horses die.

² PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder “is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault” (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). This mental disorder has been called different names depending on the time, as for instance “‘shell shock’ during the years of World War I and ‘combat fatigue’ after World War II” (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). According to the American Psychiatric Association, people with this condition, “have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended (...) and they may have strong negative reactions to something as ordinary as a loud noise or an accidental touch” (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

They die badly” (Bathurst et. Al., 2013, S01, E02: 45:18’-45:35’). This is probably the main consequence of the Great War: the death of all living creatures.

People volunteered to go and fight for their countries, and suddenly it all changed into a massacre. Yet, this was not the only consequence. Many of those who went there and were lucky enough to come back home, came “injured, gassed, shell-shocked, blinded (...) [and they] staggered back from the wars to a life that would never be the same again” (Briggs, 1985: 299). This affected people of all kinds, both poor and rich, who went to war and as the poet Vernon Scannell (1962) said “Whenever war was spoken of / I find / The war that was called Great / Invades the Mind (...) The reason darkens”. After The War, people had to learn to live again: “politicians began to talk more and more of ‘reconstruction’, changing society after war (...) [and] issues of social policy (...) raised, and (...) urged the need to deal sensibility with social discontent” (Briggs, 1985: 302).

People did not want another war, and they opposed to ‘super-patriotism’ when it started to flourish, and, moreover, when the surge of this phenomenon “was at its height during the 1920s” (Briggs, 1985: 303). At that precise moment, it was possible to see other changes among society as for instance the role of women and their liberties. These women took care of everything that men had left behind during the war in which they were fighting. Around 1918, governors acknowledged children the same way as they did with women “as a result of both the effects and experience of war” (Briggs, 1985: 305).

The economy was another element they had to keep in mind, and in response to that, a significant number of strikes were called as

illustrated on ‘Black Friday’³, 15 April 1921, when the railway and transport unions, bound in ‘triple alliance’ with miners (...) [, and conducted several strikes. A] General Strike [was] called on 3 May 1926[.] (...) ‘[T]he twenties react after the war and recede from it; the thirties are apprehensive of war and are carried towards it’. (...) [There was] strongly aware[ness] of the shadow of the last war as the shadow of a new war approached (Briggs, 1985: 307-309).

Bearing this in mind, it is easy to differentiate this 1920s from the ‘roaring twenties’.

We get a completely different picture of these years. It is true that in those days people frequented more bars, although that tendency to the consumption of alcohol came from earlier times. Bars were even more haunted by individuals in great cities such as London, where “gangsters and decadent nobility plagued the clubs” (McDonald, 2010: 188). Businessmen and women saw that type of business advantageous and decided to be part of it, as did Billy Kimber, of whom I will write about later, in co-operation with the McDonald brothers⁴. They entered the West End club world⁵ in which “clubs

³ Black Friday “in British labour history, refers to 15 April 1921, when the leaders of transport and rail unions announced a decision not to call for strike action in support of the miners. The epithet ‘black’ derives from a widespread feeling amongst labour radicals that the decision amounted to a breach of solidarity and a betrayal of the miners” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Friday_\(1921\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Friday_(1921))). Last accessed 06.12.2019). Some historians refer to this day as “a date of shame in the Labour movement, the day when the miners were betrayed by timid allies” (Taylor, 1965: 146).

⁴ The McDonald brothers (Wag and Wal) were the leaders of the Elephant and Castle mob in London from the 1910s to the 1930s and they were the ones who “battled the Sabini gang for control of allocation of bookmaking pitches on racecourses” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_and_Castle_Mob). Last accessed 06.12.2019).

⁵ The West End club world combined several aspects of London’s underworld, but it can be said that it “became, more and more, a magnet for London’s crooks. It was the centre of their underworld, within which were gambling and drinking dens and clubs of all sorts, from desperately tawdry dives to swanky nightspots. Illegal dens would be open from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., or from 2 p.m. to 6 a.m. on days when there were no race meetings and bookmakers would be among the clientele. Cheap eating houses provided temporary hangouts from late afternoon to early morning for crooks dressed in hand-made suits, (...). They would lounge around a Wireless set blaring out dance music or sit in a corner hatching dark deeds, from hotel theft for short-term working capital to blackmail plots. Visitors to Soho[, the centre of the West End world,] were often from outside London[.] (...) Goodtime girls went through their pockets to obtain letters, addresses and diaries to pass on to boyfriends, who would then threaten exposure to a victim’s family (...) unless they purchased the items back. Billiards rooms, or a comfortable sprawl in an Italian barber’s chair for a shave, were other relaxations. Gangsters dressed well and liked to be well manicured. It was a demeanour that could turn instantly nasty when they reached for a knife or razor” (McDonald, 2010: 187).

attracted the early flapper society embarking on the Roaring Twenties” (McDonald, 2010: 187-188).

Nevertheless, in the streets of smaller cities, there was a feeling of fear towards a new possible war. Many strikes were taking place, work conditions were not the best possible and the remaining problems from the Great War kept the people in constant tension. However, there were also changes for the better, as the changing role of women, who took more responsibilities and were increasingly taken into account, both inside the home and outside at work, or even when claiming the right to vote (D’cruze, 2004: 253-266).

In Birmingham, the 1920s were the same as in the rest of the country, and there were many strikes due to the high number of factories. Regarding women, in Birmingham, working-class women were important for their families. They were

strong women (...). In Birmingham we don’t say ‘it’s your parents’ house’, if you’re working-class, you say ‘it’s your mom’s’. And your mom is the most important person, and the mother of your mom is the second most important person (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders> (02:54’-03:02’). Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

Another interesting point, and related to some of what was said before, is the fact that “there were no Peaky Blinders in Birmingham in the 1920’s” (Chinn, 2014: 7). So, if there were no Peaky Blinders in the 1920s in Birmingham, how could the TV show portray the reality of a gang in a time period in which they did not exist? We will see this and other differences between reality and fiction, including the differences that have been mentioned above, in chapter three so as to give an analysis regarding the veracity and correctness of the series.

III. Based on a True Story: A Comparison

Before starting the analysis, I think that it is necessary to know the real story behind the Peaky Blinders, so that after we completely know the facts, we will be able to see whether the series is being truthful or not, whether it follows a specific story or whether it has just been fabricated. I will have to compare the historical facts presented in the show with what it really happened in history, the real story of the gang, their performance, the characters, the places ... which is to say that I will consider as many aspects as possible.

For a better organisation of this chapter, I will compare the historical background of the show, the 1920s, and the real background of the gang, i.e. the last years of the eighteenth century. Then, I will write about the real story of the gang in contrast with what it is possible to see in the show. And finally, I will highlight several characteristics I found interesting to compare while watching the first two seasons as for instance the places and characters in order to know whether they really existed or not, the role of women in the show or even police corruption at that time.

As I have already mentioned some details from both time periods, I will start by focusing on how this type of mobs started in places such as Birmingham, Manchester or London, so that it will be easier to understand the story behind the Peaky Blinders.

As it has been said, families used to live in nearby places. It is a fact that some areas were dominated by specific families, but not all of them were migrant families. Having this in mind, we find that “even some streets had their own identity. This encouraged local bonding in terms of difference from and even hostility towards other streets and neighbourhoods” (Gooderson, 2010: 13). If we take a look at the map of the city of Birmingham (appendix, illustration 1) between 1870 and the beginning of the

twentieth century, we will see the different streets and quarters, and underlined we will see the most dangerous parts of the city. Most of the sloggers performed their crimes in very specific parts of the town, which somehow belonged to them as they dominated those streets or quarters.

Crime was very usual in cities where there were “both metal skills and (...) printing tradition” (Gooderson, 2010: 18), and because of that, a city like Birmingham “became the home of forgers, especially of paper money[.] (...) [There] greatly increased the likelihood of false notes being detected” (Gooderson, 2010: 18-19). The first gangs were very much involved in counterfeiting money, “imitating those of the Bank of England” (Gooderson, 2010: 19), and some of the best places to exchange it were the racecourses or football matches. There, coining gangs⁶ could move their product as the passers⁷ were not known. That was one of the reasons why the Football Association Cup or the racecourses of Doncaster or Derby were so popular (Gooderson, 2010: 25-26).

With the growth of the number of police officers in the cities, and also in this type of events, this kind of gangs eventually died out, but there was a new problem for policemen: “young people aimed for adventures and danger on the streets through slogging rather than the uncertain profit and the strong risk of being caught in coining” (Gooderson, 2010: 26-27). These young people started to confront those who were different from them in any way, although the differences had more to do with religion

⁶ Coining Gangs is a term used to refer to the first gangs which forged money: “Coiners operated in gangs, with roles for each member. Specialists were needed for engraving and rolling, as well as for passing or uttering the coins. (...) This worldwide practice had deep roots in the West Midlands[,] (...) [pushing away] Victorian respectability (...) [and] Birmingham’s reputation. (...) Birmingham coining gangs circulated their products as widely as Manchester and Dublin” (Gooderson, 2010: 23-25).

⁷ Passer: “A person who puts base or forged money into circulation” (*passer*’ entry n.5a <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138477?redirectedFrom=passer#eid> Last accessed: 06.12.2019)

and ethnicity (Ashworth, 2004: 224-237). It was a fact that “early factories tended to locate near water” (Ashworth, 2004: 225) and immigrants tended to move to industrialised cities. In Birmingham, for instance, it was possible to find whole Irish families (Ashworth, 2004: 273). Also, “[t]he Chinese community was another minority group whose first point of settlement was the docklands” (Kershen, 2003: 140), and so it was also for Germans and Italians. All these minority groups were subjected to xenophobic responses sometimes, not only from gangs, but also from common working-class people (Kershen, 2003: 137-140).

Germans were not only accused of job stealing (...) [and] Italian migrants in Britain were castigated by those who believe that their participation in the service trades – Italians worked as waiters, cooks, hairdressers and domestic servants – was unfair competition (Kershen, 2003: 141).

All this different population, with regards to the time they lived in and for whom crime was a daily confrontation, was subjected to constant fights among them and with the ‘locals’. These situations were typical from both the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, but the eastern-Europe immigration increased mostly in the period of wars. By watching episode one, season one of *Peaky Blinders*, it can be observed how the main character, Thomas ‘Tommy’ Shelby (Cillian Murphy)⁸, takes his horse to a Chinese street in order to do “a magic spell to make her [the horse] win a race” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 01: 58’- 02: 01’) so as to get the attention of the citizens (he is fixing races). This would lead the population to bet on the races for the ‘magic’ horse. Then, in minute forty-two (Bathurst et. al. 2013, S01, E01: 42: 12’- 42: 29’),

⁸ Thomas ‘Tommy’ Shelby (Cillian Murphy) is the main character of the series. He is the second older brother and the one who leads the family. Everything goes through him. He is the only character who presents all the characteristics of a Peaky Blinder (in the appendix, illustration 17, it is possible to see him completely dressed and styled as a Peaky Blinder). He is an awarded war veteran who suffers a small degree of PTSD.

there is a scene in which we see one of the characters (Danny Wizz-Bang⁹) suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder attacking an Italian. The interesting fact here, besides the obvious consequence from World War I, is that this Italian and his family own a hairdresser's shop, such as the one described in Kershen's quote above.

Before starting the comparison of the real and the fictional gang and for the purpose of clarity, I think it is important to summarise the contents of seasons one and two, which conform the corpus of my analysis.

Season one starts in 1919 and introduces the characters and what they do for a living. As it is possible to see in the show, they run some illegal business and the police do not do anything to stop them. This gang will try to expand and that means that they will have to deal with more influential and important gangsters, such as Billy Kimber, who runs the legal bets. Due to a missing shipment of guns, the government, headed by Winston Churchill, transfer the Irish detective Campbell¹⁰ to Birmingham to find them. While doing so, this detective will focus his rage on the Peaky Blinders. He will try to finish off their businesses, but his efforts will be worthless because Tommy, the protagonist and one of the cleverest characters, will always be ahead of this detective.

⁹ Danny Wizz-Bang (Samuel Edward-Cook) is a secondary character in the show who presents a severe degree of PTSD. Some of his acts derive in incidents produced due to his mental illness. Nevertheless, he plays an important role in the show as he works for the Peaky Blinders. First, they fake his death, so that they can keep some guns in the grave they dig for him, and then, Danny works as something similar to a spy for the peakies in London. Most importantly, by the end of season one, he will take a bullet for Tommy, thus saving his life. Danny, on the contrary, will be killed by Billy Kimber with this shot.

¹⁰ Inspector Campbell (Sam Neill) is one of the main characters of the show. He is the chief inspector of Birmingham police and he has been transferred from Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is sent there by order of Mr. Winston Churchill to achieve one specific mission, which, as mentioned in the summary of season one, is to recover some missing guns before they fall into the hands of the IRA or any other military organisation. He has fought against the IRA in Belfast, and he tries to fight against the Peaky Blinders in Birmingham. But the result in Birmingham is not as good as it was in Belfast, because, even though he recovers the guns, he cannot break up the Birmingham gang once and for all, nor will be able to do so in season two. He dies by the end of season two, shot by Polly Shelby, Tommy's aunt.

By the end of the season, Tommy is in love with a bartender named Grace, who is indeed a policewoman undercover. The detective is very much infuriated with the Peaky Blinders as they have fooled him by hiding the guns right in front of his nose. Yet, he recovers these guns. We also see how Tommy kills Billy Kimber after a fight in the streets of Garrison Lane.

Season two starts two years later, in 1921. We notice that the Peaky Blinders may have bothered someone as the season begins with an explosion in the pub they own in Birmingham. In this season, some mobs from London, with which Tommy will try to be in partnership, are included. It is also found out that Tommy had upset the London Italian gang, the Sabinis. He knows that the East End Jews, another London gang, are at war with this Italian mob; that is the reason why Tommy decides to establish a commercial relationship with the leader of the Jews, Alfie Solomons (see appendix, illustrations 20 and 21). The Italians realise that the Peaky Blinders are in contact with the Jews and will try to make a deal with the Jews, so that they both –the Italians and the Jews— will turn against the Peaky Blinders. One of the things they achieve is to imprison Tommy’s brother, Arthur.¹¹ Additionally, they keep having problems in Birmingham, as the detective is there again, trying to finish them off once and for all. By the end of the season, Tommy is in danger, because of the inspector. Campbell is that infuriated with Tommy and the Peaky Blinders that, knowing that he cannot do anything else against them, he hires men from an Irish paramilitary group to kill

¹¹ Arthur Shelby (Paul Anderson) is one of the main characters of the show. He is the eldest brother in the family and suffers PTSD from war, but he is not the leader of the gang. Since mid-season one, he is the owner of the pub ‘The Garrison’. He will be involved in illegal fights as he is the most violent member of the family. In season one, he is attacked by Inspector Campbell who thought that he was the head of the family –which he is not—, and in season two, he will be imprisoned thanks to Alfie Solomons' help.

Tommy. These men are from the Red Right Hand.¹² When these men take Tommy, their intention is to kill him, but in the end, he will be saved by one of them who will turn against his comrades. The order for his murder is said to come directly from Churchill himself who knew what was happening. Instead, Churchill decides to have Tommy as his ally by serving the British government. Polly¹³, Tommy's aunt, known for being the strongest member in the family, will have a very important role in the end of the season, as it will be her who will kill the detective.

Overall, the series portrays a gipsy origin family of illegal bookmakers who run a business of bets on racecourses. There, they are known as the Peaky Blinders and people both feared them and thanked them. They and all the people working for them were known with this same name, but the truth behind this is that originally, the name, as already mentioned, first appeared in 1890, and it was to categorise the Birmingham gangs generically. In contrast with what the fiction shows us, the term was not used to refer to a particular gang, but to a whole variety of gangs of specific characteristics. The term was well spread into the country, so that, when having to talk about Birmingham

¹² The Red Right Hand refers to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or similar groups –as the UVF did not exist as such until 1960— that were essentially Unionists paramilitary groups, similar to the IRA but with different ideologies (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Volunteer_Force. Last accessed 06.12.2019). As in these decades there were no groups called this way in Ireland, I think the name has to do with the symbol of the red hand used in the 1960s by this UVF. The red hand together with a cross, known as The Red Hand of Ulster, included in the flags of both Unionists and Catholics, were very common symbols in Ulster, Northern Ireland, as they come from two old Irish dynasties –the Burghs and the O'Neills— (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Ulster. Last accessed: 06.12.2019). In the show, the Red Right Hand is hired by Inspector Campbell, who fought in Ireland against the IRA, so it is somehow understandable that the creators had chosen this specific name to designate the mob Campbell was using for killing Tommy as their ideology will be just the opposite to that of the IRA.

¹³ Polly Shelby (Helen McCrory) is one of the main characters of the show. She is the second head of the family and aunt of Tommy and Arthur. She is usually referred as 'Aunt Polly' and she is probably the toughest of them all. She took care of the business and the family while the men were at war. She knows exactly how it has to be run, and what to do in every situation. She plays the role of a mother for them, because she is the one who worries the most about the family members and tries to teach them how life works, even though they are adults.

Gangs, people and press referred to them as ‘Peaky Blinders’ and it is possible to say that the name replaced the term ‘rough’ (Gooderson, 2010: 216-233).

The history behind the show begins before 1860. The coining gangs were just the prelude to a violent era in which each street would have their own gang. The wild young that sought for danger and adventure emerged as youth gangs around 1870 and “would terrify the populace for the next thirty years. These sloggers were both stone-throwers and fighters” (Gooderson, 2010: 74). This stone-throwing was a tradition in Birmingham during the whole nineteenth century. Sloggers used to throw stones to pedestrians randomly, to steal them or just for fun as they did when throwing stones to the police. This tendency to violence is seemed to be one of a rooted tradition, and the “stone-throwing against the police had become a major problem” (Gooderson, 2010: 76) in the course of which it became a phenomenon which started to attract attention. Gooderson (2010: 77) wrote that

[e]merging from a stone-throwing culture, (...) it was logical step for the practice of slogging to become more organised in terms of group against group or gang against gang. By 1873, slogging was, according to the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, associated with ‘lawless’ gangs of youths and boys of the lowest class’.

The first slogging gang which was identified as such was from the southeast part of the city, a place where there was a huge variety of trades and where many of the workers were young. The inhabitants of this part of the city began to realise that many boys were gathering and breaking windows there. At the same time, this also happened in the Gun Quarter (see appendix, illustration 1). People and police realised that this matter was becoming more and more organised and that it was an honour for them to claim that they were part of a gang (Gooderson, 2010: 76-80). They emerged mostly in a time of prosperity for the industries, when there was job for everyone. This revived disputes between workers who turned to intimidate one another or to simply fight amongst

themselves, as happened for instance in Garrison Lane (see appendix, illustration 1), the main location where the TV-show is set. All of this led as well to several strikes throughout the city and ironically, slogging was what soothed that fever for strikes (Gooderson, 2010: 80-87).

There were many moments during these years in which a stone-throwing youth or a mob of fifty or sixty people could intimidate a whole quarter with just a sentence as “[i]f you come here I will put you through” (Gooderson, 2010: 91) or as Arthur Shelby says “we’ll cut them a smile each” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 17: 05’-17: 08’). In addition to that, this tendency to violence could cause quite a serious problem, sometimes since many men or women ended up wounded and with scars although others end up dead, although this case was less common. In these extreme cases, they usually defended themselves by claiming that they did not want to hurt anybody that much, but that it simply went wrong (Gooderson, 2010: 88-108).

This is the beginning of the real story, and this type of violent aggressions would end sometime, by the end of the century. This insight into their beginning helps us to have an idea about where they come from, in order to really understand the acts they committed in the 1920s, because in the series it is not shown why they are the way they are. It may be that the creator, as quoted before, wanted to keep it as an inter-wars story, or that the complete explanation of the motives for fighting, as we see, would take several decades to be portrayed in the series, mostly because there is not a specific moment in which they decide to start fighting, but a set of events and situations that led them to do so. As a viewer, I think that for the show it is more interesting to start the season with a bunch of punches and cuts than with absolutely nothing happening.

Gooderson's *The Gangs of Birmingham* (2010: 276) finishes by stating that: “[g]angs had flourished in Victorian Birmingham – and would, in time, return”. This may have to do with what the creator of the show wanted to do. The book *Gangs of London* (McDonald, 2010) narrates the stories of several of the gangs in London throughout history, beginning in 1683 and ending in the 1950s. Some of them, mostly around the 1920s and 1930s, came from Birmingham. Thus, it is possible to say that there existed indeed mobs in the twentieth century but their brutality in the day-to-day was not as much as shown in the 1880s and their activities were not the same as those from past times.

Now, as some characteristics of the nineteenth century were already given in the second part of this dissertation, I will deal with the twentieth century, the World War I and the post-war years so as to be able to compare the reality of those years with the background portrayed in the series as seasons one and two are set in 1919 and 1921.

The years the show presents seemed to be very much affected by the war, not only because of the huge amount of people with visible war consequences (physical and psychological), but also with the constant references to it in the series. It is true that the economy had to deal with a debt quite difficult to sustain and that a lot of inhabitants suffered irreparable losses, but in contrast with what could be thought people were not that much into grieving the war. They were in fact apprehensive because they could smell another war approaching, but this time, people would not volunteer as they romantically did in the Great War (<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-1920s-in-Britain/>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

The series, as it has been previously said, is supposed to begin and end within the inter-war years as the director wants it. So, it is important to keep in mind the impact

World War I had on people's life. This Great War was something completely new: not only because it was the starting point for a new configuration of the world and for the thriving of the twentieth century, but because everything we now relate to the war had never been seen before (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/45966335>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). One of the main reasons why this war was called 'great' was the fact that "it affected people all over the world and was the biggest war anyone had ever known" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/45966335>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). It was a war in which new technology was introduced and replaced the old one, and the same happened with military tactics. This is probably why it

has also been referred to as "the first modern war". Many of the technologies we now associate with military conflict – machine guns, tanks, aerial combat and radio communications – were introduced on a massive scale during World War I (https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history#section_15. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

This war was supposed to end all wars, because until then, there had not been another military conflict as nasty as this was. No other conflict had ever caused such destruction and damages at that specific level as the Great War did. That is the reason why people really wanted to believe that there would not be another war ever. But, with the passing of years, people started to realise that a new conflict was becoming bigger and bigger and that it would explode anytime soon (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/45966335>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

When the war was ended, "more than 9 million soldiers [were dead]; 21 million more were wounded. Civilian casualties caused indirectly by the war numbered close to 10 million" (https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history#section_15. Last accessed 06.12.2019). This massive killing, mostly of men, left a majority of women in Britain, and "the war left one million and a half men who were permanently weakened by wounds or effects of gas" (Taylor, 1965: 120). This is well

portrayed in the series. In the very first scenes of the first season, war consequences for men are mentioned and/or shown. One of them is found in episode two, when Polly Shelby is in the church and has a conversation with Inspector Campbell. She says that “I am lighting candles for the boys from the Garrison who lost their lives in France. There’s a list there. Look” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 08: 31’ - 08: 41’). The already mentioned episode with Danny Wizz-Bang, or even Tommy Shelby himself, who eventually ends up killing an IRA man, as shown in episode five (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E05: 25: 10’ - 26: 35’), are other examples of the psychological consequences of war. Then, there was that feeling of having gone through so much in war that they took it as an honour. They had suffered a great deal in the trenches, but at home they respected those who suffered the same, those who “went through hell for our King, walked through the flames of war” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 15: 07’ - 15: 13’). They suffered so much that they usually dismissed those who did not fight in the conflict as Tommy does with Inspector Campbell in episode two from season one (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 37: 59’ - 38: 02’), not wanting to shake his hand and asking him “now why would I shake the hand of a man who didn’t even fight for his country?”.

Regarding Birmingham and when watching the series, it is possible to see quite a great deal of scenography, as they portrayed the streets of the Garrison Lane quarter in a very similar way to those streets of the real 1920s. If we take a look at illustrations 2, 3 and 4 in the appendix, we can see the real streets of Birmingham and some of the different parts of the town. Number 2 is a picture of Garrison Lane, number 3 is Bradford Street (see also appendix, illustration 1) and number four is taken from Digbeth (see also appendix, illustration 1). It is possible to see that there are not high

buildings. Instead, these are simply built. One characteristic that catches our attention is the dirt, which is not only on the ground but also on the walls. Images from 5 to 7 in the appendix represent different parts of Garrison Lane in the show. In some of the shots it is also possible to see the cleanliness in the streets, but in some others, those which are closer to the factories, we can see that the streets are portrayed much filthier (see appendix, illustrations 8, 9 and 10) than those closer to the houses. But, although they are very much alike to the originals, they are not as narrow as they should be. Thus, it may be concluded that, whilst not all the shots exactly represent what they should, the result as a whole is very much accurate, because it is known that

[t]he smoke of Birmingham [(see appendix, illustrations 8, 9 and 10)] has been very propitious to their growth (...) [and i]f we survey Birmingham[,] (...) we shall find her crowded with timber, within and without; her streets dirty and narrow, but much trodden. The inhabitant became an early encroacher upon her narrow streets, (...) [h]er houses were mean and low (Hardy 1835: 82).

A particular place that constantly appears in the show is the pub called ‘The Garrison’. This pub existed as well in real life, and albeit I could not find any picture of it from that time, I found a contemporary one (appendix, illustration 11). Seeing what the photos of the original streets show us and having a picture of what The Garrison looks like today, it could be possible to imagine how it could have been in the years of the TV show. Then, if that mental picture is compared to what the show displays (appendix, illustration 12), it may be said that the producers have roughly achieved the sought similarity.

Another similarity of the TV show with reality is the style. Peaky Blinders took their name from the peak they wore and the curly toupee they used to have over one side of their face. This is very well portrayed into the series, although it does not accurately reflect the reason for the given name. The razors in their peaks (see appendix, illustration 13) seem to be the reason why they are called Peaky Blinders. The show

mythologises the blinding part. The creator said in an interview that he felt the stories he had been told as a child to be similar to myths, that he saw everything “through children’s eyes, which makes everything more mythological –everything a bit darker, and brighter, and better. (...) [That is why] I deliberately chose in that first-ever series to keep the mythology there” (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes-with-creator-stein-knight/>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019). He wanted to surround the series with mythology and hence he decided to fabricate a story around the name. He already had the violence on his side, that was a truthful fact, so saying that they used their peaks to hide razors in order to use them when in a fight, was more or less something believable, as mentioned in episode one: “[t]he vicious... merciless gangs who blind those that see and cut out the tongues of those who talk” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 28: 03’ - 28: 12’). Yet, at that time (the 1880s), razors were very much expensive for ordinary people, so it was nearly impossible for them to have any. In addition to that, anybody could tell you the difficulty of managing a razor blade from a peaky cap (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/peaky-blinders-birmingham-cillian-murphy-7938754>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). I have to admit that the fabricated myth perfectly fits in the TV show plot, but we have to understand that the truth is that they did not have any razor blade while fighting, hence they could have never cut anyone’s face with it. There is a scene in episode one in which John ‘Jonny-Boy’ Shelby¹⁴ (Joe Cole) and Arthur discuss this topic when talking to Tommy:

¹⁴ John Shelby (Joe Cole) is one of the main secondary characters. Even though he is the youngest brother in the business, he has not been taken into account by the family as much as the other brothers have. John is usually referred as ‘Jonny-Boy’ and he is probably the most pimp of them all. He is very much straight forward even when that may cause him any trouble. He has several offspring, but he is a widower, so he is looking for a wife who helps him breeding the children. The enmity with the Lee Family, presented in

“Anyway, we’re Peaky Blinders. *We’re not scared of coppers.*’

‘He’s right. If they come for us, we’ll *cut them a smile* each’”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 17: 00’ - 17: 08’, my remark in italics).

Episode two (Bathurst et al.2013, S01, E02: 03: 59’ - 05: 26’) plays a scene regarding this razor-style of fighting. This scene is very much violent, because they are not just talking about fighting, but they actually do it. This is a good scene to exemplify the violence of the gang. The three men of the family –Tommy, Arthur and John— go to a gipsy settlement to have business with some distant relatives, the Lee family, who are Romanies. There, Tommy has an encounter with two of the Lee boys who were laughing at Arthur. Suddenly, he and his brothers start a fight with them in which they display their merciless style of fighting with the razors of their peaks. Additionally, they do not carry guns because the combat would not have been fair and guns are not part of their tradition (Gooderson, 2010: 104-105).

In addition to that fondness they had for stones, they also used life preservers (appendix, illustration 14), sticks, fire irons (appendix, illustration 15), coshes (appendix, illustration 16) or their own buckled belts, objects which were the most common ones for fighting (Gooderson, 2010: 104-105; 216-233). It is possible to see this type of instruments in episode three (around minute 40). Here, the Peaky Blinders are getting ready for a fight and because of that, it is possible to see how lively and pleased they are to get into it. Alcohol is also consumed. This use of knives and life preservers of different types is kind of surprising since Birmingham was a city famous for the trade of firearms. We are talking about a city where the gun industry was extremely important, so it is surprising that in the TV series they would not use guns in

season one, will be ended with a truce John is part of. He is to marry one of the girls from the Lee family, so that the two clans will be united by law.

fighters. It “perhaps indicates that, on the whole, the gangs were seeking recreation rather than the infliction of life-threatening injuries” (Gooderson, 2010: 105).

The clothe style was also important. Sometimes, they even match their clothes to their weapons. The

flat caps with stiff peaks became popular with working-class men and teenaged boys from the 1880s. Before then the ‘billycock’, a type of bowler hat, was the preferred[.] (...) [T]he fashion for flat caps with peaks was quickly adopted by the members of street gangs in Birmingham and led to name of the peaky blinders. This derivation of the name is reinforced by the terms ‘peakies’ or ‘peaky type’ that was occasionally used for ruffians in Birmingham” (Chinn 2014:14).

These caps matched with “a three-buttoned jacket, waistcoat and slack trousers with turn-ups all finished off with a patterned (...) tie” (McDonald, 2010: 187), together with their “buckled belts (...) [and] army boots with metal tips on heels and toes” (Gooderson, 2010: 220). They liked to dress well (McDonald, 2010: 187). Tommy is a clear example of the Peaky Blinders’ style (see appendix, illustration 17), his haircut style is the same, including that curly toupee. The character of Tommy is probably the most accurate regarding the Peaky Blinders’ style, something that it is understandable as he is the protagonist of the series.

All of these were typical characteristics of these men who sometimes even threw stones at the police officers: “Some felt real resentment against the police, for unexpected reasons (...) Brummies¹⁵ liked (...) fighting the police even more [than fighting each other]” (Gooderson, 2010: 196-197). These attacks account for the violence those ‘coppers’ inflicted on the arrested, because, although

[l]evels of police brutality are not known, these were rough-and-tumble times. Given the amount of violence suffered by the police, it is not surprising that sometimes they broke the law and used their staff or truncheons in situations where they were not acting in self-defence (Gooderson, 2010: 197).

¹⁵ Brummie or Brummies in plural is the name used to refer to those who were born in Birmingham.

The series portrays several scenes where this much of police violence is introduced to the audience, as for instance the one in episode one of season one (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 30: 37' - 34: 18'), in which Arthur is interrogated for a robbery (that of the missing guns) and the officers use violence by taking him to a dark closed room where they would punch him several times; or another scene in which the police arrest a communist man for interrogation the result being in this one ending up dead. The ugliest part of this situation is not that police are as brutal as to kill a man but that they do try to cover it all up:

“You told me to carry on. I wanted to stop. He had some kind of seizure.”

“So, you killed him? Did he give you an address?”

“What’s the matter with you!?”

“He fell down some stairs.”

“This is not bloody Belfast!”

“Not yet, but if men like him get their way, it soon will be. So, find some stairs, throw him down, and call the coroner.”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E03: 26: 00' - 26: 35').

In this conversation, we see an officer of a high rank talking to Chief Inspector Campbell. This inspector, as already introduced, was from Belfast and was called by Winston Churchill in order to retrieve the missing guns that had been stolen, and as he searches for them, he also tries to terminate with “those Peaky Blinders devils” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 07: 32' - 07: 35'). Some Irish officers were called to work there as mentioned in episode one, season one: “these are the new men, who will bolster your ranks. Good men from God-fearing families” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 29: 40' - 29: 53'). The reality of these situations is that

Birmingham did have a Northern-Irish police chief. His name was Sir Charles Horton Rafter. He came from Belfast and he did recruit a lot of Irish policemen but not protestants from Belfast, mainly from the west of Ireland, where he had served as member of the Royal Irish Constabulary. He was a very strong man. He came to Birmingham in 1899 and one of the reasons many people think the time was appointed was to take down the Peaky Blinders, which he did within a few years

(<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (03:10'-03:35'). Last accessed 06.12.2019).

It can be said that the police were overwhelmed, and for this reason they brought these men so as to help with these waves of violence. Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight the corruption of these officers. The show introduces a reality in which police officers take bribes, as for instance in episode one (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 28: 14' - 29: 36'), implied by Inspector Campbell:

you are worse than them! [(the peaky blinders)] Those of you who have taken their bribes these years since the war, those of you who look the other way, you... are worse than them! God damn you for soiling your uniform! (...) They fed on the puss of all this corruption like maggots in a corpse ... I don't trust any of you until you earn my trust! And that takes some earning.

In contrast with that, in his interview for the BBC West Midlands History (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (03: 35' - 03: 39').

Last accessed 06.12.2019), professor Carl Chinn negates that existed “police corruption at a large scale”. Other than that, he admits that it existed

for straight bookmakers such as my grandad and others. We used to pay the coppers, five schillings away, twenty-five pounds in weight to the policeman on the bait 'cause they tried to arrest you, so for that fee, not all of them took it, but for that fee they would come around and tell us when we're gonna be pinched, so you would put out a man who would never be pinched before as a dummy (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (03: 39' - 04: 00'). Last accessed 06.12.2019).

Henceforth, it is possible to affirm that the show somewhat exaggerates what it really happened. But, a bookmaker who “has [indeed] policemen on his payroll (...) outside of London” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 35: 10' - 35: 13'), was Billy Kimber (see appendix, illustration 18).

Billie Kimber was “a supplier to, and blackmailer of, bookies” (McDonald, 2010: 121), but in the end, he was indeed a legal Brummie bookmaker. He was born in Summer Lane (see appendix, illustration 1), Birmingham, in 1882. Billy Kimber was a member –and later on, the leader – of the Birmingham Gang, previously and “collectively known as the Brummagem Boys” (Chinn, 2014: 21), another name which

they had around the 1900s. This gang is one of those the name Peaky Blinders referred to back in the 1880s.

Billy Kimber was a teenage in Summer Lane at the time of the Peaky Blinders, “but whether or not he was in such a gang, he must have been gaining a reputation for violence because in 1901 as a nineteen-year old, he was in Winston Green Prison serving time for wounding” (Chinn, 2014: 46). He enjoyed much power amongst the gangs in Birmingham: they “had so lost all honour, decency, and all idea of anything but robbery, that they became a real menace” (Chinn, 2014: 20). These people did not restricted themselves to local criminality and local racecourses. On the contrary, they expanded throughout the region. This is one of the reasons why the press became aware of what was really happening there, and “embodied and helped to shape popular perceptions of the world” (Jones, 2004: 369). And a perception which was clear for everyone is that eventually Billy Kimber became one of the most powerful gangsters of England during the 1920s (Chinn, 2013: 44-56).

When watching episode three from season one, it is shown that the Peaky Blinders go to the races and fight the Lee family, who were robbing Billy Kimber’s bookmakers. Tommy is trying to create a connection with Billy Kimber (see appendix, illustration 19) because he wants his illegal betting house to become legal once and for all. He wants to be legitimate. So, in an attempt to get Kimber’s attention, not only did he fix some races without his permission, but also fought the Lee family to recover the earnings of Kimber’s bets. By recovering them, we see how the Peaky Blinders got involved in the protection business: “No more chalking on Billy Kimber’s boys, right? We’re the protection now. I commandeer this stolen money by order of the Peaky Blinders” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E03: 46: 00’ - 46: 27’). From that very moment

onwards, the sentence ‘by order of the Peaky Blinders’ will be quite often repeated in the show. In fact, there is no historical evidence of the use of such a sentence. Nonetheless, the sentence might refer to the historical violence over the population for no reason, something similar to ‘you do as I say’.

Violence became a way for the Peaky Blinders to command respect over the neighbourhoods:

the response in working-class neighbourhoods (...) [was that] people were scared of the Peaky Blinders in the 1890s (...). They caused mayhem where they were allowed to, and they picked on the innocents (...). These were men to be respected. They were men to look down upon for the way they treated the innocents and treated women very often (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (01: 56’ - 02: 34’). Last accessed 06.12.2019).

Things in Small Heath were done ‘by order of the Peaky Blinders’. People feared them very much in real life, and so do people in the series, although to a lesser extent. For me, it is as if the creator wanted to make the characters closer to the viewers so that they would create a bond with them and defend their actions irrespective of the outrages that the Peaky Blinders might commit. The people’s fear of them in the show is somehow neutralised and the viewer is compelled to sympathise them, almost thanking the Peaky Blinders for taking care of the town. This appreciation appears several times in the show: one instance takes place in a conversation between the bartender and former owner of The Garrison Pub, Harry (Neil Bell), and Tommy, in which he politely makes Tommy realise that people are not always as willing to do the things they are asked as they seem, and adds that they do them either way for fear of the Peaky Blinders:

“You’re not accustomed to not getting what you want, are you, Tommy? You wanted my pub and you took it.”

“You got a fair price.”

“What I got was an ultimatum. Like you give to everybody: do it or else. And yet, it’s funny. Everybody round here, they want you to win this battle [against Kimber]. I think, what it is... you’re bad men, but you’re our bad men”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E06: 33: 46’ - 34: 32’).

It is somehow scary to think that the gang could have such power over the population in real life. Yet, in the show, the creators have portrayed them as reckless and dangerous – which they were— but also as compassionate people –which they were not—, because in the show, they tend to help the people of Birmingham. This type of ‘sympathising procedure’ is very much likely to be portrayed in order to make the characters more appealing to the viewers as I have just mentioned above. As an example of this, I am going to provide two different times of the show in which we find the Peaky Blinders helping the citizens after a quarrel and showing ‘mercy’ to those who lost money on their fixed bets.

This first example occurs after an altercation in Birmingham while the leaders of the gang were out of town, unable to do anything to stop it. The dispute resulted in broken windows and some other material damage to some pubs and houses in Garrison Lane. The Peaky Blinders would help by paying the people from the town to fix their properties. This action is not ‘real-Peaky-Blinder-style’, but it seems common in the show. It is a strategy they use to keep their neighbours and the viewers fairly satisfied with their previous or posterior actions:

“So go on. Drink your beers, get out. You’d better show people you’re still the cocks of the walk.”

“Hand out some cash to the landlords of the pubs. Pay some veterans to fix the places up.” (...)

“Let them see your faces.”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 11: 07’ - 11: 31’);

Their ‘mercy’ for their neighbours is shown in the following example, when Tommy chats with Polly about those from the quarter who have lost money on the fixed bets the gang is responsible for. Thus, it seems Tommy feels guilty about fooling his neighbours:

“So Monaghan Boy¹⁶ finally lost...”

“Third time unlucky... we took money from all over the city.”

“Yeah, but you’ll pay it back to people round here. Buy your popularity back.”

“Already done.”

“I taught you well.”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 28: 19’ - 28: 36’).

Brummies are proud of the role of women in the show because they usually “come from a long line of strong women” (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (02: 48’ - 02: 51’). Last accessed 06.12.2019). Professor Chinn, a Birmingham history expert and a Brummie himself, affirms that “one of the things for me as a historian that stands out is the strong women and I would congratulate the writer on that” (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. (02: 43’ - 02: 49’). Last accessed 06.12.2019). Aunt Polly is an outstanding example of a strong woman who keeps up against everything that may hurt her or her family. She is, in a way, another leader of the Peaky Blinders. She knows how things work and how things have to be done, because “[t]his whole bloody enterprise was women’s business while you boys were away at war” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 17: 23’ - 17: 27’). And she does not hesitate to lecture Tommy when needed:

“And you fixed this race without the permission of Billy Kimber! Obviously, I didn’t teach you well enough. Rule one: you don’t punch above your weight.”

“Billy Kimber is there for the taking...”

“Says who? Says Tommy and his parliament of one. I ran this business for five years. (...) You’re too busy taking over the world”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E02: 28: 38’ - 29: 12’).

¹⁶ Monaghan Boy is the name of a horse which appears throughout the series. Tommy fixes its races in which it participates. Tommy takes him to the Chinese street to cast a spell on it, which is meant for the horse to win all the races, before the neighbours who believed it as real and bet on it. More people bet on Monaghan Boy on the second and third races. But ‘inexplicably’ Monaghan Boy lost his third race, so people all over Birmingham lost a lot of money. These three races were fixed by Tommy who decided when the horse won or lost. For this reason, and as if he had regrets, he helps his neighbours and returns them the money they had lost with the trick.

She even reprimands him for actions he should not have taken, such as the possession of the missing gun shipment which is the property of the government. In his favour, we must say that that he took it by mistake:

“Speak. God and Aunt Polly are listening.”

“It was meant to be routine. I had a buyer in London for some... motorcycles. I asked my men to steal me four bikes with petrol engines. I’m guessing my men were drunk. (...) They picked up the wrong fucking crate.” (...)

“Holy sweet baby of Mary!”

“Inside we found 25 Lewis machine guns, 10.000 rounds of ammunition” (...)

“Jesus, Tommy! (...) Tell me you threw them in the cut.”

“We put ‘em in the stables, out of the rain.”

“So that’s why they sent a copper from Belfast. (...) You’re not a fool (...) you will hang! Dump them somewhere the police can find them.”

(Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 19: 20’ - 21: 16’).

Polly always takes care of the family, and she wants her boys to be safe and not to be fools, so she prefers them to be only involved in the betting business.

As the Peaky Blinders do in the series, Billy Kimber was involved in the “control [of] the protection rackets in the racecourses of England immediately after the First World War” (Chinn, 2014: 19), but, regarding the original Peaky Blinders, those from the 1880s, “[t]here is no evidence that [the peakies] were involved in protection rackets” (Chinn, 2014: 19). Thus, it is possible to say that the series has focused on the idea of what Billy Kimber did in London in the 1920s rather than on what the gang really was involved in, which was fighting for the sake of fighting.

Billy Kimber was someone who endeavoured to obtain what he wanted. He is a self-made man who regulated the Birmingham Boys “to be recognised and allowed to operate their enterprises unchecked. (...) [H]e had a reputation for brains and brawn” (McDonald, 2010: 118). He was said to be “[t]all, powerfully built, strong and charismatic, he feared no man, but many men feared him. A tough fighter by himself”

(Chinn, 2014: 44). However, if we apply this description to the corresponding character in the TV show, it is very much easier to say that they are not the same person. Even though the likeness of the actor (Charlie Creed-Miles) is quite impressive regarding Kimber's real appearance (see appendix, illustrations 18 and 19), the characteristics he portrays are not that much alike. In the series, Kimber is a strong and powerful man, but of a common height and, although he seems to fear no one, Tommy seems not to fear him either. It is also believed that Kimber was charismatic and intelligent, but in the show, he is not portrayed as such. The character of Billy Kimber is rather portrayed as someone with power who does not know how to do business, because every time business is discussed, he disappears leaving his accountant behind to manage the complete negotiation.

This specific action is quite peculiar, because the series reinterprets him as someone who would avoid his own job, when, as a matter of fact, he did become one of the most dangerous and renowned gangsters of England, and he did build a network of contacts in London with the gangs of Elephant and Castle¹⁷ and the Camden Town Mob¹⁸: “[I]t seemed (...) [he was] determined to operate not only within (...) [his]

¹⁷ “The Elephant and Castle Mob was one of the many independent street gangs active in London’s underworld during the interwar years (...) they were eventually forced out by Sabini[, the leader of the Italian Gang in London] with the added manpower of imported Sicilian mafiosi and had disappeared from the city by the end of the Second World War. (...) [They] existed for many years and were particularly active between the two world wars. At that time they were allied to the Birmingham gang, often called the Brummagem, led by Billy Kimber; the Camden Town gang, led by George Sage and the Finsbury Boys, led by Freddie Gilbert. The gangs rivalled those from north and east London led by Darby Sabini, (...) [and] Alf Solomons (...). The gang achieved dominance on the racecourses and in London’s West End by conquering the West End Boys (...), and the King’s Cross/Titanic gang. From the 1910s to the 1930s, they were led by the McDonald Brothers” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_and_Castle_Mob. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

¹⁸ The Camden Town Mob “were one of the many independent street gangs active in London’s underworld during the interwar years (...). [They] existed for many years and was particularly active between the two world wars. At that time, they were allied to the Birmingham gang, often called the Brummagem, led by Billy Kimber;” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_and_Castle_Mob. Last

acknowledged sphere of control in the Midlands and the West Country but also further afield” (Chinn, 2014: 23).

Kimber had some business with a man named George ‘Brummy’ Sage, who was connected to the gangs in London, especially to the Elephant and Castle gang. It was him, Sage, who introduced Kimber in the southern racecourses and the one who created a whole network of partnerships between gangs. Kimber did the same with the allied gangs of Elephant and Castle gang and the Camden Town Mob (McDonald, 2010: 114-118). Kimber became a leader even in London and built a rapidly spread chain of connections. Everyone knew that “[w]ithout payment to Kimber, bookies¹⁹ and a range of (...) welshers²⁰ could not operate[.] (...) He did not allow everyone to benefit from his organization” (McDonald, 2010: 121). In London, he lived near to where “the tough McDonald brothers resided. It may be that Billy live there with them” (McDonald, 2010: 121-122). As explained before, the McDonald brothers were the leaders of the Elephant and Castle Gang who were partners with the Camden Town Mob. Thus, it was quite simple for Kimber to establish his web around them there.

In London there were several gangs which were in constant conflict against each other. The blooming gang of the Sabinis, who were the Italian gang, and the East End Jews became allies as they both had common enemies: The Elephant and Castle Gang

accessed: 06.12.2019). They were also allies with the Elephant and Castle Mob, led by the McDonald Brothers. From the 1910s to the 1930s, they were led by George Sage.

¹⁹ Bookie, or bookies in plural, is a diminutive for bookmaker who is “a person whose job is to take bets (typically on sports), calculate odds and pay out winnings, typically either in a betting shop or at a racecourse or other sporting venue” (*bookmaker* entry n.3a. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21447#eid16654804>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

²⁰ Welsher –or welshers in plural– is “a bookmaker at a race meeting who takes money for a bet but absconds or refuses to pay after a loss” (*welsher* entry n.1. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/227743?rkey=CuMUqc&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. Last accessed 06.12.2019).

and The Camden Town Mob. Billy Kimber tried to do business with the Italians and the Jews in order to expand his network as much as possible, but these two gangs realised that Kimber was getting involved in their same business. So, the Italians and the Jews decided not to work with him, as he, at that moment, was part of the association of the Camden Town's and the Elephant and Castle's gangs (McDonald, 2010: 115-128).

The hostilities amongst these four gangs and some others, such as The Forty Elephants, which were an “all-female (...) [gang that] worked alongside the notorious Elephant and Castle gang” (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/dec/27/girl-gang-london-underworld>. Last accessed 06.12.2019), passed down to their heirs. Kimber himself died in 1943 of an illness (Chinn, 2014: 98-101). It is quite interesting then, to question ourselves about the possible reasons why the creators of the TV show decided to kill this character at the end of season one (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 38: 47' - 42: 02'). The facts that he really died in 1943 and that they killed him in the show of a gunshot in the head are intriguing in a way. Although in the series he is not a very charismatic man, why would they kill such an interesting character with a very interesting real life? Not only did he participate in several mob-warfare, but he was also forced to move several times, once as far as the United States as a consequence of the Racecourse Wars²¹ in London and the problems with the Italians. He even met the great gangster Al Capone during his few years in America (Chinn, 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/dec/27/girl-gang-london-underworld>. Last

²¹ Racecourse Wars is the name used to refer to a constant conflict amongst the street gangs of London regarding racecourses, attacking bookies and reclaiming the place as theirs. The Wars comprise several riots in which the Sabinis and the East End Jews fought against the Elephant and Castle Gang and the Camden Town Mob, for instance. The fight started in 1914, the year in which more attacks took place and lasted until 1921. However, in 1922, there were breaches in these alliances, especially that between the Sabinis and Edward Emmanuel who was becoming an important figure in the Jews East End. This new breach lasted more or less until the 1930s. There were several periods of peace during those years although they ended up fighting again (Chinn, 2014: 57-97).

accessed 06.12.2019). But, with regard to what Londoners may think about Kimber's location, "[a]s for [him], the leader of the Birmingham Gang, he disappeared" (Chinn, 2014: 97).

Of course, there was a reason for this huge change in gang history. This murder they commit on the screen has led the creators of the TV show into a new story to tell in the second season in which we see Tommy Shelby and his family travelling a lot to London, both for partying and to do business. For this new season, the year is 1921 and the Peaky Blinders are involved in different businesses. The main business Tommy has in mind is to expand his network out of the Midlands. Therefore, he tries to get in touch with the East End Jews, headed by Alf 'Alfie' Solomons (Tom Hardy) (see appendix, illustrations 20 and 21). In the series, the character of Alf Solomons sends a telegram to Tommy in order to convince him to help him in his war against the Italians (the Sabinis). In the show this new gang-leader works in a bakery, although this is just a cover up for his true business: the illegal distillation of alcohol (McCarthy & Knight, 2014, S02, E02). The reputation of the Peaky Blinders was very much known in London as was that of Kimber in his times: "Well, I've heard very bad, bad, bad things from you Birmingham people" (McCarthy & Knight, 2014, S02, E02: 11: 43' - 11: 52').

The reputation which runs ahead the Peaky Blinders gets to Alf Solomons and he decides to set up a meeting since he is losing the war against the Sabinis at the time Tommy arrives at London. Solomons is a very proud man, so it is complicated for him to rely on somebody else. This is why his conversation with Tommy is quite interesting. We know what was happening in London through Tommy. Moreover, he tells how the partnership between the Peaky Blinders and the East End Jews started, how the different gangs worked, and also how the racecourse war was going on:

“I don’t like policemen because policemen, they can’t be trusted.”

“Mr. Sabini uses policemen all the time. That’s why he’s winning the war in London and you are losing it.”

“A war ain’t over till it’s over, mate. You were in the war? I once carried out my own personal form of stigmata on an Italian (...) It was fucking biblical, mate. So, don’t come in here and sit there in my chair and tell me that I am losing my war to a fucking wop.” (...)

“You need to be more realistic.”

“Realistic, yeah? Realistic?”

“Well, if you weren’t losing the war, you wouldn’t have sent the telegram.”

“Really? You forget your fucking telegram. The telegram just said, ‘Hello’. Face it, you want to sell me something. What?”

“We join forces.”

“Fuck off. No! Categorical. Fucking ridiculous.”

“Mr. Solomons. Your distillery provides one-tenth of your income. Protection is another ten per cent and the rest you make from the racetracks. I know you keep a gun in the drawer, beside the whiskey. I know you offer a deal or death. I know what I’m saying makes you angry, but I’m offering you a solution. You see, Mr. Sabini is running all your bookies off your courses, and he is closing down the premises that take your rum, and people don’t trust your protection anymore”

(McCarthy & Knight, 2014, S02, E02: 12: 55’ - 14: 36’).

When Darby Sabini (Noah Taylor), the head of the Italian gang, finds out that Alfie Solomons has made businesses with the Peaky Blinders, Tommy is added to his enemy’s list. With the deal sealed, the Sabinis feared that the Jews will win the war. For this reason, Darby Sabini decides to propose Solomons a truce and a deal by which both of them would work together against Thomas, allowing Alfie’s bookies to go to the races without any problem and without fear of being harmed (McCarthy & Knight, 2014, S02, E04). Yet, by the end of season two, Darby Sabini breaks the deal. At that moment, Alfie Solomons decides to work with the Peaky Blinders again. This plot is not exactly truthful to history, because, as mentioned before, the Jews and the Italians were a team, while Kimber was in partnership with the Elephant and Castle and the Camden Town gangs. But this two last gangs are not mentioned in the show.

Bearing all these considerations in mind, it is easy for me to relate the character of Thomas Shelby to that of the real Billy Kimber, as he was strong, powerfully built,

charismatic, fears no one and intelligent, as he himself says: “I think... Arthur. That’s what I do” (Bathurst et al. 2013, S01, E01: 06: 35’ - 06: 39’). Additionally, the deals he tries to do in London have the same purpose as that of Kimber: to expand the business. It is comprehensible that they changed this side of the real history in order for it to match the plot they had in mind for their characters. This is why the series is historical drama and not just a historical show. But they had already killed Billy Kimber, so a question now arises: why not portraying Tommy as Kimber in London, together with the Elephants and the Camden mob and against the Jews and the Italians, which is to say, why not portraying the real Racecourse Wars? What I mean is that with the characteristics with which the creator of the TV show has endowed Tommy, which are very much alike to those of Kimber, the series could have followed Kimber’s real life throughout the character of Thomas Shelby and that would have been a very much accurate story to tell.

IV. Conclusions

Having all this in mind, it is possible to create a mental picture of what is real and what is fiction in the TV show. The period of time between the 1860s and the 1920s was a very rough time, in which ruffianism²² emerged and evolved and criminal gangs alongside with it. The interesting point about it is that it was a national boom; slogging and ruffianism affected the whole country, not just specific areas on the British map. All these sloggers or organized ruffians were vile, dangerous and attacked for the mere fact of fighting.

²² Ruffianism: “Conduct or demeanour characteristic of a ruffian or ruffians; violence, lawlessness; ruffianly behaviour.” (*ruffianism*’ entry n.1 <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/168588?redirectedFrom=ruffianism#eid>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

As a historical drama, the series portrays the essence of the gangs of the time quite accurately: the violence, the alcohol, the businesses, the races, the revolts... The creators have taken the most important qualities and characteristics of these rough years and have put them together, melting some details from the different periods of time in order to create the plot as much truthfully as possible. Why the creator chose to change the time period in order to keep the show as an inter-war series seems to remain a mystery: it might have to do with personal interest since he has probably based the Sheldons on his own family, the Sheldons, who participated and took an important role in the development of *The Garrison Lane Vendetta*²³.

Keeping the idea that his family 'are' the Sheldons, it is completely coherent that the creator has chosen Tommy Shelby as his main character and not Billy Kimber. Yet, again I think that despite the role of the Sheldons in Birmingham, which is definitely interesting, I would have rather followed Billy Kimber's life, mostly to keep the time period right. Why would not the creator follow the scenario of *The Garrison Lane Vendetta* if his family had had an important role in it? Curiously enough, this *Vendetta* is not even mentioned in the show. The show might have started with this important conflict in Birmingham and continued with the expansion of the Shelby's business somewhere else. In this way the creator would have followed the real facts.

Anyway, the main plot line which functions as a guiding thread in the two first seasons of the show is very well portrayed. I know for sure that seasons three and four

²³ The Garrison Lane Vendetta was "a bloody feud between two local families and their allies. The Beach and Sheldon families had fought each other over several years from the early years of the 20th century to 1912. The strife between them involved riots, shootings and fierce fights. And it entered Birmingham folklore" (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/violence-bloody-feuds-slums-birmingham-6845287>). Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

will deal with some other issues of the times they portray in the TV show and that these issues would be true to the times and the different gangs of London.

Something that would probably have enhanced the show would have been the Racecourse Wars as the plot very much revolves around the racecourse business. Various gangs participated in this mob warfare. Even so, the high number of gangs and characters could have been confusing or complicated for the audience to follow, but the explicit reinterpretation of this conflict would have added interest to the series.

Something that is quite evident is that women were and are strong. The show is set in a changing time, in which women were more free and individual. They are an important pillar for the show, because as it has been mentioned, although Tommy is the leader of the family, it was actually Polly who ran the business while they were gone, and she is the one who makes him come to his senses when needed. People from Birmingham themselves are very much proud of the way female characters have been depicted (<https://historywm.com/films/carl-chinn-the-real-peaky-blinders>. 03: 03' - 03: 08'. Last accessed: 06.12.2019) and this should say something about the subject.

Families of the real Peaky Blinders –there were several groups of people called the same way, not just one family as the series portrays— felt excited about who their grandfathers or great-grandfathers were despite the fact that they admit they are not proud of what their relatives did in the past (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/real-peaky-blinders-how-billy-6450246>. Last accessed 06.12.2019). In one of my e-mails to Professor Carl Chinn, he told me that by being a social historian, he approaches the whole matter in a very different manner from Steven Knight, who approaches the story as a drama writer. I totally understand his point of view. Yet, Mr. Chinn is happy with what the series has

done for Birmingham today, as more people and researchers are interested in visiting the city. But, what it really is significant is the fact that there are indeed historical realities behind the drama and the real Peaky Blinders and the gangsters of the 1920s, and also the fact that Mr. Knight kept all of it as it truly was: not glamorous but vicious and vile. Despite the plot being slightly exaggerated and notwithstanding the differences between the original and the fictional gang, the series offers a very clear and truthful reinterpretation of what was happening in Birmingham and London in the 1920s and of those vicious, dangerous, vile and merciless times.

This dissertation has triggered many questions on the topic which I would really like to have answers for. Therefore, I would like to take further research in the form of the analysis on the third and the fourth seasons so as to go deeper in the gangster world of Londoners and Brummagem and to find out to what extent the new plots the creators have built are as truthful to the historical background as these of the first and the second seasons. Yet, still now, I can imagine that new allies and new stronger enemies will turn up –and that is almost a sure thing recalling what we have seen in these two first seasons—, so, most probably, not all is going to happen ‘By Order of the Peaky Blinders’.

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VI. Appendix

Illustration 1: Map of the town of Birmingham from 1870 to 1900 (Gooderson, 2013: 71).



Key to Slogging Gangs:

- 1 Cheapside
- 2 Gun Quarter (Loveday, Price, Weaman St.)
- 3 Livery St. (Hall St.)
- 4 Bishop Ryders (Sheep, Old Cross St.)
- 5 Bordesley
- 6 Lozells (Clifford St.)
- 7 Suffolk St.
- 8 Park St.
- 9 Milk & Barn St.
- 10 Allison St.
- 11 Hope St.
- 12 Spring Hill
- 13 Ter Arches & Wainwright St.
- 14 Nechells
- 15 Parade
- 16 Farm St.
- 17 Highgate St.
- 18 Great Barr St.
- 19 Nova Scotia St.
- 20 Whitehouse St.
- 21 Charles Henry St.
- 22 Adderley St. (Peaky Blinders)
- 23 Cliveland St.
- 24 Barford St.
- 25 Adams St.
- 26 Moorsom St.
- 27 Bow St.
- 28 Garrison Lane

- Major Roads
- Railways
- Rivers
- Canals

Illustration 2: Garrison Lane (Gooderson, 2010).



13. Parts of Garrison Lane resembled a shanty town. It was also home to Henry Lightfoot, one of the first men to be referred to in the Press as a peaky blinder.

Illustration 3: Bradford Street (Gooderson, 2010).



Illustration 4: Digbeth (Gooderson, 2010).



Illustration 5: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E01.



Illustration 6: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E01.



Illustration 7: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders*, (2013), S01, E02.



Illustration 8: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E02.



Illustration 9: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E02.



Illustration 10: Screenshot from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E02.



Illustration 11: Photograph of The Garrison Pub today, taken from Google Images (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/garrison-peaky-blinders-wiki-pub-7157988>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).



Illustration 12: Screenshot of The Garrison Pub portrayed in *Peaky Blinders*. From *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E03.



Illustration 13: Screenshot of the razors inside the peaks. From *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E01.



Illustration 14: Photographs of two different styles of life preservers. Both taken from Google Images. A is from (<http://www.samuelsouth.co.uk/cosh.htm>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019) and B is from (<https://www.pinterest.es/pin/377035800031891748/>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

A.



B.



Illustration 15: Photograph of a fire Iron from Google Images (https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Fire_iron. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).



Illustration 16: Photograph of a cosh from Google Images (<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/7275>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).



Illustration 17: Photograph of Cillian Murphy as Thomas Shelby, from Google Images. A is from (<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/857302479043876461/>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019) and B is from (<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/857302479043876461/>. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

A.



B.



Illustration 18: Billy Kimber (Chinn, 2014: 50).



Illustration 19: Screenshot of Charlie Creed-Miles as Billy Kimber, from *Peaky Blinders* (2013), S01, E02.



Illustration 20: Photograph of Alf Solomons (McDonald, 2010).



Illustration 21: Photograph of Tom Hardy as Alfie Solomons, from Google Images (https://peaky-blinders.fandom.com/wiki/Alfie_Solomons. Last accessed: 06.12.2019).

