THE DECLINE OF RIOTING AND ITS STRANGE PERSISTENCE: CROWD LIFE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT: During the nineteenth century, the level of rioting in Britain declined significantly, but this change was not consistent across the country. This presents us with a significant historical challenge: to explain the uneven and irregular decline in rioting. Most of the existing theories subsume riots within larger schemas, treating them as one interchangeable element in the wider 'repertoire of contention' or in the 'politics of provisions'. They also fail to account for the particular timing and trajectory of the decline. My contribution is twofold. Empirically, I offer a new, systematic catalogue of 414 riots from Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow between 1800 and 1939. Then I use that wealth of archival material to propose a new account of the uneven decline of rioting in Britain over the nineteenth century. I argue that the decline of rioting was due to the closing down of the social and cultural space that sustained it. More specifically, it was due to the decline in the acceptance of active and assertive crowds as part of urban life, and the public use of violence; the two dimensions of what I call *crowd life*. At a theoretical level, I also suggest a novel approach to the study of rioting, treating it as a practice with its own particular traditions and heritage. This allows us to better account for the decline of rioting and also to extend and refine Charles Tilly's famous concept of the 'repertoire of contention'.

For much of the nineteenth century rioting was a central part of urban life. From striking workers burning down factories and rival election parties fighting in the streets, to sectarian unrest and assaults on the police, collective violence was common and often unremarkable. Indeed, journalists were rarely fazed by the frequent unrest. They complained of *yet another* riot in the Liverpool workhouse (*Liverpool Mail* 10/6/1843), brushed off fights between local gangs and the police as merely a 'row' (*Glasgow Free Press* 9/6/1860) and dismissed vicious attacks on strikebreakers and factories as "mischief… [and] petty depredations" (*Manchester Courier* 29/4/1826). However, by the start of the twentieth century, a complex pattern of change and continuity had taken hold. The level of urban rioting had noticeably declined, but violence did not disappear completely. In fact, there were recurrent waves of unrest right up to World War II and, in cities like Glasgow, rioting actually reached a peak in the interwar period. This pattern of *uneven decline* leaves us with a significant empirical puzzle.

There are two prominent explanations of this 'transition to order': the first claims that it was the result of greater "relief and repression" (Bohstedt 2010: 1), and the second emphasises the emergence of alternative ways of protesting (Stevenson 1979, Tilly 1995). Both approaches try to subsume rioting within a wider schema, turning it into an interchangeable element within the 'politics of provisions' or the 'repertoire of protest'. Because of this conceptual move, they struggle to fully explain the timing of the decline, the range of forms of public violence that were affected and the differences between different cities. Explaining the decline in rioting is, therefore, not just an issue of niche historical interest. It also requires a new theoretical framework.

I will argue that in order to explain the decline in rioting, we need to think of it as a *practice* in its own right. This approach has several important theoretical implications. Like all practice-based accounts, it forces us to take meanings, as well as instrumental rationality, into account when explaining people's behaviour. It also suggests a particular vision of history where change happens through gradual evolutionary processes of adaptation, adoption and innovation. Finally, it recognises the specificity of particular ways of protesting to particular communities and the traditions of protest that they carry with them. Theories of practice therefore allow us to better account for the uneven decline of

rioting in nineteenth century Britain and I hope will also provide a more useful framework for understanding the wave of recent riots in Europe, north Africa and north America.

In order to chart and explain the pattern of rioting in Britain, I draw on a systematic catalogue of riots from 1800 to 1939 in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow (the three largest cities in the UK after London, which has already been studied extensively). This catalogue was produced in two stages. The initial list of riots was compiled through keyword searches of three digital newspaper archives (*The Times*, the *Annual Register*, and all of the relevant local newspapers stored in the British Newspaper Archive as of August 2016[1]; the keywords were riot, riots, rioting, rioter, rioters, mob, disturbance, disturbances, tumult, tumults, disorder, disorders plus Manchester/ Liverpool/ Glasgow). This produced nearly 20,000 search results which I went through manually to determine whether they referred to a riot happening in each city or not. Rioting was defined as public, collective violence against people or property involving more than 20 people (something of a middle ground between Bohstedt [1983] who chose 50, and Tilly [1995] who chose 10). That initial list was then expanded using: all of the newspapers stored on microfilm at Glasgow City Archives, Manchester Central Library and Liverpool Record Office[2]; local police records; Home Office records (HO

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[1] For Manchester: *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (1825-1830, 1832, 1834-1870, 1874, 1876-1916), *Manchester Evening News* (1870-1887, 1890, 1892-1895, 1897, 1899, 1901-1903, 1914-1921, 1939-1949), *Manchester Mercury* (1752-1830) and *Manchester Times* (1828-1829, 1831-1862, 1864-1872, 1874-1895, 1898-1900). For Liverpool: Gore's Liverpool General Advertiser (1800, 1805, 1822-1823, 1826-1841, 1843-1853, 1855, 1857-1860, 1863-1865, 1867-1876), *Liverpool Courier and Commercial Advertiser* (1870), *Liverpool Daily Post* (1855-1871, 1875-1876, 1881-1882, 1887, 1905-1906, 1914-1918, 1939-1945), *Liverpool Echo* (1879-1886, 1888-1893, 1897-1999), *Liverpool Evening Express* (1911, 1914, 1939-1945), *Liverpool Mail* (1836-1837, 1839-1858, 1860-1868, 1870-1874, 1877, 1880), and *Liverpool Mercury* (1811-1835, 1837-1871, 1873-1897, 1899-1900). For Glasgow: *Daily Record* (1914-1918, 1939-1945), *Evening Citizen* (1866-1870, 1879-1890, 1892), *Glasgow Citizen* (1844-1845), *Glasgow Constitutional* (1853, 1855), *Glasgow Evening Post* (1867, 1870, 1879-1881, 1883-1893, 1895), *Glasgow Free Press* (1853, 1856, 1858-1868), *Glasgow Gazette* (1849-1852), *Glasgow Herald* (1820-1822, 1826-1827, 1844-1900), *Glasgow Morning Journal* (1858, 1862-1865), *Glasgow Saturday Post, and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer* (1861, 1864), *Glasgow Sentinel* (1850-1865), *Scottish Guardian, Glasgow* (1853-1856, 1859), *The Scotsman* (1817-1950), and *Sunday Post* (1914-1928, 1935, 1939, 1941-1950).

[2] Manchester: *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette, Gorton Reporter, Manchester and Salford Advertiser, Manchester City News, Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, Manchester Evening Chronicle, Manchester Evening News, Manchester Mercury, Manchester*

40, 44 and 45); and secondary literature. The final catalogue is made up of 414 riots and over 1200 sources.[3] These sources allow me to compare between the three cities and across time, evaluating existing theories before proposing an alternative account.

This methodological approach distinguishes rioting from other ways of protesting and also lumps together different kinds of riots. For example, rioting includes collective attacks on strike breakers in Manchester in 1891, sectarian battles in Liverpool in 1853 and violent political unrest in Glasgow in January 1919 (*Manchester Evening News* 7/8/1891, *Liverpool Mercury* 12/7/1853, *Glasgow Herald* 1/2/1919). There are obviously important differences between these different events, just as there are certainly connections between these riots and other social processes. But, I want to argue that treating rioting as a practice with many faces allows us to better explain its evolution over time than any of the other leading alternatives. This is an explicitly pragmatist position which asserts that a framework is good if "it works, it clears up difficulties, removes obscurities" (Dewey 1910: 164), if it has a 'cash value' (James 1907). So, ultimately, the success of this theoretical move is bound up with the success of my explanation of the decline in rioting.

Drawing on that wealth of archival material, I argue that urban rioting in the nineteenth century depended on a particular social and cultural space. In particular, it was supported by what I call *crowd life*: the acceptance of (a) active and assertive crowds as part of urban life and (b) the public use of violence. Over time, these two dimensions of crowd life came under increasing pressure and, gradually, the space for rioting was shut down. Pressure from elites and from the leaders of various working class movements, alongside broader cultural changes from below, helped to cut rioting off from its social and cultural roots. By the early twentieth century, in most cities the traditions of crowd life had almost disappeared and, as a result, the longstanding practice of rioting faded.

Times, and *Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle*. Liverpool: *Gore's Liverpool General Advertiser, Liverpool Courier, Liverpool Courier and Commercial Advertiser, Liverpool Daily Post, Liverpool Echo, Liverpool Evening Express, Liverpool Mail, Liverpool Mercury,* and *Liverpool Weekly Albion*. Glasgow: D*aily Record, Evening Citizen, Evening Times, Glasgow Chronicle, Glasgow Courier, Glasgow Echo, Glasgow Examiner, Glasgow Free Press, Glasgow Gazette, Glasgow Herald, Glasgow Sentinel, Glasgow Weekly News, North British Daily Mail, Scottish Guardian, Scotsman, Sunday Mail,* and *Sunday Post.*

[3] The full catalogue is available from the UK Data Authority: Tiratelli 2019.

THE DECLINE OF RIOTING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

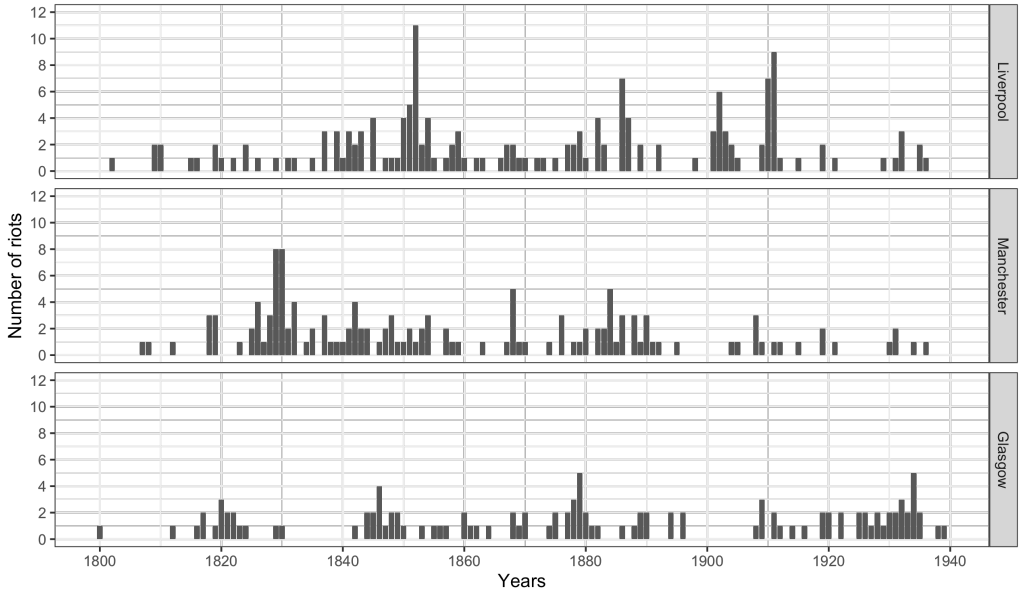
In Britain, the start of the nineteenth century was greeted by a wave of riots. Against the backdrop of costly wars with revolutionary France, the famines of 1795-6 and 1800-1 saw riots spread rapidly across the country, bringing much of Britain to a standstill. These were enormous events, with hundreds of different riots across the country in a matter of months (Wells 1988). But, despite these inauspicious beginnings, over the next 100 years, the level of rioting declined significantly (historians broadly agree on this general pattern of decline, see Stevenson 1979, Randall 2006, Bohstedt 2010, Bailey 2014b; *cf* Richter 1965).

My catalogue of riots in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow confirms the outlines of this narrative, but reveals two significant points (see Figure 1). First, different cities had very different histories of rioting. In Manchester rioting moves in step with wider political movements, with noticeable surges accompanying the Reform movement of the 1820s and 1830s, the Chartism of the 1840s, various local strike waves and battles between unemployed workers and the police in the 1930s. Liverpool's riots reflect the sectarian divides in the city, with spikes driven by Irish migration during the great famine of 1845-1850 and the escalating wave of anti-Catholic sentiment from 1900-1911. The story in Glasgow is rather different, with concentrated surges in the 1820s, 1850s and 1880s, before a wave of sectarian and anti-police violence took hold in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, rioting there reaches a peak in the interwar years, a time when the rest of the country was fairly peaceful.

The second point is that in none of these cities does rioting seem to be declining before the 1850s or 1860s. This suggests that riots remained a common feature of urban life until far later than most commentators assumed. They certainly lasted longer than is suggested by those London-centric narratives which see the Gordon Riots of 1780 as the moment when the mob was expelled from the political scene (Haywood and Seed 2012). They also lasted beyond the demise of the bread riot at the turn of the nineteenth century (Bohstedt 2010). I don't want to exaggerate the extent of public disorder in this later period. George

Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) famously argued that Britain was on the verge of a revolution that only the shock of World War I prevented. But this revolutionary threat seems to have been overstated (Bailey 2014a). So too does the level of violence in the 1930s, supposedly driven by brutalised ex-soldiers and Bolshevism (Stevenson 1975, Lawrence 2003). Riots played a central part in urban life for most of the nineteenth century and there are marked differences between different cities, but, this doesn't mean that the 'transition to order' was completely fictitious. Unpicking this uneven pattern of change and continuity is my central empirical challenge.

FIGURE 1: RIOTS IN LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER AND GLASGOW, 1800 - 1939



One important limitation of my research design is that it restricts me to looking at urban riots, ignoring events like the 'last great rising of agricultural labourers', the Captain Swing riots of the 1830s (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969). However, it's important to note that, even by 1800, the character of riots was changing. Compared to previous waves of rioting throughout the 1700s, the events in 1800-1 were unusually *urban*. Rapid population growth over the previous 50 years had led to a remarkable urbanisation of British society (Corfield 1982, Wrigley 2014), and this meant that popular protest also shifted into new urban settings (Bohstedt 2010: 208). This growth continued over the next 100 years,

with Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow all growing from less than 100,000 in 1801 to over a million by the 1920s (Bennett 2012; 1921 census). These three cities can only give us a partial perspective, but, by continually comparing my findings with those from other studies, I hope to be able to contribute to that wider debate while also emphasising the importance of local variation.

'RELIEF AND REPRESSION'

Even in the first decades of the nineteenth century, many commentators were convinced that growing prosperity, and more proactive relief efforts by local and national elites, would leave people with fewer issues to riot about. This change in the 'politics of provisions' reduced people's need to riot in the face of intermittent distress. In April 1812, the *Manchester Mercury*, in a bid to discourage food riots, called on the people to "enquire of the aged, what were the number fed by our different branches of manufacture, before our machinery had acquired such perfection [as it has today]" (*Manchester Mercury* 28/4/1812). Accompanying this economic shift was a growth in the capacity of the state to maintain its monopoly of violence and forcibly repress rioting when it broke out. For example in Manchester, the Hulme barracks were built in 1804 and the various groups of night watchmen were formed into Manchester Borough Police in 1844. This argument, that greater 'relief and repression' led to the demise of rioting, continues to have some support today (e.g. Bohstedt 2010)[4]. However, I want to suggest that this narrative does not stand up to historical scrutiny. First, the timing of the decline in urban rioting is too late to be fully explained in this way and, second, the role of police forces and militias is far more complex than it first appears.

The idea that riots declined because there were fewer issues to riot about is appealingly intuitive. It sees riots as automatic (but more-or-less rational) responses to grievances, as "spasmodic… rebellions of the belly" (Thompson 1971: 76-7). Therefore, as living standards rose, you would expect to see fewer and fewer riots. The debate around the standard of living during the industrial revolution is hotly contested and

[4] Bohstedt uses the idea of 'relief and repression' to explain the decline of food riots in particular, but the logic is often extended to other forms of rioting (see Bailey 2014a: 1-10).

far too large to be fully explored here. As a brief summary, recent quantitative surveys indicate that life expectancy at birth rose from the late 1700s (Wrigley et al 1997), average heights fell dramatically from 1650-1850 (Galofré-Vilà et al 2017), hours worked increased before falling back in the late 1800s (de Vries 2008), GDP per capita rose steadily from 1650 (Broadberry et al 2015), real wages for annually contracted workers rose steadily from the same point (Humphries and Weisdorf 2016) and real wages for casual workers were fairly stagnant until the mid 1800s when they started to rise (Clark 2005, 2007). Whatever uncertainties remain for the early period of the industrial revolution, even 'pessimists' like Robert Allen (2009) believe that working class living standards were improving by the mid to late 1800s which roughly aligns with the decline in rioting. The difficulty with accepting this evidence at face value is that national aggregates conceal regional and demographic variation (Timmins 1998, Humphries 2013, Griffin 2018) and also smooth out the sudden shocks which seem most likely to cause unrest.

If there is a case to be made for this argument, then you would expect it to be clearest in relation to food riots where people react in a direct way to an immediate need. There is some correlation between food prices, which stabilised after 1819, and the decline in food riots. However, this association may well be spurious because of the many other social and economic changes in the period. Indeed, it seems that the decline in food rioting was already well underway before the grain crisis of 1810-12 (Bohstedt 2010: 165-244). Moreover, once you move to a more detailed year-by-year analysis, it becomes difficult to match up, chronologically or geographically, changes in the number of riots with food prices. For example, although rioting seems to have reached peaks in 1795 and 1800, food prices in fact peaked the following years, when there was significantly less rioting (Bohstedt 2010, Figure 5.1). Moreover, we would need to explain why the various recessions from the turn of the century through to the 1930s failed to bring rioting back to the levels seen a hundred years earlier. This is symptomatic of the general weakness of grievance-based explanations for protests (Snyder and Tilly 1972, McAdam 1999) and should give us reason to doubt whether this is an adequate explanation for the decline in rioting.

Another change which could have frustrated would-be rioters was the

emergence of local police forces from the 1830s. The availability of a dedicated public order force, without recourse to the army or yeomanry, allowed potential riot situations to be dealt with in a more flexible and sophisticated way (Townshend 1993). This seems to have sometimes worked. For example, during the 1867 food riot in Liverpool, unrest was kept to a minimum by the prompt response of the local police force (*Liverpool Mercury* 19/1/1867). There does also appear to have been a shift in the severity with which authorities responded to riots. Scenes like this execution at Middleton in 1812, where "25 to 30 of the misguided populace became the victims of their own folly and criminality" (*The Times* 27/4/1812), became fairly rare by the 1820s.

Nevertheless, it's extremely difficult to test how effective the police were in micro-managing potential riot situations because there's no easy way to find events which could count as 'near misses'. Moreover, many historians are sceptical about the effectiveness of the police, citing the availability of alternative ways of establishing order in earlier times, the high numbers of assaults on police officers and the importance of cultural constraints on police behaviour as evidence that they played only a marginal role in the decline in rioting (Stevenson 1979, Morgan and Rushton 2007, Bailey 2014a). There is also evidence from across the country that the presence of police actually provoked riots well into the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Storch and Engels 1975, Price 1975, Storch 1976, Weinberger 1981, King 1985, Klein 2010). This picture is confirmed by my catalogue which shows that, especially in Glasgow, anti-police rioting remained common until the early twentieth century. Indeed, in Liverpool, as late as 1921, it was reported that "it is only in recent years that the police in parts of Liverpool have been safe in working in less than fours together" (HO 45/11032/423878). This suggests that changes in law enforcement also can not easily explain the decline in rioting.

FROM THE 'ONLY RESORT' TO THE 'LAST RESORT'

The second leading explanation for the decline in violence is the idea that riots were 'crowded out' by other forms of protest. John Stevenson argued that people "were not in the main prepared to risk life and limb in the face of intermittent distress when opportunities for piecemeal reform and gradual improvement were being offered to them" (1979:

323). This echoes Charles Tilly's famous argument about the 'repertoire transition' in the early decades of the nineteenth century, where new, modern forms of protest emerged (Tilly 1981, 1995). Rioting in that sense went from being people's only resort to their last resort. More formally, as the repertoire of contention expanded, alternative, lower-cost tactics became available, leading to fewer riots. For example, during the dock strike in Glasgow in 1911, it was only after the "failure of their normal methods of 'peaceful persuasion' [that] they resorted to stronger methods" (*The Times* 4/7/1911:7).

There may be some truth in this, but it doesn't fit particularly closely with the slow and uneven decline in rioting suggested by my data. Various writers have shown that the modern repertoire of petitions, marches and public meetings, was available in the early 1800s (Tilly 2008, Stamatov 2011). However, the number of violent protests doesn't seem to be on the decline by the mid 1800s (Tilly 2010, Figures 2 and 4). In fact, the decline only really began in the later half of the nineteenth century, and even then different regions had very different experiences (see Figure 1 above).

This argument also underestimates the range of political tools available to local people before the advent of mass organisations and social movements. As James C. Scott has shown (1977, 1987), even groups with no de jure powers often engage in subtle and invisible forms of protest, what he calls the 'weapons of the weak'. In fact, riots were never the only resort people had, but were often the final stage of complex series of local negotiations (Randall 2006: 19). For example, my catalogue gives many occasions from the early nineteenth century where industrial disputes began with peaceful meetings and negotiations, before evolving into strikes, and eventually into violence (see e.g. *The Times* 21/7/1818, *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette* 5/9/1818; Rule [2000] gives examples of this pattern from the early 1700s).

Explaining the decline of rioting through the emergence of alternative tactics also ignores the fact that, although instrumental riots declined from the late nineteenth century, so did more expressive violence. Election riots often broke out after the result was announced and had no immediate aims. Sometimes they were celebrations or protests at the result (see e.g. *Manchester Courier* 10/1/1835 and Waller 1981: 250),

but they could also be simple celebrations of the political process itself (Baer 2012: 111-3). I don't want to suggest that all election violence was mindless 'letting off of steam' (Richter 1981, Hoppen 1994), but, there are clearly expressive as well as instrumental elements, both of which need to be taken into account. Spontaneous attacks on the police also quickly stopped being a serious, instrumental attempt to force the police out of town. But, they continued to function as ways of spiting authority and expressing a general belief in the "illegitimacy of the police role in enforcing street order" (Churchill 2014: 257).

Ultimately, neither the emergence of alternative forms of protest, nor greater relief and repression, can fully explain the decline in rioting over the nineteenth century. In both cases this is because they try to subsume rioting within wider schemas, in one case as a part of the 'politics of provisions', in the other case as one way of making political claims. Clearly rioting was related to both of these worlds. It was often used to secure food and provisions, or to escalate a political struggle. But, rioting also existed as a practice in its own right, a practice with its own particular heritage and ideology. And that particularity needs to be at the heart of how we explain its decline.

THE DEMISE OF CROWD LIFE

Urban rioting was a regular feature of nineteenth century life. The practice was grounded in a variety of local traditions, coloured by local customs and reflected local dynamics. It was also a practice with many faces, appearing in the context of economic disputes, political conflicts or sectarian rivalries. Nevertheless, there were two common features which seem to characterise the social and cultural space of rioting across Britain: the acceptance of active and assertive crowds as part of urban life, and the public use of violence. Over the course of the nineteenth century, both of these dimensions of crowd life came under enormous pressure, gradually closing down that social space and reducing the level of rioting. I want to start by sketching those two dimensions, before exploring the process of historical change in more detail.

The first dimension is the importance of active and assertive crowds to urban life. Nicholas Rogers (1989, 1998) describes the urban crowd in the early nineteenth century as both an extra-legal enforcer of

community norms and as an essential symbolic component in the transmission (and contesting) of authority. They followed loose conventions, had specific roles rooted in local politics and were seen as representing the people (Bohstedt 1983). The precise functions of these crowds varied across settings, but they were a vital part of political campaigns, of civic and religious ceremonies and of community life. But, over time this changed (Shoemaker 2004). Starting in the late eighteenth century, fear of the French revolution led to a concerted effort to re-choreograph public festivals to inhibit mob activity in favour of decorum and civility (Rogers 1998: 235). However, as I will go on to show, elites continued to sponsor disorderly crowds when it suited their needs. It wasn't until the 1920s that they fully embraced the modern notion of the public as a passive, individualised 'silent majority' (Lawrence 2003, 2006).

The second dimension is the public use of violence. This included everything from common assaults and 'hooliganism' to more ritualistic violence like 'rough music'. Often, riots broke out as part of petty disputes. For example, in Manchester in July 1857, a pawnbroker was attacked as part of an intra-family feud. His house was destroyed, his son beaten and the family eventually forced out of the area (*Liverpool Mercury* 20/7/1857). In that same city in 1829, a group of several hundred people fought off bailiffs who were trying to seize the possessions of a local Irish family (*The Times* 14/11/1829). However, over time the use of public violence to settle scores or pursue collective goals seems to have fallen out of favour.

This approach is therefore similar in many ways to E.P. Thompson's classic history of bread rioting in rural England (Thompson 1971). Like him, I focus on the presuppositions which guide collective behaviour and trace their evolution over time. However, there are two specific points of difference. First, Thompson argues that eighteenth century food riots were grounded in a 'moral economy', which justified their forceful appeals for fair prices and localised relief efforts. However, that particular set of beliefs and values can not explain the full range of rioting, nor does it easily extend from eighteenth century rural England to the cities of the nineteenth century (cf Jones 2007). Moreover, the traditions of crowd life justified the *form* of collective rioting rather than any specific claim. Second, Thompson's vision of rioting is embedded in

a bipolar world of plebs and patricians, which is inappropriate for more complicated urban landscapes (Randall 2006). Understanding the decline in urban rioting over the nineteenth century therefore requires uncovering a new set of presuppositions, a different social and cultural space which sustained the practice of rioting.

It is important to note that this social and cultural space was, like all meanings, context dependent. Therefore, the acceptance of crows and collective violence declined at different rates in different places and in different spheres of life. For example, sectarian violence was condoned by the state for much longer than economic violence, while different cities saw rioting decline at remarkably different rates. Rioters themselves seem to have been aware of this. In 1820 the *Glasgow Chronicle* complained that the "mobs that assemble to do honour to the Royal family are always the most destructive because they assume everything will be excused" (*Glasgow Chronicle* 16/11/1820). But, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that riots rarely fit neatly into one category or another. The Chartist unrest of the 1840s included food riots, industrial unrest and outbreaks of criminality (*Manchester Courier* 12/3/1842); meanwhile, in Liverpool, the riots during the general transport strike of 1911 also involved a sectarian battle between Orangemen and Irish Nationalists (*The Times* 15/8/1911). Those events were different faces of a broader practice and they were all structured by the acceptance of crowds and public violence in urban life.

Although the rest of this essay will focus on the general contours of this social and cultural space, it's worth noting in passing that particular places and particular times were also seen as licenses for rioting. For example, riots clustered in particular places in all the three cities. These included places of civic importance, like Liverpool's central square, St George's Plateau, and Glasgow Green, but also more informal gathering spaces like St George Fields, Manchester, which was used for trades gatherings from 1808. No one hub accounted for more than a handful of riots in any given city, but, there are a set of significant places people return to, and these account for roughly a fifth of the riots I have documented. Riots also cluster around particular dates. Again, nearly a fifth of riots happened on occasions like the Glorious 12th of July, St Patrick's Day or during elections. In Liverpool, the 12th of July was not celebrated consistently throughout the period and yet that date saw full-

blown riots on at least 14 occasions. Elections were also plagued by rioting. There were 36 General Elections from 1802 to 1935 and riots were recorded in around a third of them in both Liverpool and Manchester. Rioting also became embedded in more regular cycles. Rivalry between Glasgow's two football clubs, Rangers (the Protestant club) and Celtic (the Catholic club), inflamed sectarian hostilities with a regular calendar of violence. Every Sunday, protestant football fans would march into Catholic streets looking for fights (Taylor 2013). For example, on April 16 1930, a group of 40 to 50 victorious Rangers fans paraded through Gorbals carrying a replica of the Scottish Cup on their way back from the final. Their presence attracted the attention of a local, predominantly Catholic, gang and a riot soon broke out (*Evening Citizen* 17/4/1930). Nevertheless, as rioting's wider social space was closed down, even events like the 12th of July stopped acting as invitations to violence.

The pressure on the two dimensions of crowd life came from a variety of sources and their extent varied in each of the three cities. I will start by describing the role of pressure from above in constricting the space for rioting, as elites became more and more reluctant to sponsor or condone active and assertive crowds. Next I will look at the debates on the place of violence in the different waves of working class protests throughout the nineteenth century, from the Reform Movement, to the Chartists and the growing trade union movement. Finally, I will examine the role of pressure from below, as changing community norms around violence, crowds and popular culture made the traditions of crowd life obsolete. In each case the logic of my argument will be to present independent evidence for the number of riots and for the relevant dimensions of crowd life, and then argue that they map onto each other chronologically and in terms of comparisons between the three cities. The strength of my causal claim therefore rests on that move.

PRESSURE FROM ABOVE: THE ROLE OF ELITES

For much of the nineteenth century, Britain's elites were happy to sponsor active and assertive crowds when it suited their needs. They treated them as legitimate representatives of 'the people' and even occasionally supported their violent excesses. In part, this came from the elite's confidence in their own position and a lingering belief that the

English had a 'right of resistance', an idea which John Locke and other Whigs had espoused since the seventeenth century (Randall 2006: 17). But, they also had specific interests which, from time to time, led them to promote rioting. Often, this took the form of inflaming sectarian rivalries to serve their political interests (a pattern which echoes through to today - see Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012). Liverpool is notorious in this regard, as the local Tory party sponsored the Protestant ships carpenters, then the anti-Catholic Orange Order and other working class Protestant organisations which helped to foster regular violence (Waller 1981, Neal 1992)[5]. One of the worst riots took place during the 1837 election, where initial violence on the 14th of July at a pre-election meeting culminated in two days of fierce street fighting on the 24th and 25th (*Liverpool Mercury* 28/7/1837, *Gore's Liverpool General Advertiser* 27/7/1837). The two Conservative candidates went on to narrowly win the election with 52% of the vote. However, as the Tory Party centrally began to distance itself from the Orange Order, a similar process happened in Liverpool and they switched focus away from violent street fights to a more peaceful form of masculine, English, Protestant, working class Toryism (Waller 1981, Lawrence 1993). The wave of violence from 1900-1911 was particularly important in this process, as rival Protestant factions, led by George Wise and Henry Kensit, fed an escalating cycle of violence and eventually convinced local Tory leaders that this kind of street politics could not be contained or easily managed (see Police [Liverpool Inquiry] Act, 1909). By the end of World War I, sectarian rioting had largely disappeared from the city.

Over time, this withdrawal of elite support for sectarian demonstrations also helped to decouple ethnic violence from other forms of unrest. In 1839 an industrial dispute amongst railway workers ended up pitting Irish against English (*The Times* 15/10/1839). So too did the post-election riot of 1841 where a crowd of Irishmen enforced a boycott of a Tory bread makers shop on Sawney Pope Street (*Liverpool Mercury* 2/7/1841). Politics in Liverpool remained particularly closely connected to sectarianism right up until the early 1900s. In 1910, Protestant 'rabble-rousing' preachers were still being invited to speak at Tory election meetings, sparking vicious fighting and an attack by a nearby

[5] Similar accusations were also made in Manchester that there was a division of special constables who are all Orangemen who provoked unrest by raising orange flags and were then sheltered by various landlords (*Manchester Courier* 1/8/1835).

crowd of Irish Labour voters (*Liverpool Echo* 19/7/1910). Even the 1911 Transport Strike provided an excuse for a riot between Orangemen and Irish nationalists in Great Homer Street (*The Times* 15/8/1911). However, gradually, ethnic violence became separated from economic and political unrest. The unemployed disturbances and political violence of the 1930s saw no sectarian elements, nor did the large outbreaks of looting in 1915 and 1919.

The comparison with Glasgow is instructive because there the connection between elite politics and sectarian violence was reignited in the interwar years, creating a new space for rioting. During the nineteenth century, sectarian rioting in Glasgow had never reached the levels of Liverpool or Manchester. But this changed after World War I, as local politics became entwined with Catholic-Protestant rivalries. The 1918 Education Act, local IRA activity and the establishment of the Scottish Protestant League transformed the political landscape in the city (Smyth 2000), sparking sectarian tensions and leading to at least nine separate riots. The most dramatic of these occurred during the Glorious 12th of July parade in 1925. As 48,000 Protestants returned from the march that evening, the local Irish community hung green flags out of the windows of every tenement and threw bottles down at the Orange Lodge banners below. There were fights in Shettleston, Parkhead, Abercromby Street and Stevenson Street. In Garngad that evening more fights broke out and windows were smashed as Catholic houses and the Emerald Hall were targeted (*Glasgow Herald* 13/7/1925, *Evening Chronicle* 13/7/1925).

As well as sectarian unrest, elites also played a crucial role in creating the space for food riots. In the eighteenth century, small towns across the country were characterised by dense local networks which connected elites directly to those bearing the brunt of high food prices (Bohstedt 1983, Thwaites 1996). And, until the early 1800s, those elites had lingering sympathies for food rioters, sympathies grounded in a kind of benevolent Tudor paternalism (Thompson 1971; Bohstedt 2010: 171-2). However, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, those networks were largely replaced by a system of impersonal rule and a faith in free market principles, eroding local elites' willingness to accept the demands of large, rowdy crowds of food rioters (Randall 2006). Although it's difficult to pinpoint the precise moment at which attitudes

changed, it's clear that by mid-century food riots were frowned on. Descriptions of the 1848 food riot in Glasgow described the crowd as made up of the "lower orders" and Chartist fanatics (*Glasgow Chronicle* 7/3/1848), "desperate looking" young men (*Glasgow Examiner* 9/3/1848) and "blackguards looking for plunder" (*Glasgow Herald* 10/3/1848). Similarly, the food riots in Liverpool in 1855 and 1867 were blamed on "thieves and bad characters" (*The Times* 20/2/1855), "well known roughs" (*Liverpool Mail* 24/2/1855), "blackguards" (*Liverpool Mercury* 19/1/1867), and "habitual criminals" with no connection to the deserving poor (*Liverpool Daily Post* 21/1/1867). This is a marked contrast to the incredibly sympathetic coverage of the May 1808 riots in Manchester, where the reporter recorded the crowd saying "we have nothing to eat; and unless our wages are raised, we might as well play and starve, as work and be famished". He described their wages as "a pittance which will not support nature", the crowd as "poor, half famished, but patient auditors" and admitted that their "sorrowful and piteous tales of distress quite unmanned me" (*The Times* 28/5/1808). Reports like these seem to have vanished by midcentury, as changing attitudes filtered through all levels of local and national press. Alongside this change in values, metropolitan food riots began to decline in the early nineteenth century, and by the 1850s they had all but vanished.

The final area where elites were willing to condone large, assertive and often violent crowds was as part of the electoral process. The election cycle gave many opportunities for violence: from the hustings, to the chairing of the candidates, to polling day itself (O'Gorman 1992, 2000). Although unrest was fairly common in the early nineteenth century (e.g. in Liverpool in July 1802 and again in June 1816: *Annual Register* 1802 p. 424, *Liverpool Mercury* 21/6/1816), election rioting actually *grew* in the years following the 1832 Reform Act and the expansion of the electorate (Baer 2012). Violence seems to have been accepted as a central part of the political system for three reasons: first, the election itself was seen as a useful test of a politician's character and mettle (Lawrence 2006); second, there was a sense that a healthy polity depended on a vigilant and assertive citizenry (Lawrence 2006); and third, rioting also seems to have been correlated with the number of contested constituencies, suggesting that elites incited crowd violence as a tactic during campaigns (Wasserman and Jaggard 2007).

However, rioting was not endorsed by all. It was often condemned in the press and sometimes weaponised by blaming it on the rowdiness of the opposing side. For example, in a fascinating exchange from the election in Ashton in 1841, a large iron screw bolt was found and handed to the Whig candidate who attached a red ribbon to it in order to blame the Tories for using such a 'destructive weapon'. This charge was promptly rebuffed by the Tory candidate as a set up. *The Times* then reported that the bolt had been brought to Manchester deliberately to make a case of intimidation against the Tories (*The Times* 2/7/1841: 3). Election rioting was also legally prosecuted for and some justices took the view that the worst aspect of these riots were that "the crimes were committed in the midst of an election… for the purpose of obstructing the freedom of election" (Justice Swinton 1838: 615). Nevertheless, it seems to have had some legitimate space as part of the political process, which, over the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was closed down. The 1854 Corrupt Practices Act clamped down on bribery and on many of the traditional election excesses. In 1872 hustings were banned as the Ballot Act introduced secret ballots. After World War I, fears of 'brutalisation', the felt need to appeal to new female voters, and changes in political tactics (namely the house-to-house canvassing techniques pioneered by the suffrage and temperance movements), all combined to close down the space for election riots (Lawrence 2006). This combined weight of changing attitudes and legislation shortened and standardised the electoral process, gradually reducing the scale of electoral violence.

There is some disagreement about the timing of this decline. Marc Baer's (2012) study of Westminster indicates that the last serious election riot was in 1841. But Jon Lawrence (2003, 2006) has argued that the turning point didn't come until the early 1920s. My catalogue suggests that election rioting became extremely rare after the 1880s, with only one serious incident after that point when, in 1911 in North Liverpool, ethnic tensions boiled over after Bonar Law won the Bootle by-election. This roughly fits with Wasserman and Jaggard's (2007) quantitative survey which indicates that election violence grew up to the 1868 general election and then started to decline. However, they also claim that only "a handful of English and Welsh constituencies repeatedly experienced disrupted elections" (2007: 154). Perhaps Manchester and Liverpool are exceptional in that regard, but is also worth noting that Glasgow sees almost no election rioting whatsoever, which suggests that local

traditions may have been more important than Wasserman and Jaggard thought.

Over the nineteenth century, elites became reluctant to sponsor rowdy crowds and, slowly but surely, this contributed to the decline in rioting. However, this can only be part of our explanation because some forms of rioting were never condoned by elites. In particular, violence during strikes (and trade unionism more generally) was always condemned. The fact that strike violence in Manchester left so much more of a mark in the Home Office records than sectarian unrest in Liverpool and Glasgow says something about the kinds of violence that scared the central state. And, at a local level, newspaper reports rarely showed any sympathy for the violence of strikers. A *Manchester Mercury* editorial from April 21st 1812 epitomises this: "The distresses of the labouring poor are undoubtedly great, but can Riots and Outrage remove their privations? *Certainly not"* (emphasis in original). Moreover, rioting often occurred in industries whose long run survival was at risk, rather than those which were looked on sympathetically by elites. For example, violence during the 1878 cotton strikes was caused by their belief in the justness of their cause and the correctness of their diagnosis of the problems facing the industry, rather than any realistic chance of victory (*Manchester City News* 18/5/ 1878, King 1985). In Glasgow, the fact that employers took such a hard line against any form of trades union (Johnston and Johnston 2000), has actually been seen as one of the main causes of the wave of militant, and often violent, labour activism in the 1910s (Foster 1990). This suggests a more complicated relationship between riots and elite sponsorship and forces us to consider other factors shaping the crowd life of the nineteenth century.

TACTICAL DEBATES WITHIN POPULAR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The second major source of pressure against rioting came from the leaders of various waves of working class protest. Although all these movements celebrated active and assertive crowds, their relationship with violence was much more complex. The radical movement of the early nineteenth century marks the first wave of struggle in this period. They were in many ways a peaceful movement: their rhetoric and ideology were framed in explicitly constitutional terms, while their organisational focus was the mass meeting (Belchem 1988, Poole 2009,

Navickas 2009). But, they also left an ambiguous space for violence, reserving its use for a time when the constitution was decisively broken. The Peterloo massacre, where local militia charged a peaceful meeting in Manchester killing 18 people and wounding several hundred, was therefore a turning point. The movement's leaders could not decide whether the constitution had been broken by the authorities and whether this legitimated violent resistance. With their rhetorical framework of constitutionalism shattered, the movement was paralysed (Belchem 1985). This ambiguity revealed itself again during the desperate and uncertain uprising of 1820 in Glasgow and northern England. In Glasgow the call for a general strike on the 1st of April 1820 was successful, but then, over the next eight days, the uprising failed to materialise. Groups seized arms, began to manufacture pikes and there were reports of drilling in the countryside. But, the leadership dissipated and, whenever calls were made for groups to assemble, they failed to reach anything like the numbers needed to challenge the military (*Glasgow Herald* 3/4/1820, 7/4/1820, 10/4/1820, 14/4/1820).

Debates around the use of violence resurfaced within the Chartist movement. However, well-documented public spats between advocates of 'moral' and 'physical' force somewhat overplay the extent of this division. Both sides existed on a continuum contained within the logic of 'peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must' and shared a belief in the power of the 'language of menace' which depended on intimidation as much as persuasive power (Sykes 1985). Moreover, individuals moved along this continuum in response to changing circumstances (Maehl 1975). However, there were important regional differences. In Glasgow the emphasis was on 'moral force' and there was far more cooperation between working class Chartists and middle class reformers (Wilson 1970, Montgomery 1974, Fraser 2010). This helped to underpin the strength of Scottish liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century (Smith 1980). Meanwhile, in Liverpool, the already broad franchise gave Chartism little purchase and it was only when the movement momentarily fused with the Irish nationalist cause in 1848 that Chartism found a base there. As this indicates, faith in the second half of the Chartist mantra, 'forcibly if we must', was far from universal, despite the experiences of Peterloo a few decades earlier. This shows up in an absence of significant Chartist riots in both cities.

However, in Manchester, Chartism took on a different character and there was considerable evidence of arming and drilling by the local population (*The Times* 1/2/1820, 11/4/1848, 31/5/1848; also Sykes 1985, Turner 2008). Although this suggests a culture which condoned violence, the strategy still left all the initiative in the hands of the state, because it was predicated on waiting for an incident of state repression which would trigger a wider rising. This is not to say that rioting played no role in the Chartist movement. There were several huge riots in and around Manchester from 1839 to 1848, most notably the Plug Riots of August 1842 and the events in March and August 1848. Moreover, the Home Office clearly took the threat of violence seriously; in 1849, they were still receiving monthly reports on local Chartist activity and the number of troops stationed in different areas (HO 45/2793). However, by the late 1840s, although tactical disagreements sometimes resulted in scuffles at local meetings (*Manchester Times* 15/9/1849), even in Manchester the allure of violent methods seems to have worn off. In fact, the experience of failed European revolutions in 1848 marked the end of Chartist rioting in Manchester (Figure 1 above, Hewitt 1996).

Violence also came to be disavowed within the labour movement. During the anarchic period of Luddite unrest, a leading Luddite was heard to give an order "Kill him, he is a spy!", directing the crowd to hurl stones at the offending individual (HO 40/1/2/20). And this pattern of violent labour unrest was at its most intense from the 1820s to the 1850s. After that, violence didn't disappear completely, but there was a clear shift in the attitude of trade union leaders (Hobsbawm 1952, 1964). In Liverpool, they were even thanked for their work keeping the peace during the religious riots of 1900-11, the 1911 Transport Strike and the 1919 Police Strike (HO 45/11032/423878/42). More significantly, most of the later examples of strike violence show that it had become subordinated to the logic of the strike, rather than being an autonomous tactic in its own right. In a telling example, in Liverpool in 1889, striking sailors directed their violence exclusively at strike breakers, searching English sailors for their union membership cards while allowing Spanish sailors to pass freely (*Liverpool Courier* 6/7/1889). So, while violence was rejected by the leaders of working class political movements, it also fell out of favour on the industrial front.

However, the peaceableness of this narrow group of leaders and

agitators should not be overstated. Even in the 1930s there are occasional incidents of leaders controlling and directing violence. For example, in Glasgow in December 1932 a group of plain clothed policemen were attacked at a demonstration after a speaker shouted that there were 'spies' and 'detectives' in the crowd (*Daily Record* 23/12/1932). It is also difficult to assess how much power leaders really had to prevent violence. The first problem is that it is extremely difficult to locate events which 'almost turned violent', but it's also hard to judge the effectiveness of a power which might have been largely preemptive. There are a few examples where leaders seem to have been able to stop riots which were well under way. For example on May 31st 1859, during a riot in Birkenhead, a local Reverend met the mob at the town hall and persuaded many of them to lay down their arms (*Liverpool Courier* 4/6/1859). There was a similar intervention by a priest to save the life of a police officer three years later, in October 1862, when local Catholics were attacking a meeting held by the British Parliamentary Debating Society on the merits of the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi (*The Times* 17/10/1862). Nevertheless, without a broader, bottom-up cultural change, it is unlikely that these leaders would have been able to shift the weight of tradition and significantly reduce the number of riots.

CHANGING COMMUNITY NORMS: PRESSURE FROM BELOW

It's much harder to recreate the attitudes of working class citizens than their rulers and representatives. There's far less archival material that allows them to speak in their own words, and that which does survive can be very difficult to interpret. However, there are two significant changes which, along with the changing attitudes of elites and working class leaders, help to explain the decline in rioting. First, there was a shift in popular culture which left working class communities increasingly inward-looking, detaching them from the assertive crowd life of early nineteenth century cities. And second, there was an increase in social differentiation, which made it harder to accept the crowd as representing 'the people' in any straightforward way. Taken together, these two changes consigned the traditions of crowd life to the past, squeezing out the space for rioting and helping to bring about its demise.

The nineteenth century saw continued battles over the 'reform of popular culture', as various groups tried to suppress the rowdy

traditions of the past and replace them with more decorous, modern and restrained habits (Burke 2009). This transition began amongst the elite themselves, where violent lifestyles were gradually eclipsed between the 16th and eighteenth centuries (Brundage 2017; see also Elias 2000). Beyond elite society, violent rituals seem to have been common until at least the middle of the nineteenth century (Storch 1976, Thompson 1991, Steinberg 1998). These traditions had many affinities with riots, from the sense of carnival, to the ritualised use of violence and theatricality. Sometimes they led directly into rioting (Storch 1982a), but, more importantly, they shared the same cultural space. We can see this cross-fertilisation throughout the period: the 'rough music' of clanging pots and pans was heard in Manchester during the riots of January 1840 (*Manchester Times* 25/1/1840), teams of rush carters fought at the Oldham Wakes in 1844 (*Manchester Courier* 14/9/1844), effigies were burned in Liverpool in 1872 and 1878 (*Liverpool Mercury* 16/7/1878, *Liverpool Weekly Albion* 20/7/1872), and violence followed the 12th of July celebrations in all three cities. However, by midcentury this rowdy crowd culture had succumbed to systematic attack (Bushaway 1982, Ingram 1984). You can see this in the way that riots become less clustered around auspicious days (like the 12th of July). In the years before 1860, 36% of riots in Liverpool happened on a notable day of some kind. That figure drops to 17% for 1860 to 1939. Manchester shows a smaller decline in the clustering of riots around those days and, significantly, in Glasgow the figure remains constant at around 10%.

In urban areas, these popular traditions were replaced by a very different working class culture. As Gareth Stedman Jones (1974) has demonstrated, the new culture was autonomous and authentically working class, but also enclosed, defensive and small-c conservative. By the end of the nineteenth century, the traditions of the music hall were dominant and the cultural field was increasingly fragmented, consumer-oriented and inward-looking (Bailey 1982, Davies 1992a). The other major innovation was the emergence of football as a mass spectator sport. Football violence has its own peculiar history: in Glasgow it helped to entrench sectarian hostility after World War I (Davies 2006), while in Liverpool the sport actually worked to suppress violence (Roberts 2015). Nevertheless, in both cases, this new form of leisure helped to cut working class culture off from the middle and upper classes. This isolated culture was at odds with the shared social world of

the eighteenth and early nineteenth century that I described above, and with the crowd life that sustained rioting.

Glasgow again follows a different trajectory. Severe economic downturn after World War I compounded a situation of extreme poverty in much of the city (Donnachie et al 1989). This fed into a dramatic growth in gang culture, particularly (though not exclusively) amongst young men (Davies 2013). Unlike the young gangs of 'scuttlers' in nineteenth century Manchester (Gooderson 1997, Davies 1998b), these gangs were increasingly commercially oriented (Davies 1998a, 2007). Along with the growth in football violence, this transformed youth culture in the city, feeding a series of escalating battles between rival gangs and the police. The Chief Constable of Glasgow's police force, Percy Sillitoe, embarked on a proactive campaign to force gangs out of the city. Predictably, this led to retaliation from the local community (see e.g. *Glasgow Herald* 31/5/1920, *Sunday Post* 9/10/1927, *Glasgow Herald* 5/5/1928, *Evening Chronicle* 1/5/1933), at a time when relations with the police were improving across the rest of the country (Klein 2010). These anti-police riots, together with the growth of sectarian hostilities described earlier, account for more than two thirds of the riots in Glasgow in this period and largely explain the unusually late resurgence in rioting in that city (see Figure 1).

The second change which put pressure on the practice of rioting was increasing social differentiation. Speaking of the eighteenth century, E. P. Thompson suggested that rioters were normally "supported by the wider consensus of the community" (Thompson 1971: 78). This was always a bold generalisation, but by the end of the nineteenth century, it had largely broken down. The rapid advance of urbanisation, successive waves of migration, wage and status differentials within working class communities, the growth of the middle classes, and increasing gender and generational divisions, all helped to fragment urban communities (Stedman Jones 1974, Storch 1982b, Foster 1990, Davies 1992b). It therefore became harder to accept the crowd's claim to represent 'the people' as some kind of organic unity. This undermined the acceptance of active and assertive crowds in public life and, in particular, the community consensus which supported rioting.

There are two trends in the way people rioted which reflect this: first, the

decline of 'prison rescues', and second, the decline of rioters marching over long distances to spread unrest. In both cases, these actions depended on rioters confidently assuming the support of the wider community. And so, the decline of those actions can be used as indirect evidence of the loss of consensus around rioting. This is clearest in the case of 'prison rescues'. In the early part of the nineteenth century, it was common to see the whole community turn against the police, often surrounding them and following them back to bridewells, even encircling or attacking the jails (e.g. *The Times* 1/3/1819). Actions like this are simply foolhardy without the overwhelming support of the local population and, even then, were rarely successful. These 'prison rescues' were common features of unrest in the early nineteenth century, but, outside of Glasgow, they become rare after the turn of the century.[6] It is also important to note that those prison rescues which do occur after 1900 tend to happen at moments of unusual community cohesion. For example, during the anti-German riots during World War I there were prison rescues in Liverpool, while in Manchester the courts themselves decided to release two young men and two young women who had just been arrested (*Liverpool Echo* 12/5/1915, *Manchester Courier* 15/5/1915). In Liverpool in April 1903, a Protestant crowd trying to rescue prisoners shouted at the police 'They are Wiseites, let them go!', justifying their actions with reference to a popular English Protestant identity (*Liverpool Echo* 27/4/1903). However, the overall trend seems to away from that level of normative consensus. Even in Glasgow the relationship between the crowd and the police in the interwar period is more ambiguous than it first appears. During the Battle of George Square in 1919 groups of people turned against the rioters and made them return their looted goods, while 'loyal workers' protested against the unrest (*Daily Record* 1/2/1919). Similarly, in May 1920, people came to the rescue of a police officer who was being held over the rails of Albert Bridge by an angry mob (*Glasgow Herald* 31/5/1920).

A similar pattern can be seen in rioters' use of marching. Adrian Randall (2006) has argued that rioters in the eighteenth century were so confident of sharing the same moral beliefs as others, that they would march from town to town, spreading unrest across large areas. There is

[6] In Liverpool and Manchester there were no riots involving prison rescues during the interwar years, while in Glasgow there were 7.

clear evidence from the early nineteenth century that rioters still held onto that assumption, even if they were often disappointed on arrival (see e.g. *Glasgow Herald* 07/04/1820, 10/04/1820; *The Times* 28/05/1808; *The Times* 30/04/1812; *Manchester Courier* 22/07/1826; Navickas 2016: 290-291, cf Bohstedt 2010). But, after the 1860s, this became vanishingly rare, again suggesting that the community consensus around rioting had broken down. It is interesting that this tradition of marching also disappeared in Glasgow, despite rioting itself remaining common up to 1939. Two potential explanations suggest themselves. It is possible that the practice simply had a different local form; indeed, marching never played as prominent a role in Glasgow as in Liverpool or Manchester. But, it is also possible that, by the twentieth century, Glaswegians knew they didn't share a common set of presuppositions about rioting with the surrounding towns and villages of Lanarkshire.

This combination of growing social differentiation and changes to popular culture helped to erode the space for rioting. Violence no longer came readily and crowds no longer played a central role in urban communities. On top of the pressure from elites and working class leaders, this made the traditions of crowd life increasingly untenable. And so, gradually and unevenly, the practice of rioting itself declined.

DISCUSSION: BETWEEN REPERTOIRES AND PRACTICES

Throughout this essay I have treated rioting as a practice, without interrogating that term too closely. But, that conceptual move has important implications. Most significantly, it allows us to extend and refine Charles Tilly's famous metaphor of the 'repertoire of contention'. Tilly introduced this idea as a way of explaining the fact that would-be protestors tended to cling to "the same forms of collective expression… and never engaged in a wide variety of technically feasible ways of making collective claims" (Tilly 2008: xiii). Instead, they draw on well established scripts, improvising and extending them in certain ways, but remaining constrained by the repertoire they have learned.

Bringing this notion of repertoires into dialogue with theories of practice

is useful in several ways. The first concerns repertoires' micro-foundations. In his early work, Tilly suggests that, although repertoires are "learned cultural creations", individual performances are chosen "through a relatively deliberate process of choice" (Tilly 1993: 264). This creates a tension between the stress on meaning and culture, and the act of rational choice. The idea that tactics are chosen in this deliberate way raises difficulties. Of course people do ask the utilitarian question of which tactic is most likely to succeed. But, it is not clear that the decline of riots can be explained by supposing that they went from being regularly successful, to being largely impotent. Some historians have claimed that food riots led "often enough [to] winning relief supplies of food" and that they reached a peak in scale and efficacy during the famine years of 1795-6 and 1800-1 (Bohstedt 2010: 1). However, others have argued that "in terms of immediate gains, it must be admitted that it achieved comparatively little" (Rudé 1964: 259). Others are more agnostic, but ultimately conclude that it was only in terms of long run, indirect effects on markets and expectations that eighteenth century riots can be said to have been effective (Thompson 1971). Riots also did not become completely ineffective as they moved into the twentieth century. As Jacqueline Jenkinson (2009) pointed out, the anti-German riots of 1915 led to the internment of Germans in Britain, riots by ex-soldiers in 1918-19 led to faster de-mobilisation, and the race riots of 1919 led to the deportation of sailors and soldiers born in British colonial Africa and the Caribbean.

In fact, in his later work, Tilly himself backs away from this emphasis on rational choice (Tilly 2008; see Krinsky and Mische 2013). But, he never explicitly replaces it with an alternative micro-foundation[7]. This is where practice theory (particularly a pragmatist reading of it) can be usefully deployed. Theories of practice have a long and varied history, from Aristotle's writings on habits and virtues, to Marx's understanding of labour as an essential human capacity, the American pragmatists anthropology of human action, and Wittgenstein's notion of 'rule following'. But, they all share a common view of human action which foregrounds meanings, as opposed to social norms or utility maximisation (Joas 1996, Reckwitz 2002, Gross 2009). Treating rioting

[7] He focusses instead on the macro question of how repertoires evolve, a process he likens to jazz improvisation and the evolution of language (Tilly 2008).

as a practice therefore focusses our attention onto the shared ideas and presuppositions which lie behind it, which in this case I described as crowd life. However, instrumental reasoning does not disappear completely from this picture. Theories of practice also presume that humans are problem solvers, who, through an interplay of habitual action and innovation, develop certain modes of thought and action which they use to try to solve concrete problems. This is, fundamentally, a purposive view of human action, where practices are creatively and actively deployed in particular circumstances (Gross 2009: 365). And when those circumstances change, as they did over the course of the nineteenth century, practices will change with them.

The second point of connection concerns repertoires' geographic and temporal scope. In terms of space, Tilly often (though not exclusively) focussed on the was repertoires vary across different types of state (Tilly 2008: chpt 6; cf Tilly and Wood 2003). This risks obscuring the local histories I described above, as well as the ways in which particular forms of protest cluster together because of certain cultural affinities (Doherty and Hayes 2012, Ring-Ramirez et al 2014). In terms of time, one of Tilly's most famous arguments concerns the emergence of the new 'social movement' repertoire in the early nineteenth century, a process he attributes to state centralisation and the growth of free markets (Tilly 1993, 1995). In less careful hands than his own, this narrative collapses into a passage through discrete, teleological stages on route to modernity (e.g. Clover 2016). Again this epochal vision of time is difficult to reconcile with the gradual and uneven history of rioting that I described above. Although these macro perspectives are extremely valuable, thinking about rioting as a particular practice gives us the option of sticking closer to the empirical detail. It allows us to concentrate on the specificity of a practice to "particular communities or groups [whether geographic, occupational or interest-based]" (Gross 2009: 365), and it encodes a vision of history which emphasises the continual, evolutionary adaptation of practices in response to changing conditions (Mead 1929). In both cases, thinking about rioting as a particular practices helps to refine our broader understanding of the repertoire of contention.

CONCLUSION

This essay began with an empirical puzzle: how to explain the uneven decline of rioting in Britain over the nineteenth century? Previous arguments about the increase in 'relief and repression' and the rise of new ways of protesting, fail to fully explain the different trajectories of rioting in different cities and its persistence alongside other forms of contention. Using a new systematic catalogue of riots in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, I argued that the key change was in the social and cultural space which sustained the practice of rioting, the decline in crowd life. Under growing pressure from elites, from the leaders of the nascent working class movement and through changes in working class culture, that space was gradually closed down and, with that, rioting faded.

I have also suggested a new theoretical approach, treating rioting as a practice in its own right. Reframing the history of rioting as the gradual evolution of a particular practice has several significant implications. Most importantly, it may offer insights when thinking about contemporary protests. Instead of treating different tactics as interchangeable elements in a wider repertoire, it suggests that they are creative deployments of particular practices. This emphasises the context-specific meanings associated with different forms of protest (Crossley 2002, Gillan 2019). And also forces us to pay attention to the patterns of adaptation, adoption and transmission which characterise the particular genealogies of different practices (Tartakowsky 1998, Traugott 2010, Biggs 2013).

However, there are several limits to this argument. First, although this is an explicitly cultural explanation, many of these cultural changes seem to have had material roots and more work is needed to examine their ultimate causes. Second, more research is also needed to examine the regional history of rioting in other parts of the UK. Too many existing studies are based on national, but London-based, newspapers. Systematic investigations of other cities would enable my arguments to be more rigorously tested and perhaps throw up new hypotheses and new empirical puzzles. This might also prove to be a more tractable way of studying the history of social movements given the huge difficulties in building nationwide catalogues.

Another area which I have only touched on is the connection between riots and interpersonal violence. On the one hand, it seems plausible that a population more used to violence would be more willing to engage in rioting (Collins 2008; see also Granovetter 1978). On the other hand, many writers have suggested a link between periods of civil unrest and everyday criminality (Smelser 1962, Gurr 1977). It is true that there was a massive and generalised decline in interpersonal violence in the later half of the nineteenth century. From 1875 to 1900 the rate of assaults per 100,000 people fell from 423 to 204, while there were equally steep declines in wounding offences and homicides (Bailey 2014a: 1). However, there is also evidence from court records and local archives which suggests that homicides had been declining steadily since the 14th century, a trend which was common to much of Europe (Eisner 2003). It's hard to see how this much longer trend can be mapped onto the various waves of rioting over that 600 year period. It's also worth noting that, during the 1920s and 1930s, murder rates appear to be higher in Liverpool than in Glasgow, with Manchester more peaceful than either of them.[8] More research is clearly needed to unpick these potential connections.

In the last decade, a wave of riots has swept across Europe and north America, sparking a renewed sociological interest in the subject (e.g. Lewis et al 2012, Badiou 2012, Mayer et al 2016, Clover 2016). However, much work still needs to be done to challenge the dominant image of riots as unpredictable outbursts of madness. Thinking about the particular local traditions that rioters are engaging with and comparing those different practices across space and time can deepen our understanding of rioting and help us to see how those moments of madness are structured (e.g. Traugott 2010, Ketchley 2014). During the recent 'gilet jaunes' riots in Paris, graffiti linked President Macron to King Louis XVI (who was executed during the 1789 revolution) and

[8] The average annual number of murders and attempted murders (by number of persons proceeded against) in Glasgow from 1925-1937 (the only years with data available for that period, 1931 is also unavailable) is 6.7, while its population was over a million. In Liverpool the average annual number of murders and attempts, threats or conspiracies to murder (by indictable offences known to the police) was 8.7 over the same period, with a smaller population of over 800,000. In Manchester the average number of murders and attempts, threats or conspiracies to murder (by indictable offences known to the police) was 4.5, with a population of over 700,000. Calculated from Home Office Judicial Statistics.

proclaimed 'The people want the fall of the regimes', echoing the famous slogan from the Arab Spring.[9] As sociologists, we should take these genealogical references seriously and use them to make sense of the gradually evolving practice of rioting.

[9] *The Guardian,* Monday 3 December 2018.

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