On the role of a social identity analysis in articulating structure and collective action: the 2011 riots in Tottenham and Hackney.

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Abstract.

Theoretical perspectives that give primacy to ideological or structural determinism have dominated criminological analysis of the 2011 English 'riots'. This paper provides an alternative social psychological perspective through detailed empirical analysis of two of these riots. We utilise novel forms of data to build triangulated accounts of the nature of the events and explore the perspectives of participants. We assert these riots cannot be adequately understood merely in terms pre-existing social understandings and political realities and that identity based interactional crowd dynamics were critically important. The paper demonstrates the value of the social identity approach in providing criminological theory with a richer and deeper perspective on these complex social phenomena.

Introduction

Crowd events are sites in which we can both 'read' social identities and social representations, but also see how they come to be redefined (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher 1987, 2001; Stott & Drury, 2000). For these reasons, it has been argued that studies of the crowd, far from being seen as peripheral to the core concerns of the social sciences, should rather be placed at the very centre (Reicher, 2011). That is why it is encouraging to see recent criminological publications that use the 2011 English riots in order to debate the ways in which contemporary ideologies and political divisions frame criminal activity (e.g. Akram, 2014; Jeffery, Ibrahim & Waddington, 2015; Jeffery & Jackson, 2012; Moran & Waddington, 2015; Moxon, 2011; Newburn, 2015a,b; Newburn et al., 2015; Treadwell et al, 2013). These studies take the voice of rioters seriously and start from the premise that we have much to learn from 'reading the riots'. We see this as little short of a paradigm shift in the interdisciplinary understanding and study of crowds, of crowd criminality, and of criminality more generally. However, as with any such shift, it does not indicate the production of a new consensus. Rather, it signifies the emergence of novel questions around which debate is focused and assertions differ. In this paper we point to some of these questions – empirical, theoretical and methodological. We use these to frame an empirical study of the 2011 'disorder' in Tottenham and Hackney, which stakes our position on what can be learnt from these riots and demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches to the understanding of riots.

Theoretical questions and controversies.

When it comes to asking what precisely the 2011 English riots tell us, the emerging criminological literature divides loosely into two camps. In the one, it is argued that, while the initial outbreak in Tottenham may have been linked to 'racial' tensions, what followed was acquisitive and nihilistic, characterised by looting and general 'disorder'. It was not so much a reflection of political grievances but of the domination of consumer ideology and culture (Moxon, 2011). Perhaps the most comprehensive statement of this position comes from

Treadwell et al. (2013), who argue that an ideology of neo-liberalism has undermined and substituted 'political solidarity' within society. In its place has emerged a form of atomised and marginalised individualism, and the *'inarticulate and destructive dissatisfaction'* (p. 3) of such subjects found its expression in the riots. In the other, focus is given to background grievances, which it is argued persisted even as the riots spread (Moran & Waddington, 2015; Waddington, 2012). From this perspective both the riots and the looting "*needs to be seen through a political lens*" (Newburn et al., 2015, p. 1000). When it comes to the nature of these grievances, the two prime candidates are racism and poverty. To cite Jefferson (2012, p. 9) the riots were situated: *"in relation to the angry, ongoing story of police-black relations, racism, the criminalisation of black youth, growing poverty and deprivation, chronic youth unemployment"*.

To contend that riots exist in relation to structural inequalities or background ideologies is not to provide a detailed explanation of *how* they relate. Indeed, criminologists have historically argued that there cannot be a simple deterministic relationship between 'higher order' structural variables and riots. Instead it has been emphasised that adequate theorisation requires conceptualisation of social psychological variables. For example, Useem and Kimball (1987) contend that there has been a tendency for criminological accounts of prison riots to either ignore social psychological levels of analysis entirely or draw selectively upon social psychological theory in ways that best support structural explanations. They state that to adequately explain patterns of rioting in US prisons theoretical accounts must draw upon the concept of social identity as a mediating variable, since "*identification theory plausibly accounts retrospectively for variation in riot activity*" (p.116). Sparks et al (1994) also assert that beliefs about legitimacy are central for understanding the maintenance and breakdown of 'order' in British prisons. Moreover, Carrabine (2005) argues that structural factors merely explain why a riot is structurally likely and that to adequately account for specific incidents of riot *"attention must be paid to the 'foreground' of interaction"* (p.907).

This need for a theoretical account of the mediating role played by social psychological variables such as identity, legitimacy and interaction is also

evident with respect to the patterning of the 2011 'riots'. Even when all the over-arching conditions pointed towards disorder, rioting was not inevitable. Thus while rioting developed in cities such as Manchester and Nottingham it did not take in other cities with similar structural conditions such as Leeds and Sheffield (Guardian/LSE, 2011; Newburn, 2015a). This suggests that what is critical is the way that distal social conditions framed other processes that ultimately determined whether conflict did or did not escalate (see, for instance, Moran & Waddington, 2015; Newburn 2015a; Reicher & Stott, 2011; Waddington et al, 1987).

It follows then that the relationship between social context and collective action in riots is inherently social-psychological. However, there remains considerable suspicion towards psychological analysis of riots. Akram (2014), for instance, groups together all psychological approaches from Le Bon onwards and criticises them for obscuring the relationship between rioters, riots and society. This is ironic, because contemporary psychological crowd theory emerged precisely as a critique of Le Bon's de-socialised understandings of the self and social action. This social identity approach (Turner et al., 1987) to crowds seeks precisely to understand the ways that crowd action relates to social context – in terms of broader societal and more immediate interactional dynamics of crowd events (Reicher, 1987, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000, 2016; Stott & Reicher, 1998a).

The starting point for the social identity model of crowd behaviour (Reicher, 1987) is that individuals define themselves and act not only in terms of their idiosyncratic personal identities but also as members of socially determined historical categories such as 'race', gender or class. When salient in the self-system, these social identities enable individuals to make sense of their collective position in relation to other social groups and act collectively within that relationship. For example, Reicher (1984, 1987) provides an analysis of the inner city 'riot' in the St Pauls area of Bristol in the summer of 1980. He showed that the behavioural patterns evident within the riot were intelligible in terms of the racialised self-understandings of crowd members - understandings that developed from the oppressive practices of agencies of the state such as the

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police (cf. Scarman, 1981). The concept of social identity thus links subjects and their behaviour to broader ideologies and social structural relations.

However, one of the striking features of St Pauls, and of riots more generally, is that they don't just reflect existing social relations but serve to transform them. This realisation led to the development of an *Elaborated* Social Identity Model of crowd behaviour (ESIM). ESIM explains when such change does (and does not) occur by taking account of the proximal social context. Crowd events are typically intergroup encounters, and ESIM addresses the dynamics between groups within crowd events. For instance, police use of coercive force, when perceived as both illegitimate and indiscriminate, can create the proximal social conditions through which previously diverse crowd participants become united and empowered through sharing an 'anti-police' identity (Reicher, 1996, 2011; Stott & Drury, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998a).

Newburn (2015b) acknowledges that a social identity approach to crowds has the potential to provide clarity concerning the ways in which riots unfold and relate to social realities. Nonetheless while his study provides an in-depth analysis of the nature and centrality of intergroup interactions it explores only how these impacted upon the *limits* of the spread of the 2011 riots; why riots did not happen. This paper therefore builds upon Newburn's (2015b) contribution by providing an ESIM-based interactionist analysis of how and why some of the rioting *did* take place. But before we present this analysis, it is necessary to address what evidence is needed to sustain an analysis of riots, and how can one obtain it?

Methodology

Riots are difficult to study. They are relatively unpredictable, fast moving, and dangerous. Moreover, even if one were lucky enough to be on hand, people are often not inclined to stop and talk to a researcher. Consequently, the most abundant data source is post hoc accounts, which predominate in the literature (e.g. Guardian/LSE, 2011; Newburn et al, 2015; Treadwell et al, 2013). It is easy to dismiss such accounts on epistemological grounds. For example, P. A. J. Waddington (1991, 1994) questions the assertion of Benyon (1984, 1987) that

the 1980s riots in England were a form of sub-cultural political protest, socially determined against a backdrop of deprivation and racist policing (e.g. Scarman, 1981). Waddington questions these theoretical assertions because the post-hoc accounts on which such analyses are based "*may be an example of post-riot ideology*" (1991; p. 234; see also Stott, 2016). Winlow et al. (2015) also use epistemological arguments to challenge studies of the 2011 riots that they argue rely too heavily on participant accounts (p. 138).

There is merit in such criticism, but it is important not to overstate the case. In this regard we have much to learn from social historians who, since the 1960s, have been developing a 'history from below' (e.g. Rudé, 1964). Their challenge was to explain popular action when those involved left virtually no accounts of their intentions or subjective experiences. E. P. Thompson elegantly formulates the problem and the solution: '*the inarticulate, by definition, leave few records of their thoughts. We catch glimpses in moments of crisis, like the Gordon riots…*' (1963, p. 59). That is, if you can't access what people say, look at what they do, because their actions – particularly in crowds – reveal their understandings. As we intimated above, the patterns of crowd action – what people attack and what they leave alone, what elicits collective support and what is shunned or even repressed – provide a window into patterns of thought (Reddy, 1977).

We are in a more fortunate situation than they. We have both records of what was done in the riots and participants' accounts of what they did. Accordingly, we are in a position to employ a strategy of triangulation, whereby we take accounts seriously to the extent that they accord with patterns of action and provide a parsimonious understanding of those patterns. This is a strategy used successfully many times before (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury & Stott, 2001; Reicher 1984, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998b). However, in 2011, unlike previous waves of UK riots, the explosion of social media provides us an extra resource: a rich corpus of video recordings taken during the events in question. In this paper, we are therefore in a position to triangulate not only what happened during the riots with what was said afterwards, but also to triangulate post-hoc with contemporaneous accounts. When all of these converge, we are in a strong position to make claims about the nature and

significance of events. Certainly, it can no longer be claimed that accounts are simply *post*-riot ideology.

Data sources

Of course, there have been multiple analyses of the English riots that focus on general details and chronology (Briggs, 2012; Guardian/LSE, 2011; MPS, 2012; Riot Communities & Victims Panel, 2012). There are studies using Ministry of Justice statistics to describe global patterns of damage and looting (Ball & Drury, 2012; Newburn, et al, 2015). There are studies that describe the clustering of events (e.g., Baudains et al., 2012; Guardian/LSE, 2011) along with the characteristics of the people that were arrested and convicted for involvement in them (Stanko & Dawson, 2012). But, to our knowledge, there is as yet no published peer reviewed study that provides in depth-triangulated analysis of the pattern of collective behaviour *within* any of the specific riots of August 2011.

Given their scale and scope it is impossible to present a detailed analysis of all the riots that occurred in 2011. In this paper we have therefore concentrated on two case studies, chosen for their significance within the overall events. The first is the Tottenham 'riot' of August 6th since this is universally acknowledged as the 'catalyst' riot, and generally accepted to be rooted in political grievances. The second is the Hackney riot of 8th August, probably the largest and most violent of all. This allows us to examine issues of the importance of consumerist and of political motivations as the riots spread beyond Tottenham.

Our data is drawn from various sources. Between September and November 2011 we collected thirty-eight videos posted on the Internet and multiple photographs[1]. In the main these videos comprised footage taken directly in the vicinity of the events by journalists, eyewitnesses and participants. They also included mainstream media footage. Videos were identified and accessed firstly using keyword searches. Subsequently, we followed automatically-generated associated URL links provided by YouTube and identified a series of associated videos. When examining videos we were able to identify sequences of footage that related to the events in question. The videos often provided footage of

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[1] For details and URLs for these videos see Reicher & Stott (2011).

important incidents sometimes from different locations and perspectives. This enabled us to identify landmarks in the video – such as shops, bus stops, police stations, junctions and street names – that were able to identify by cross-referencing with images of those locations on Google Street View. Using this technique it was often possible to identify the exact locations at which specific events occurred. It was then possible to cross-reference these against 'time stamped' news media coverage along with the MPS (2012) report on the riots in London in order to build a rich and detailed picture of the chronology. Moreover, given sunset was at roughly 8.40 pm on the days in question it was also possible to use the changing levels of daylight evident in the video footage to position events chronologically. On a few occasions participants are interviewed during the events and give detailed accounts. Moreover, in much of the footage people can be heard speaking, often about what is happening and what they as participants are experiencing. Some were documentaries produced by interested community groups (e.g. Fully Focused, 2013). In these videos people positioning themselves as participants, eyewitnesses and community representatives were interviewed in the days following events. We also drew on post-event accounts from other sources including Slovo (2011). Where only single sources are available or multiple sources are contradictory we make this clear within the analysis. Following claims or quotations drawn from video evidence the relevant source is cited and the URL listed in the appendix.

Analysis

1: Tottenham, Saturday 6th August

Background

Two important features of the context in the months preceding the rioting in Tottenham in August 2011 were: cuts to youth services and stop-and-search practices (e.g., Guardian/LSE, 2011; Prasad, 2011; Topping, Robertson & Smith, 2011). As part of its attempt to shave £41 million from its budget, Haringey Council announced in January 2011 that it would cut its youth service spending by roughly £2 million. By February 2011 eight youth centres had been closed and other services such as after-school clubs and employment support removed.

According to news reports, the closure of the centres and other important youth services left many young people feeling aggrieved. With nowhere else but the street to socialise, many were inevitably brought into contact with the police who at this time were conducting very high levels of stop-and-search in the borough. For example, in the 30 days of June 2011 the MPS conducted 1,614 stop-and-searches in Haringey, of these 91.4% did not lead to any arrest (Moore, 2012). Such activities were likely to have been highly racialised. In London in 2009, 210 out of 1,000 black people were stopped compared to 76 out of 1,000 for whites (Human Rights and Equalities Commission, 2010).

At around 6.00 pm on Thursday 4th August 2011 Mark Duggan, a young black male from the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham, was shot and killed by police on Ferry Road in Tottenham Hale. While all commentators acknowledge the shooting of Mr Duggan was a 'flashpoint', collective violence did not develop for over 48 hours. In this period Mr Duggan's family received no formal notification he had been killed. Despite various communications between the police and community representatives across the next two days, no attempt was made by anyone in authority to address the family's concerns over the lack of information (MPS, 2012; Slovo, 2011). As a direct consequence, people within the local community decided to mount a peaceful protest.

At around 5.00p.m. on Saturday a crowd gathered outside the police station on Tottenham High Road. The crowd – predominantly black, numbering around two hundred people including members of Mr Duggan's family and a number of key community representatives – spread out across Tottenham High Road. There were just a handful of police outside the station (MPS, 2012; Slovo 2012). Things remained peaceful and community leaders and police officers in the station took several opportunities to communicate. However, no officer above the rank of Chief Inspector was present in the police station and that from the perspective of those gathered outside there was no one of sufficient rank to address their concerns.

The emergence of conflict

Feeling further aggrieved and ignored, the family and community leaders left the demonstration at around 8.00 pm. At around 8.30 pm an empty police car parked adjacent to the station was attacked. The initial police reaction was to deploy a Police Support Unit (PSU[2]) in full 'protective equipment' into the street immediately outside the police station. As is standard practice, the police cleared everyone from the roadway to create "*a safe working area*" (MPS, 2012; p.40) during which time the police acknowledge, "*numerous missiles were being thrown at officers*" (ibid).

In contrast it is evident that some within the crowd were unaware of any surrounding 'disorder' and that as such they saw this police action as an unwarranted and indiscriminate aggressive intervention. For example, a young woman was apparently pushed over and struck by the police. While there is some dispute about the time at which (or even whether) this episode occurred (Brown, 2011) an eyewitnesses who was interviewed by the BBC live from the scene later that evening linked the episode directly to a subsequent escalation of collective violence toward the police:

> *What ignited everything was that young female had approached the police line and she was set upon by police with their batons... The police line charged toward her and started hitting her with their batons. She was only sixteen and this made everyone go up in uproar.... Then obviously hundreds of people that congregated had then charged toward the police.* [BBC news footage, August 6th]

After already feeling aggrieved about the lack of communication from the police concerning the shooting of Mr Duggan, accounts from witnesses suggest that police intervention outside the police station added a further sense of illegitimacy, which in turn fuelled the subsequent conflict.

Patterns of conflict

A PSU from the Territorial Support Group[3] arrived outside the police station at 9.10pm. By this time a large crowd had gathered on the High Road some 150 metres to the north of the police station. Two police cars, parked in roads

[2] A Police Support Unit is a formation of 25 public order trained officers.
3 The Territorial Support Group (TSG) is a specialized unit within the MPS trained to a high level to deal with serious incidents of public disorder.

adjacent to the police station were pushed out onto the High Road and set alight. Video footage taken during this episode shows crowd members moving toward the police. There are shouts of "*come on*" and "*I've just seen a girl getting mugged by the Feds [police], come on, what the fuck are you doing?*". Some can be seen throwing missiles at the police [V1].

The small group of around 55 police officers (MPS, 2012) were becoming outnumbered. So, rather than attempting to disperse the crowd, they held the line outside the police station. Video footage shows someone in the crowd near to the police station shouting "*they're scared of us*" [V1]. In time, the fire in the two police cars died down and the situation calmed. According to the MPS (2012) report, a further nine PSUs (225 officers) arrived from 10.40pm onward. It was at around this time that a solicitor's office on the High Road was set alight, possibly because of a perceived link to the police and to police illegitimacy. As one participant explained, this was the "*solicitor for the police... the one that the police give you, will tell you to plead guilty and not represent you very well. Essentially just doing the police's work for them*" [V2].

The fire rapidly spread to the adjacent William Hill bookmakers and flats above. Shortly afterwards a double-decker bus a little further north on the High Road was set alight and was soon burning fiercely enough to damage nearby housing. However, in each case, residents were evacuated without being harmed.

Meanwhile, to the south of the police station, PSUs equipped with riot helmets and shields and with batons drawn had begun to force everyone on the streets further down the High Road, toward the junction with Monument Way. A crowd, mostly composed of white people, were standing watching the events unfold. Some chanted "*whose streets, our streets*" and "*get the police off our streets*'". Missiles smashed onto the roadway in front of the police line. [V3]

As with the situation to the north, the attacks at this stage were targeted primarily against police and those associated with them. There was sporadic damage to other targets, either 'collateral' (as in the fires at the bookmakers and above) or deliberate (as in a fire started in a pile of rubbish outside a community

centre to the west of the High Road). But in neither case did such attacks appear to gain collective support.

In relation to the former incident, an eyewitness recalled how crowd members actively intervened to alert residents and ensure they evacuated properties at risk from the conflagration. In the latter incident, as the blaze began to get out of control, a fire engine arrived. The fire officers doused the flames, unmolested by the watching crowd. Contrast this with the police carrier vans which, at more or less the same time, were driving up the nearby High Road. These were pelted with missiles. Here also, a third parked police car was attacked and set alight [V3].

By midnight, the police had pushed the crowd some distance up the High Road to the North. As they did so, the rioting intensified. Mounted police units arrived and started charging into the crowd. Around this time a jeweller and bullion dealer was set alight. The fire quickly took hold and eventually destroyed the entire complex of shops and residential properties to the rear.

Various other shops in the area were attacked and looted, including Iceland and Aldi supermarkets. But in the process of looting, people also appropriated weapons to use against the police. Trollies and large dustbins from these supermarkets afforded effective barricades against police charges. There was a building site nearby that was a source of missiles and it was police officers that came under sustained attack along with a series of buildings associated with the criminal justice system: the police station at 398 High Road, the Haringey and Enfield Magistrates Court and the probation offices in Lordship Lane.

Not only was there a clear pattern to which buildings were collectively attacked, there are indications that the looting of commercial property was not entirely random. One local resident who did an anecdotal survey of damaged properties suggested, "*the big corporate entities seem to be the ones targeted by the arsonists*" (Williams, 2011). Others claimed that locally owned shops on the High Road were largely left alone because "*the majority of businesses someone knows them, so certain business didn't get touched.*" [V2]

More significantly, perhaps, there is a patterning to how people reacted when different types of property came under attack. One eyewitness recounts that: "*there was an awning that got ripped off a smaller shop up the road. A lot of people just started shouting 'just stop it leave the small people alone'*". Another self-declared rioter describes a clear process of collective regulation regarding targets: "*I definitely could see a lot of people saying 'no'. Like 'don't smash that shop, smash that one'. And others saying 'no, you're not going to break into that one. If you want to smash a shop, smash that one'*". [V2] There are no such reports relating to attacks on Aldi or Iceland.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most iconic act of destruction that night, illustrated on the front page of most national newspapers in subsequent days, was the burning of the CarpetRight store at the junction of Lordship Lane and Landsdowne Road, far behind the epicentre of the rioting. Above the shop were twenty-six residential flats owned by the Metropolitan Housing Trust. Once again the building was evacuated and nobody was killed. While we don't know how the attack started, and whether it was collectively endorsed, we do have evidence of the reaction as the store was alight. Contemporaneous video shows a substantial number of people watching, laughing, even dancing. The atmosphere is carnivalesque and celebratory. One onlooker explains:

> *This is what happens [pointing to the burning building] when the police take things into their own hands and shoot people for no reason... They have to understand that they cannot go around shooting people for no reason.... The people are fighting back and they will fight back. This is not the end, believe me this will carry on* [V4]*.*

Points of significance

There are four points we wish to raise from this analysis. *First*, the riot did not immediately follow the shooting of Mark Duggan but emerged following extended interactions with the police, characterised by failed communication and marginalisation of those seeking dialogue. *Second*, the initial confrontations arose out of the intergroup interactions outside Tottenham Police Station wherein the police were perceived to have acted illegitimately and indiscriminately against people in the crowd. *Third*, there is a systematic patterning of collective action. Attacks on the person are limited to the police,

while others in danger (e.g. residents of fire-threatened properties) are on occasion protected. Police property (cars, police stations) came under consistent collective attack, as did properties linked to the criminal justice system (duty solicitors, probation offices, magistrates court). Where attacks on commercial properties took place they appear to be patterned in the sense that 'insider' businesses may suffer small scale attacks, but crowd members tend not to join in and sometimes actively prevent further damage. *Fourth*, there is some evidence of change in emphasis during the riot. By the end of the evening, there is greater evidence of crowd members being celebratory and of changed power relations with the police, a change also noted by others (Guardian/LSE, 2011). This raises the suggestion that 'rioters' were able to challenge the police with impunity, one index of which is the increasing inability of the police to prevent acts of criminality. This suggests a changed meaning and a politicisation of property damage; crowd members come to see and celebrate such actions as a sign of police impotence. In this sense CarpetRight is as iconic for the crowd as for the media, albeit signifying very different things.

In sum, then, our analysis confirms the importance of a situated interactional analysis of riot rather than merely trying to read the events in terms of broad background grievances or ideologies. It also shows how these interactions may produce changed social relations and changed social understandings. More concretely, the pattern of events does suggest that a sense of police (and criminal justice) illegitimacy was central to the developing pattern of events. The Tottenham riot was in the sense 'political', in that it appears to have embodied a power struggle between a racialised community and the police. This is not to deny that attacks on the police opened the way to 'consumerist' looting. But even here we agree with Newburn et al (2015) that at times there appears to have been political dimensions to such behaviour in terms of what was looted, how it was looted and how some looting may have been a reflection on police-community relations. Nonetheless, our analysis is limited because it is isolated to precipitating events and we have yet to explore the explanatory power of a social identity approach with regard to the 'contagion' of the rioting beyond Tottenham. To this end we now turn to our second analysis.

Analysis 2: Hackney, Monday 8th August.

Background and the emergence of conflict

There are considerable similarities in the broader background of Haringey and Hackney. In Hackney, black people are three times more likely to be stopped and searched compared to whites (HREC, 2010; see also Hohl, Stanko and Newburn, 2012). Indeed, just five days before the riot, 300 police officers mounted dawn raids on 32 addresses in the predominantly 'non-white' Pembury Estate.

However, there is an obvious difference in the immediate context to the two riots. What happened in Hackney was framed by the previous events in Tottenham on the 6th and the wave of 'disorder', which spread across London on the Sunday. By Monday 8th August, incidents categorised as 'riot' had taken place at Enfield, Islington, Waltham Cross, Oxford Street, Brixton, Chingford Mount, and Walthamstow. Already after Tottenham, there were posts on social media celebrating the 'victory' over the police, expressions of regret from those who had not experienced it personally and of a desire to have such an experience (Guardian/LSE, 2011). Moreover there is evidence that some people were drawn to Hackney in anticipation of future conflict.

In the mid-afternoon of the Monday a young white man was interviewed on Mare Street, Hackney's main central thoroughfare. He claimed to live in Islington but had come to Hackney "*because I hate the police… because they shoot people for no reason*" [V5]

By now, some 6,000 riot-trained police had been deployed onto the streets of London (MPS, 2012). If the previous riots had made many young people, especially black youth, more suspicious of them, so it is likely that they made the police more suspicious of those congregating on the streets. Moreover, in the light of emerging criticisms of 'soft policing' in Tottenham and elsewhere[4], the pressure on officers was to be more, rather than less, interventionist. In such a

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[4] For instance, a headline in the daily Telegraph on the morning of August 8th was 'Tottenham riots: police let gangs run riot and loot' – see
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8687540/Tottenham-riots-police-let-gangs-run-riot-and-loot.html

climate, it was all too easy for mutual distrust and expectation to turn into the dynamics of conflict.

This potential was crystallised in an interaction that immediately preceded the onset of widespread violence. A group of police officers stopped and searched two black men in the Narrow Way, near the top end of Mare Street. Video footage shows the two men being manhandled by the officers; one was handcuffed, and both men were angered by the fact that they had been stopped. They became agitated as they were searched and shouted out "*What's your reason for arresting me? What's fucking wrong with you? Kicking off what? What public order?*". Another black man who was passing by started to remonstrate with the police. He told them that they had "*assassinated someone already*" – an obvious reference to Mark Duggan [V6]

As the search was occurring, a small crowd of some 20 youths, largely but not exclusively black, gathered close by. Some began to remonstrate with police, who put on their helmets, picked up their shields, drew their batons then pushed and struck out at individuals within the group. Missiles were thrown at the police, who then pushed the crowd as a whole south towards Hackney Central railway station, underneath the railway bridge where a number of police cars had been left unattended. Some began to attack these cars, while many others in the crowd cheered and whistled their support. Other vehicles were left alone [V7].

Shortly afterwards, further police in 'riot gear' arrived and cleared the area under the bridge. Video evidence shows that this created some anger amongst bystanders who were confronted by the police despite having no involvement in the incident in the Narrow Way. Having cleared the area under the bridge, police officers stood facing a crowd gathered further south on Mare Street. One individual threw a street bin that bounced off their shields down onto the pavement. It appears from news footage that at around this time a JD Sports shop was looted. A group of youths can also be seen opening the rear doors of an articulated lorry in Mare Street. They unloaded pieces of wood onto the road. Others in the crowd grabbed the larger pieces and almost immediately began to use them to smash the windows on a bus, also stuck at the junction [V8].

A crowd then moved south, some smashing the windows of a Ladbrokes betting shop as they passed. The police ran forward and once again dispersed everyone further south. Video footage shows that police then charged into Sylvester Road, a narrow lane leading off Mare Street. Officers with dogs allowed them to bite out at two black men who had been standing there watching events develop. One ran away, the other stood with his palms raised toward the officer. He was then pushed and jostled by a number of other police officers [V9]. A journalist videoing the incident interviewed the men shortly afterwards. Both were highly agitated, one of them explained why:

> *One of these officers was using his truncheon and hitting my man right around his head. I was recording just like you are. I was standing next to one officer and another officer has come running over to me and smashed me with a truncheon. That's how they are dealing with us down here* [V9]*.*

As they were being interviewed, a policeman with a dog forcefully instructed the men to "*move*" while ignoring the white journalist standing directly next to him. The men refused and one gesticulated to the journalist shouting angrily "*we are all equal, tell me to move, then tell the white man to move*". Other police officers, some with dogs then also intervened and the men were forced to run away. One of them again explained how they felt:

> *We was all there, they just set the dogs on us. Told us to go up here and set the dogs on us. I've been bitten four times by the dogs... I'm not violent. My hands are up in the air while I'm being bitten, what's happening?...The one thing I want to know is why is it that if someone gets off a bus with their child and wants to go home why must they be bitten by dogs and charged down another road?* [V9]

By this point, a small crowd had gathered to watch the two men complaining about what they saw as illegitimate and indiscriminate police action. While they were doing so a police officer released his dog onto its long lead. As it attacked, the crowd scattered. The journalist once more caught up with and interviewed the men. This time, they explicitly made their own recent experience of police illegitimacy emblematic of the experiences of the community as a whole and used this to ground a commitment to collective defiance:

> *You see half of the people in this community have all got a story to tell about the fucking police and individual brutality... So when they come out on our*

streets and tell us we must do what we are told and we are all together! What do they expect? We ain't fucking going nowhere. [V9]

Patterns of conflict

Throughout this period, police reinforcements were deploying into Mare Street where substantial conflict took place between 'rioters' and police. Some people broke into the large Tesco supermarket and took bottles. But this was not primarily for loot. One man shouted: "grab some missiles bro', just grab some missiles." [V7] But there were also some attacks (albeit limited) on property in the vicinity – a Carhartt Designer outlet store was looted and a Mazda MX5 sports car was burnt. At about this time, a news team located to the north of the Narrow Way stopped and interviewed one of the 'rioters' about his involvement. He responded by referring to a continuous experience of police mistreatment exemplified by the shooting of Mark Duggan:

> *The Five O [police] on this manor [district] take the piss. They rough up the man dem, they take liberties and at the end of the day it was inevitable. You can't go around hassling people, taking the piss out of people because this is what is going to happen. The police take the piss. At the end of the day they gunned down a man for nothing.*

As the interviewer struggled to understand the link between the patterns of riot around him and Duggan's death, the rioter explained:

> R: *It's about what we can get out of it. At the end of the day what they did to him was fucked up but this is an opportunist thing, all day long. Opportunist.*

> I: *But this should be about protesting and no one is getting their voices heard.*

> R: *No, no. It's not about the protesting side of it. Its about showing the Five O that they can't run around taking the piss out of the young man and getting away with it. So therefore we are going to smash up the area and let them know that the next time they do that kind of shit this is what is going to happen...*

> I: *Is it going to still continue?*

> R: *Yeah, I hope so. I know it's bad to say, but I do. I hope so* [V10]*.*

This is strikingly similar to what we heard from outside CarpetRight in Tottenham. On the one hand there is a rejection of conventional protest politics. On the other hand there is an insistence that attacks on property are a form of politics. They are not just about individual access to consumer goods (though

that is not denied); they also impose a cost on the opposition in order to effect a change in intergroup relations – and even if they don't at least they give this antagonist a taste of their own medicine, which is a pleasure in itself. This interview continues:

> I: *What do you want to come out of this?*
>
> R: *More tolerant police. That is what we need.*
>
> I: *Do you think that will happen?*
>
> R: *I hope so. I beg so, but I don't think it will. Because the police don't show no respect to the youngsters around here. The police take the piss out of everyone around here. So at the end of the day if we organise ourselves and come as a unit and show them that we can roll the force like they can roll the force and treat them like how they treat us then maybe they will show us a bit more respect. But they don't want to show us no respect so at the end of the day you have got to get out and harm that shit.*
>
> I: *Where are you going now?*
>
> R: *I'm looking to smash up something!* (laughs) [V10]

The next phase of the riot began in and around Clarence Road, between Narrow Way and the Pembury Estate [V11]. Nearby, on Dalston Road there was a substantial group of police in 'riot gear'. The crowd pushed a taxi and a commercial dustbin across the road to form a barricade. The police tried to advance but were forced back by intense missile throwing. Crowd members pushed more cars and dustbins into the road. They sallied out to throw missiles at the police line then retreated again, regrouping in the vicinity of Hindrey Road. Here a local convenience store was broken into and extensively looted. But this appears to be one of only a few shops that were attacked in the vicinity.

A short while later the police moved en masse up Clarence Road. As they did so a Nissan Micra parked close to the convenience store was set alight and was soon burning fiercely. The flames rapidly took hold and as they did, wind took the flames onto an adjacent house. Some of those in the crowd realised that the house contained a family with a baby. Some of the rioters rushed to assist the family's escape.

The police continued to push into the Pembury, ubiquitously under attack from missiles, including what appeared to be petrol bombs. An electrical retail store just to the east of Clarence Road was looted. But the focus of intense rioting was on the police. This focus was maintained through collective organization – seemingly less a matter of established leadership than of spontaneous support for effective anti-police action (and spontaneous opposition to anything that weakened such action) [V12]. For example, in Goulton Road 'rioters' could be heard urging others to "*stop running*", to *"get a brick"* and to "*let them* [the police] *come*" so that the crowd could "*ambush them*". On the one hand a 'rioter' who threw a missile that nearly hit another was rebuked: "*watch your shot man, you nearly hit your own man in the back of the head*" [V13].

Crowd members continued to stone the police over several hours, with little comeback. Each time the police tried to gain ground, crowd members would disperse, regroup and start the attack again. Once again, as in Tottenham, this sense of crowd agency and of police impotence – a reversal of everyday power relations – appears to have experienced as exhilarating, not only by those directly involved but also by some amongst those who witnessed it. One bystander was quoted in the Guardian newspaper "*I've been wanting to see us do this to the Feds for years*".[5]

Points of significance

The most striking thing about the Hackney riot is the continuity with Tottenham. Both events occur against a background of police-community antagonisms, which are then crystallised in specific antagonistic encounters that serve as precursors to generalised violence. Attacks on police personnel and property were systematic and sustained. There is no evidence of deliberate attacks on private individuals; indeed when such people were under threat from crowd actions (as in the case of spreading car fire) they were helped. There were some attacks on private property – always in the context of anti-police violence – but these were sporadic and sparse. Moreover, while consumerist motives may have been involved, acts of looting were relatively scarce in Hackney and difficult to

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[5] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/09/hackney-riots-police-east-london

separate from the assertion of crowd power and police powerlessness. In sum, Hackney was a political grievance based riot in much the same way as Tottenham.

The main difference between the two events was Tottenham itself. That is, the foregoing riots changed the context and the self-understanding of rioters in Hackney. They began with a heightened sense of grievance, a sense of empowerment and an unwillingness to tolerate encounters with the police that they experienced as oppressive. Throughout the events 'rioters' sought to, and took delight in expression of power, whether that was a matter of smashing things up or ambushing the police on the Pembury Estate.

Discussion

Empirically, the patterns we have described in Tottenham and Hackney support Newburn et al's (2015) contention that "*many of the rioters shared…. strongly antagonistic attitudes toward, and specific grievance with, the police*" (p. 59). It also adds empirical weight to Newburn et al.'s (2015) warning against overstating the role of consumerist culture and underplaying "*those elements of the 2011 England riots that did not involve the desire to do some shopping for free*" (p.1001). Correspondingly, our analysis of the events in Hackney challenges the argument that after Tottenham the riots became a matter merely of acquisitive nihilism.

Of course, those supporting the latter position could easily retort by arguing that it was after Tottenham *and* Hackney, the riots escaped their moorings. They could equally ask what about Tottenham Hale and other retail parks which were looted without any attacks on the police. As we acknowledged at the outset, practical limitations have led us to focus thus far on just two of the many events during August 2011 and this does affect our capacity to generalise to the riots as a whole. There is therefore a pressing need to conduct similarly detailed analyses of other 'riots' which took different forms, including what have been termed 'commodity riots' (Ball & Drury, 2012; Reicher & Stott, 2011). But as has been pointed out elsewhere the mere fact that riots target consumer goods is not, in itself, evidence for individualism, consumerism, or lack of solidarity.

Indeed, this study along with others simply emphasises the danger of reading too rigid a conceptual divide between anti-police action and looting (cf. Akram, 2014; Ball & Drury, 2012; Newburn et al, 2015). First, while there was looting and damaging of property in both riots, it appears to have been relatively sporadic, and in Hackney actually quite limited in scale. Second, the looting that was identified appears to have been linked to conflict with the police in the sense that it was characteristically both in the vicinity and aftermath of anti-police action. Third, there is some evidence that the looting and damage that did occur was patterned, with 'insider' shops in Tottenham generally either being left alone or collectively defended. Fourth, insofar as it is the responsibility of the police to stop property damage, one cannot separate attacks on property from relations with the police. Insofar as rioters were able to mount such attacks with impunity, they signify police impotence. In the course of both riots there were at least some that openly celebrated attacks on property as such; 'opportunism' became another way asserting power over the police (Guardian/LSE, 2011).

We are reminded here of Eric Hobsbawm's (1952) famous description of Luddite machine breaking as 'collective bargaining by riot' and Bachrach and Baratz's (1970) argument of riots as the 'ballot box of the poor'. Arson, vandalism and looting are, at least in part, a means of confronting everyday relations with the police by asserting a cost to police harassment that cannot be achieved in everyday relations of police dominance. But, additionally, even if one is sceptical about achieving long-term changes in social relations, the ability to reverse everyday relations in the moment of riot is valued by rioters in and of itself.

Moving, now, to the theoretical dimension, our analysis shows that an account of the broad context - whether it be consumerist ideology *or* grievances against the police - may be necessary but it certainly isn't sufficient to make sense of the August 2011 riots. This is exemplified by the shooting of Mark Duggan, often seen as the 'flashpoint'. But it was two days before rioting actually began, during which a series of interactions with the police took place which appear to have undermined those voices calling for resolution through dialogue and given increasing credibility to those arguing that the police would only listen to force. In Hackney too there were also a series of interactions involving a 'stop and

search' and then subsequent dispersal tactic exercised by the police, interactions that appear to have been central to the dynamics of the rioting in London.

David Waddington et al's (1987) 'Flashpoints' theory, argues that background history, meanings and material social structures are important in determining whether 'riots' will or will not take place. This position appears to be validated by our data. However, Flashpoints makes clear that these background contexts do not mechanically determine riots. Rather they are understood to frame and give meaning to other processes that occur at the level of interaction. This study therefore contributes to Flashpoints primarily through its capacity to provide a detailed theoretical account of precisely *how* such interactions led to the presence of rioting during the first and the largest of these series of events.

Nonetheless our claims must be measured against the limitations of our data. We have examined just two of the estimated 141 incidents across 66 different areas (Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, 2011). Our small sample severely restricts our capacity to generalise to the 2011 riots as a whole and highlights the need for more research on these other incidents in other locations. Our sampling of data from within the two events was also largely opportunistic. We therefore have no way of identifying all of the events and collective actions that took place. Therefore we cannot be certain that events always occurred in the sequential order we have assumed and there may be important incidents that were not recorded, posted or identified in any of the sources of informal and formal evidence we have drawn from. Nonetheless the sample we have obtained does allow for direct and often triangulated observations and detailed analysis of the behaviour and verbal utterances of people involved *in vivo* across the events in question.

As with Useem and Kimball's (1987) criminological analysis of prison riots our turn toward social identity helps to explain how the observed patterns of collective action reflected existing categories, ideologies and social relations (cf. Carrabine, 2005; Sparks et al, 1996). Our social psychological approach helps to understand the crowd processes underpinning the production of new social identities, beliefs and social relations in a way that helps account for the specific

development, escalation and spread of these two riots. Our analysis is consistent with the following explanation of intergroup dynamics. First, police fears about danger led them to act toward gathering crowds aggressively and assertively. This undifferentiated use of force created unity amongst crowd participants, both legitimising and empowering collective confrontation. Such processes contributed towards the inversion of power relations between police and those in the community - something that appears to have framed and fed interactions later in the evening and in subsequent rioting. Thus, while embedded within a specific structural and ideological context there was nothing inevitable about the Tottenham riot; it required a whole series of interactions before it happened. Equally, Hackney appears to have involved similar interactive and escalatory social psychological processes.

Thus, far from being a psychology that desocialises and pathologises crowd action, it is an approach that helps relate distal and proximal contexts to action in a way that helps explain the social patterning of crowd action and change. In this sense it is a perspective that demonstrates the value of bringing sociological and social psychological analyses of riot together. In so doing we hope to have articulated how this inter-disciplinary approach within criminology provides a richer and deeper perspective on these complex social phenomena.

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Appendix

At time of writing video footage available at the following URLs

[V1]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcelEPjFnyU
[V2]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJeCzbX8vWE
[V3]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrbQtHA-9tM
[V4]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDw0pzHj6kI
[V5]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=778tRtzdjvQ
[V6]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xF8X9Fhnx8
[V7]	https://www.vice.com/en_uk/video/hackney-systems-overload
[V8]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj0lSps6Lec&feature=youtu.be
[V9]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oyAmki6BD8&feature=youtu.be
[V10]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPK6BkJdDFw&feature=youtu.be
[V11]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCUnHnuUuiA
[V12]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rbHnUddPTA&feature=youtu.be
[V13]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILjIwAbmNMo