

The changing practice of rioting: Revisiting repertoire transitions in Britain, 1800–1939

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Abstract: This paper uses a systematic catalogue of 414 riots in Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester to examine the changing practice of rioting from 1800 to 1939. Three empirical findings emerge: first, over this period, riots went from being an autonomous tactic to one which was largely subordinated to other protest logics; second, the way rioters chose their targets changed: instead of targeting individuals with whom rioters had concrete relationships, they started targeting people as tokens of some wider type; third, throughout this period rioting was a localised practice which reflected local traditions and dynamics. On the basis of these findings, I revisit the orthodox history of social movements and suggest we refine this narrative to explicitly acknowledge continuity in the repertoire of contention, regional variation, the uneven reach of the state and to properly distinguish between individual practices like demonstrations, composite forms like social movements and the repertoire as a whole.

Keywords: Charles Tilly, repertoires, riots, the state, violence, urban

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Introduction

Over the last decade, riots have returned to cities across Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East. There was unrest in England in August 2011 and in France in February 2017 and November 2018; there were riots in Ferguson in August 2014 and in Turkey in May 2013; even the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in early 2011 began as riots. Aside from their often-dramatic political effects, this wave of unrest has also unsettled entrenched narratives about the evolution of protest and reopened debates about the nature of collective action (Borch 2012; Mayer, Thörn and Thörn 2016; Clover 2016). Much of the existing research has focussed on questions like who riots (Santoro and Broidy 2014; Kawalerowicz and Biggs 2015), why particular cities seem particularly prone to rioting (Myers 2010) and the changing incidence of rioting across nations (Lagi, Bertrand and Bar-Yam 2011). Researchers have also tried to unpick riots' internal dynamics (Stott, Drury and Reicher 2017; Stott, Ball, Drury, Neville, Reicher, Boardman and Choudhury 2018) and to figure out how they reflect wider cultural patterns (Treadwell, Briggs, Winlow and Hall 2013). But we know much less about the long run history of rioting, about how these modern events fit into the longer lineage of violent resistance, or about how that tradition has evolved over time. In fact, as with social movement studies more generally (Tilly 2011), we too often treat riots as transhistorical constants, rather than investigating their historical transformations. This essay attempts to address this gap by using a systematic catalogue of 414 riots in Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester from 1800 to 1939 to explore the long run trends in the practice of urban rioting in Britain.

Returning to the violent events of the 19th century allows us to do two things. On the empirical level, it offers a historical vantage point from which to examine the changing practice of rioting. I make three principal claims about that history. First, riots went from being an autonomous tactic to one which was largely (though not entirely) subordinated to other protest logics, notably the strike and the demonstration. Second, the way that rioters chose their victims changed: instead of targeting particular individuals with whom rioters had concrete social relationships, they started targeting people as tokens of some wider type. Third, urban rioting at that time was a localised practice which reflected particular local traditions and dynamics. At a more historiographical or theoretical level, this research allows us to revisit the orthodox history of protest, which is largely based on studies of Britain from this period (Tilly 1995, 2008). I suggest that we refine this narrative to better account for continuity in the repertoire of contention, regional variation, the uneven reach of the state and to properly distinguish between individual practices like demonstrations, composite forms like the social movement and the repertoire as a whole.

I then conclude by codifying a new research agenda. The modern repertoire of protest is made up of many different component parts, from marches and demonstrations, to strikes, petitions, civil disobedience and electoral campaigns.

However, there has been comparatively little research examining the individual histories of these various practices. Research along those lines would help to illuminate a properly historical sociological imagination, one which privileges the interplay between different social forces across time. This means focussing on how particular practices *evolve* over the *longue durée*, as well as charting their emergence and diffusion; exploring the variety of links *between* different practices, as well as typologising them as part of this or that repertoire; and locating individual instances of protests within *particular historical traditions*, as well as their structural context.

Cataloguing riots

Investigating the changing practice of rioting requires a systematic, long run event catalogue. This is an extremely labour intensive process and so I limited my scope in three ways. First, I focussed on Britain in the period 1800 to 1939. This allows for an extended commentary on the country and period that provides the basis for much of the seminal historical work on the history of protest. It also allows me to adopt the same research procedure throughout, relying on historical newspapers, police reports and Home Office documents. If I had pushed further back into the 18th century then I would have had to switch to different sources, which would have made comparison between events more difficult and so threatened the coherence of the overall catalogue.

Second, I concentrated on urban rioting. This obviously narrows the scope of my conclusions, but it allows me to concentrate on a practice that is much more relevant to today's urbanised world. Following earlier work, I then defined riots as instances of public, collective violence against people or property involving more than twenty people (this follows Lieberman and Silverman 1965; Stevenson 1979; Bohstedt 1983; Rummel and Tanter 1984; Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney 1996).

The third methodological choice was to concentrate on Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow. This opens up the possibility of regional comparisons and also allows us to situate riots in their particular local contexts. Although these cities have different economic bases, they faced similar challenges over the 19th and early 20th century: rapidly growing populations, frequent periods of catastrophic recession, significant migration (particularly Irish migration), political tensions and the growing power of the central state.

My procedure for finding and describing riots was as follows. I searched three digital newspaper archives (*The Annual Register* [an annual reference work published in London, 1758-1994], *The Times* [a daily newspaper published in London from 1785], and all the local newspapers from the three cities included in the British

Newspaper Archive as of August 2016¹) using keywords (riot, riots, rioting, rioter, rioters, mob, disturbance, disturbances, tumult, tumults, disorder, disorders plus Manchester/ Liverpool/ Glasgow). These newspapers were chosen because they represent the major newspapers of record and the widest possible sample of local publications. The search terms were developed by reading a selection of articles about riots from across the period to see which terms were used. These searches produced nearly 20,000 results which I went through manually to determine whether they referred to a riot happening in each city or not. That initial catalogue was then expanded using: Watch Committee Reports for Liverpool and Manchester, Home Office records (HO 40, 44 and 45) and secondary literature. Finally, the dates from the catalogue were then used to search for further sources in the newspapers stored on microfilm at Glasgow City Archives, Manchester Central Library and Liverpool Record Office.² This resulted in a catalogue of 414 riots and over 1200 sources (now publicly available, Tiratelli 2019). The different accounts from different sources were then used to produce triangulated accounts for each riot (Stott et al 2018: 826-7).

This leaves two major methodological issues: selection bias and description bias. The first problem arises because the chances of a given newspaper reporting a given riot depend on the characteristics of the event, the newspaper in question, other potential stories and the general socio-cultural atmosphere (Ortiz, Myers, Walls and Diaz 2005). Because of this, I doubt that my procedure will have picked up every single incident of violence involving more than twenty people. However, I

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 newspapers: *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 Times*, and *Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle*. Liverpool newspapers: *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 newspapers: *Daily 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*.

am fairly confident that the 414 riots cover the 'near universe' of riots in each city and certainly the most significant ones. When checking my results against Home Office records (HO 40, 44, 45 and 144) and secondary sources, I found no large riots (riots which seem to have involved hundreds of people) which I had not already picked up through keyword searches. This may reflect genuine gaps in the historical record, but it seems fairly implausible that a large riot would have left no traces in any of the many newspapers and records that are now available for this period.

The second problem is whether my sources can be relied on to give accurate descriptions of those riots. Ultimately, the answer depends on what you are looking to these sources to document. For my purposes, I needed accurate and detailed descriptions of how these events played out on the ground. Therefore, where possible, I triangulated across different newspaper accounts and different archival materials. These are wonderfully rich accounts, providing dates, times, precise locations and descriptions of the actions of rioters and law enforcement. Often, they provide descriptions of the crowd and their banners, flags or uniforms, the political content attributed to or claimed by the rioters, as well as the things that rioters said, the songs they sung and chants they shouted. The major limitation of these sources is that they tend to concentrate on the actions of the rioters themselves, isolating them from their interactions with police and other authorities. Unpicking this relational dimension would be essential for a full account of the practice of rioting, but it lies beyond the scope of this essay.

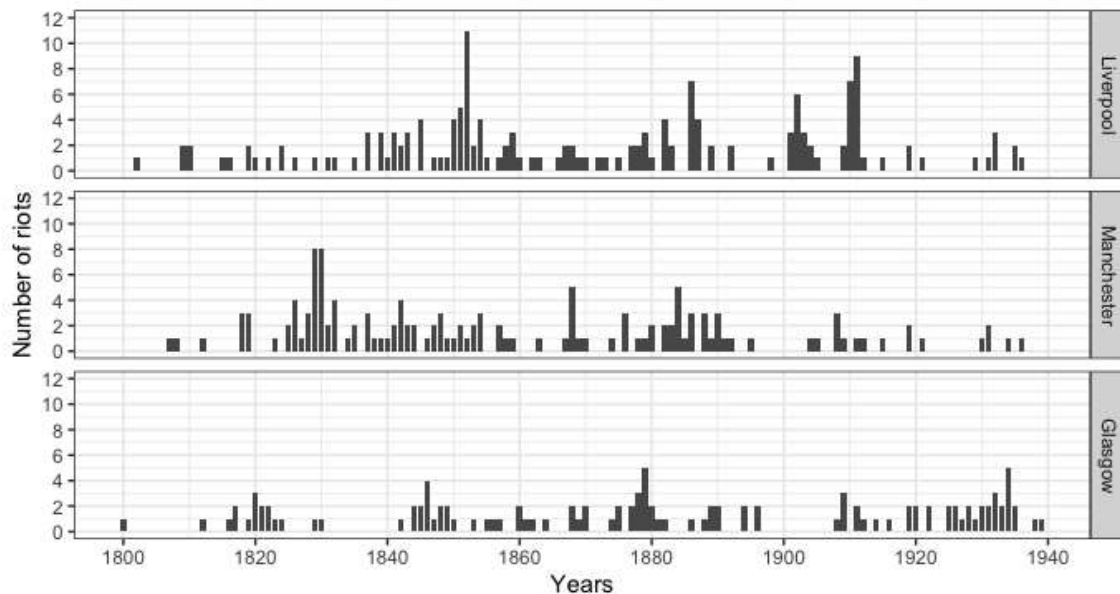
This catalogue was then approached from an 'events-in-history' perspective (Tarrow 2019). That is, rather than simply relying on pre-coded data points, I try to place those events in their individual historical context, to understand their particular dynamics by weaving together quantitative and qualitative analysis. Therefore, in order to guard against 'cherry picking', I have quantified my catalogue of riots in various ways, measuring the level of rioting over time and space and the occurrence of particular types of riot behaviour (from who was targeted, to 'factory visiting' and 'begging'). This allows me to simplify and test some of my hunches about the long run trends in the practice of rioting. However, these are very minimal tests, which need to be buttressed by more detailed arguments relying on rich, archival evidence.

A history of urban rioting, 1800-1939

The 19th and early 20th centuries were fertile grounds for rioting. As Figure 1 shows, the level of urban rioting seems to have grown in the early part of this period, before falling, gradually and unevenly, from around the 1850s or 1860s. Manchester sees a peak during the 1820s and 1830s Reform agitations before declining significantly after 1860. In Liverpool, the peak occurs slightly later and is generated mostly by the anti-Irish rioting of the early 1850s. There is then a

noticeable decline punctuated by the wave of sectarian violence from 1900-1911, the anti-German riots of 1915 and the police strike of 1919. Glasgow, however, seems to diverge significantly from this trend, with fairly concentrated waves of rioting in the 1820s, 1840s and 1880s, before a noticeable resurgence of rioting in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 1: The number of riots per year



Notes: For sources see text and Tiratelli (2019)

The overall pattern of uneven and inconsistent decline fits fairly well with the evidence we have for the rest of the country (see Stevenson 1979; Gatrell 1980; Randall 2006; Bailey 2014b). During the cotton famine of the early 1860s, journalists praised the pacification of Britain, saying, “in the ‘gold old times’ it might have happened that under similar circumstances riots would have been created” (*The Times* 22/12/1862)³. But, the pundits were soon proved wrong, as riots broke out in Stalybridge and Ashton only a few months later. Traditional food riots became fairly rare after 1819, but continued throughout much of the century including Liverpool in 1855, Stalybridge in 1863 and Oxford and Devon in 1867 (*Liverpool Mercury* 23/02/1855; HO 45/7523A; Storch 1982, HO 45/7992). The 1880s saw almost continual rioting against the Salvation Army in various towns across the country (Bailey 2014b), as well as the infamous events of Black Monday in Pall Mall and the Bloody Sunday demonstration in Hyde Park (Channing 2015). The proud tradition of election riots continued into at least the 1890s and found a modern equivalent in the anti-fascist riots of the 1930s and 1940s (Lawrence 2003, 2006). Likewise

³ All dates in references are given as Day/Month/Year.

anti-Catholic violence continued to rear its ugly head, with William Murphy's scandalous anti-Catholic lectures causing violence across England throughout the 1860s (see e.g. *Manchester Times* 01/02/1868, HO 45/7991). Ethnic rioting then continued into the 20th century, with the race riots of 1919 and beyond. Jacqueline Jenkinson suggests that, even after World War I, "in expressing their feelings in violent terms, the crowds of rioters... were acting out a familiar scenario" (2009: 19). Overall, across Britain there were at least 450 riots from 1865 to 1914 (Richter 1965). Looking only at my three cities, I found 163 riots in that time period and a further 54 up to 1939. Explaining the causes of this slow and uneven decline is a vital empirical challenge, but unfortunately, it lies beyond the scope of this essay and will have to be explored elsewhere. The focus instead is on how the practice of rioting itself evolved.

The subordination of economic rioting

Rioting played a central role in the development of the British labour movement. In the early 1800s, violent practices like attacking factories in order to spread the strike ('factory visiting'), machine-breaking, forcibly setting the price of grain and 'begging' for relief in wealthy parts of town, were common elements of economic unrest. For example, in Manchester in July 1818, a wave of exceptionally disciplined and peaceful strikes broke out amongst cotton spinners. Even *The Times* described it as in "steady adherence to the rules of combination" (21/06/1818). However, by September, strikers were seen booing and shaming local notables, attacking factories and even the home of an employer (*Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle* 05/09/1818, *The Times* 02/05/1826). In Ancoats in April 1812, and again in April 1826, striking weavers broke into the homes of strikebreakers, destroyed power looms and forced merchants to lower their prices (*Manchester Mercury* 21/04/1812, *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette* 29/04/1826). Similarly, in May 1829, rioters started a system of 'sturdy begging', visiting shops and the houses of the wealthy asking for donations (*Manchester Mercury* 19/05/1829, *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette* 09/05/1829). These events therefore combined traditional elements, direct attacks and machine breaking with disciplined strikes and intimidation.

Early economic unrest in Liverpool and Glasgow was similarly varied. In Glasgow, attempts to set the price of goods were reported in October 1800 and again in September 1817 (*The Times* 25/10/1800, *Glasgow Herald* 19/09/1817). Meanwhile, in November 1812 and September 1823, striking weavers broke into the homes of strikebreakers, destroyed their pieces and even attempted to assassinate the manager of a power-loom factory (*The Times* 25/11/1812, *Glasgow Herald* 12/09/1823, *Glasgow Chronicle* 09/09/1823). One of the largest riots of this early period took place in August 1816 when 'some gibing expression' used by a relief officer at a Calton soup kitchen led to a riot. The crowd then threw stones and attempted to rescue prisoners before attacking a steam loom factory on Tureen Street (*Glasgow Herald* 02/08/1816). Liverpool saw far less industrial unrest in this early period, however, it does contain some of the last examples of food rioting

anywhere in Britain. The events of February 1855 and January 1867 followed 18th century traditions as rioters demanded bread from the shops and begged for relief at the houses of the middle class (*Liverpool Mercury* 23/02/1855, *Liverpool Weekly Albion* 26/02/1855). There is a remarkable account from 1855 of a woman stealing pea flour by accident. When she realised her mistake she returned to the shop and demanded the shopkeeper exchange it for her. He refused, but did not dare to ask her to give back the pea flour (*Liverpool Mail* 24/02/1855). Just as in Manchester, these events combine traditional routines, personalised attacks and machine breaking with the disciplined strikes of the modern labour movement.

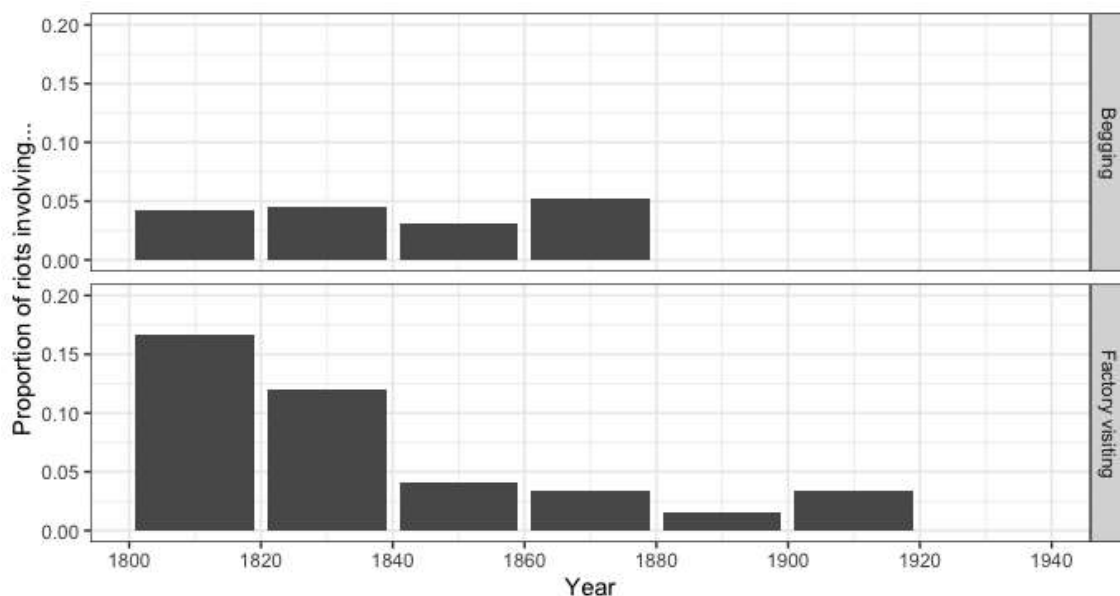
However, this pattern soon began to change and, by the late 19th century, although economic violence remained common, it had become largely subordinated to the logic of the strike. Rioting sailors in Liverpool in July 1889 carefully directed their violence at fellow trade unionists who were crossing the picket line, allowing Spanish sailors to pass unmolested and searching English sailors for their union cards (*Liverpool Courier* 06/07/1889). There were similar scenes during the strikes in Glasgow in August 1911 and February 1912. Huge numbers of workers assembled outside dock sheds or tram depots waiting for strikebreakers to arrive or leave, and these daily pickets were the main site of violence. Rioters also charged sheds trying to stop ships from being unloaded and blocked strikebreakers access to the subway stations (*Glasgow Herald* 14/08/1911, 10/02/1912). The *Daily Record* (14/08/1911) even reported that there were mostly good relations between the police and the crowd, while rioters' focus was on those breaking the strike. Indeed, in February 1912, the trigger for violence was a rumour that non-union men were being smuggled onto the boats (*Glasgow Herald* 10/02/1912).

The recognition of the particular form and logic of the strike, what Eric Hobsbawm (1964) called 'learning the rules of the game', changed the way violence was used. For example, in Liverpool, after the brickmakers' and dock labourers' strikes of February 1879, rioters never again targeted their employers' machinery or infrastructure. The logic of the strike implies that workers are returning to work, which means there is little incentive to destroy the tools strikers hoped to be using again soon. The April 1912 riots in Pendlebury, Salford, made an even more direct reference to the 'rules of the game'. There the immediate trigger for the unrest was a misunderstanding between strikers and management about the precise terms of the strike: whether coal mined before the strike began could be delivered or not (*The Times* 08/04/1912). That strike also marks one of the last incidents of factory visiting, which emerged as a challenge to the large, institutionalised, bureaucratic trade unions that had done so much to formalise the 'rules of the game'. Large bands of strikers were seen marching between the collieries around Manchester trying to spread the revolt against the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (the main union which had, after six weeks, called off the strike) (*The Times* 11/04/1912).

One way of quantifying this changing use of violence is to look at the decline in two specific routines mentioned above: begging and factory visiting. These traditional

forms of direct action had no place in the logic of the strike and they declined dramatically across the period, becoming extremely rare after the 1850s and all but disappearing by the 1880s (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The proportion of riots involving ‘begging’ or ‘factory visiting’



Notes: For sources see text and Tiratelli (2019)

The history of begging is particularly interesting in this regard. Of course, rioters' demands have always been backed up by threats and force (indeed, the *Manchester Mercury* [19/05/1829] made much of the fact that people were being charged for theft of things that had been handed to them, but under intimidation). However, in the early 19th century, these threats were often concealed within a performance of asking for and receiving relief. In many cases rioters left shops unharmed if a few loaves were thrown out to them, concentrating their violence on those shops which seemed to be violating this tradition by shutting their shutters or refusing to hand out loaves (e.g. *Manchester Courier* 13/08/1842). In Liverpool in January 1867, rioters even left a shop promising to return only once its had returned (*Liverpool Mercury* 19/01/1867). However, over the course of the 19th century, this traditional framework began to break down. During the food riot in Liverpool in February 1855, handing out bread only occasionally pacified the crowd. One shopkeeper even had the loaves thrown back at his face as the rioters moved on to take money from the tills of pubs and break into pawnshops (*The Times* 21/02/1855). Here we see the beginning of looting in its more modern form, unconstrained by tradition and the thin veil of acceptability. More significantly, as the traditional cultural norms that lent begging a quasi-normative status were eroded, it slowly vanished, disappearing completely after the 1870s. The cumulative effect was that rioting gradually came to

be subordinated to the logic of a different form of protest, namely the strike.

Marching, demonstrations and violence

A similar process can be seen in the relationship between rioting and marching. Processions had been a key part of British popular culture for most of the early modern period. From the annual 'perambulations' of the Parish boundaries, the parades of Masons, Odd Fellows and trade associations, to rushbearing and various religious processions, they formed a central part of traditional rural calendars (Bushaway 1982; Storch 1982; Thompson 1991; Poole 2006). And they were also vitally important to the street theatre that defined urban politics in the 18th and 19th centuries (Rogers 1989, 1998; Shoemaker 2004). Marching also played a more specific role within riots. Adrian Randall (2006) has argued that one of the defining features of earlier food riots was the fact that rioters marched over prodigious distances. Guided by local knowledge and confident of a shared moral compass, they marched over parish boundaries, controlling whole areas for days or weeks (cf Bohstedt 2010: 16-7). Particularly in the early 1800s, there were many examples of urban rioters moving across large distances, spreading unrest. In Glasgow, the uprising of April 1820 saw groups of radicals marching from town to town, trying to gather support for their faltering insurgency (*Glasgow Herald* 07/04/1820, 10/04/1820). In Manchester, during the strike waves of May 1808, April 1812, July 1826 and August 1842, groups of rioters regularly marched between the city and the surrounding towns (*The Times* 28/05/1808; *The Times* 30/04/1812; *Manchester Courier* 22/07/1826; Navickas 2016: 290-291). These attempts to spread unrest were not always successful. In July 1826, rioters marched from Ancoats, in north Manchester, to Middleton, where they expected friends and arms. But, when they got there, they found that they could not induce the 'honest men of Middleton' to raid the shops and they were promptly dispersed by cavalry (*Manchester Courier* 22/07/1826).

If marching once played a supportive role within the practice of rioting, by the end of the century this had become extremely rare. One of the last examples occurred during the anti-Catholic violence of 1868 when William Murphy's incendiary anti-Catholic sermons in Ashton sparked off two huge riots in January and May, which saw crowds marching out to Dukinfield and Stalybridge to encourage anti-Irish attacks in other towns (*The Times* 01/02/1868, HO 45/7991). But these were exceptional events, the overarching pattern during the 19th century was that the relationship between rioting and marching became inverted as the practice of rioting got caught up in the 'orderly' demonstrations of the new social movements (Tilly 1995, 2008). During Manchester's 1818 spinners' strike, for example, workers marched in 'regular military files' to factories, trying to persuade women employed there to leave their jobs. But, these disciplined parades went alongside arson, attacks on factories, threatening letters and the macabre sight of a dead and skinned rabbit hoisted on lamppost at Deansgate (*The Times* 04/08/1818). Even by the 1840s those older, carnivalesque traditions had not totally disappeared. In

March 1848, rioters reclaimed New Cross from the police and paraded loaves of bread (*Manchester and Salford Advertiser* 11/03/1848). In Glasgow, this interweaving of old and new coloured the protests in defence of Queen Caroline in November 1820. When the news broke that Parliament had dropped the bill King George was trying to use to divorce the Queen, celebrations quickly escalated with illuminations, bonfires and parades across the city centre. But the crowd also smashed windows, lamps and police boxes, liberated prisoners and tore up railings (*Glasgow Chronicle* 16/11/1820). There were similar scenes in April the following year on the King's birthday (*Glasgow Herald* 27/04/1821). Therefore, although the social movement repertoire would come to dominate protest over the next 200 years, for the first half of the 19th century, it proved difficult to separate orderly processions from violent rioting.

The tradition of religious parading reveals a slightly different history, but one which also emphasises the overlap between orderly processions and riots. In Liverpool, the marching of rival bands, lodges and churches (often accompanied by raucous songs, banners and flags) were sites of violence throughout this period. Indeed, bands often seemed to have deliberately drawn crowds into hostile areas to provoke riots. In August 1905, for example, a Protestant crowd tried to persuade the Garston Liverpool Heroes L.O.L. band to parade an Irish area known as 'the bogs', in what would have been an obvious act of provocation (*Liverpool Courier* 28/08/1905). Right the way up to World War I, parades and bands caused chaotic scenes of violence across Liverpool and, from the turn of the century, the police were regularly asked to ban them. In Glasgow, this process took even longer. There the 12th of July parades still acted as an excuse for rioting throughout the 1920s and 1930s. So, although they followed a different lineage, religious parades were similarly haunted by the spectre of violence.

There is an obvious contradiction between parades as displays of respectability and violent rioting. Unlike with strikes, riots were rarely used to support orderly parades. Instead, they came out of frustration when parades were obstructed or protestors frustrated. This continued into the 1930s, when the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) tried to recreate the hunger marches of the 18th and 19th century in social movement form (Perry 2013). In Glasgow in October 1931, riots broke out at the moment when the police tried to disperse an NUWM demonstration being held in Glasgow Green (*Evening Times* 02/10/1931). That same month in Manchester, a meeting of 10,000 unemployed workers in Ardwick Green decided not to follow the prearranged, police approved route for their march. As they set off into town, fights quickly broke out with the police who tried to redirect the procession (*Manchester Evening News* 07/10/1931). Rather than marching to spread the riot, rioting had become a contentious and controversial aspect of the new social movement tradition.

Changing patterns of targeting

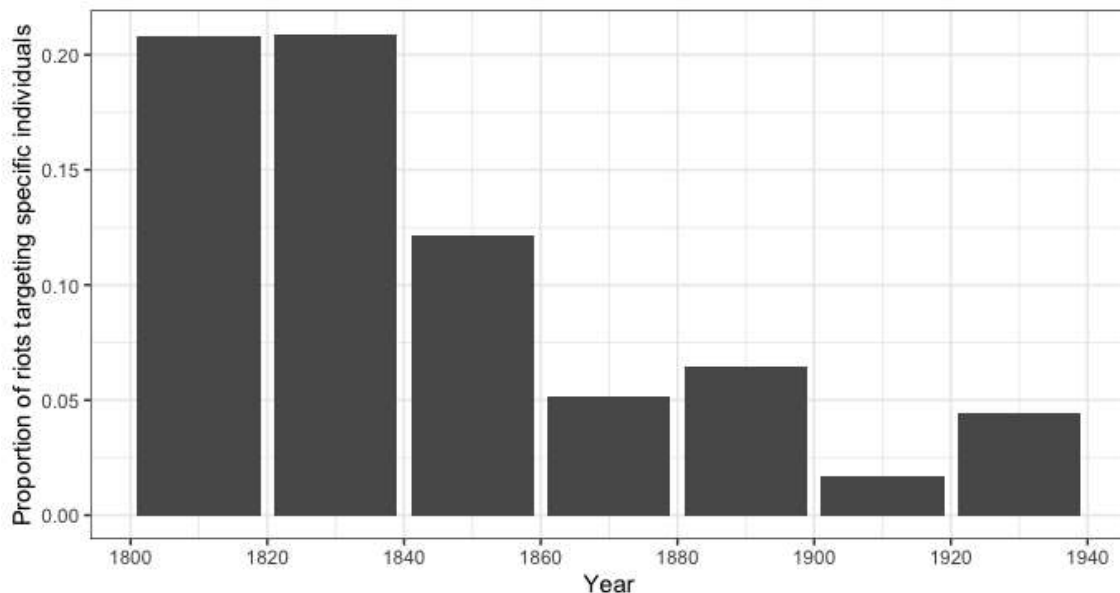
Another pattern of change concerns the way rioters chose their targets. In many riots in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the pattern of targeting was shaped by specific and concrete social tensions: “they addressed the petty exactions and humiliations that might oppress the small traders, artisans [etc]... in their everyday lives” (Rogers 1998: 169; see also Bohstedt 1983; Collings 2009). For example, in Stockport in April 1812, a crowd of 3,000 rioters led by two men dressed in women’s clothes and styling themselves as ‘Ludd’s wives’, tried to get into the house of one of their employers at Edgeley. They eventually burnt the house to the ground and then made a move for another local notable’s home, chanting ‘Now for [Mr] Sykes!’ before being intercepted by the military (*The Times* 17/04/1812, *Manchester Courier* 25/07/1829). In October 1831, crowds of Reformers criss-crossed Manchester attacking the houses of prominent Tories like Hugh Hornley Birley and Daniel Grant (*Manchester Chronicle* 15/10/1831). During the election riots of June 1841, crowds attacked the offices of Liverpool’s two rival newspapers, the *Mercury* and the *Standard*, and trashed the houses of various local Liberals (*Liverpool Mercury* 02/07/1841). In March 1861 in Johnstone Parish, Glasgow, after the election of the police commissioners, a crowd of un-enfranchised locals attacked the houses of the just-elected Mr Moore, the local Bailie, his bakery and the home of the Superintendent of Police (*North British Daily Mail* 06/03/1861).

However, this pattern of personalised targeting slowly began to disappear, as victims were increasingly chosen as tokens of wider types. So, strikebreakers continue to be victims of violence, while the only attacks on managers and employers after 1850 occur in Manchester in August 1853 and in Glasgow in June 1889 and October 1894. On the political front, the attack on the Protestant rabble-rouser John Kensit in September 1902 (he eventually died of the injuries received when he was hit with a chisel during a meeting in Everton) was remarkable because of how unusual attacks on prominent individuals were (*Liverpool Echo* 04/10/1902). For example, the anti-fascist violence the 1930s concentrated on everyday fascists rather than their leader, Oswald Mosley himself (see e.g. *Liverpool Evening Express* 12/10/1936). One simple way of measuring this change is to examine whether the proportion of riots involving targeted attacks on specific, known and named individuals falls over time (see Figure 3 below). Despite the important continuity in sectarian and racial rioting, there is a clear downward trend over time.

However, as I just suggested, this story is not just about change. It also needs to reflect the ongoing menace of sectarian and race rioting, in which people had always been targeted because of what they represented, rather than because of any concrete social relationship (cf Miskell 2004). Manchester was one of the major destinations for Irish immigration in the early 19th century and saw a gradually escalating level of intra-Irish and anti-Catholic violence throughout that period (Herbet 2001; Busteed 2016). The first major riot broke out during the 12th of July Parade in 1807, where rival parties fought with bludgeons and chalked ‘No Popery’ on the walls of Catholic houses (*Cowdroy’s Manchester Gazette* 18/07/1807). This set

a pattern that was replicated for much of the 19th century, with violence clustered around particular dates and people targeted tokenistically in their homes, at marches or in churches.

Figure 3: The proportion of riots targeting specific individuals



Notes: For sources see text and Tiratelli (2019)

Liverpool is notorious for its history of sectarian violence and, although the scale was different to Manchester and Glasgow, the character of the violence was fairly similar. From 1819 to 1824, the 12th of July Parade ended in violence every single year (Neal 1988: 30). Although the 12th of July celebrations were soon banned in the city centre, violence continued to accompany various parades and marches right the way through to the 1930s. The larger riots of July 1835, June 1841, July 1910 and June 1911 also saw rioters attack people in their homes. For example, in June 1911 an Orange Procession formed on Netherfield Road and attacked the houses of the only Catholics who lived in the area, throwing stones and tearing out the window frames in an effort to drive the Catholics out (*Liverpool Echo* 18/06/1911).

The 1915 anti-German riots that broke out across Britain following the sinking of the RMS Lusitania in May demonstrate that this form of targeting was not constrained to anti-Irish conflicts. As in other sectarian riots, people were targeted because they were foreigners (most of the victims were German but the crowds weren't too picky, also attacking Chinese and Russian immigrants – *Daily Record* 13/05/1915, *Liverpool Courier* 12/05/1915). And again, rioters invaded their homes and shops, tearing out furniture and piling it into bonfires on the streets. They even stole pianos for impromptu concerts where they sang 'Rule Britannia', 'Tipperary'

and other patriotic tunes, mimicking the raucous carnival of marching bands and the 12th of July celebrations (*Liverpool Daily Post* 11/05/1915, *Manchester Courier* 11/05/1915, *Manchester Evening News* 11/05/1915).

The final site of continuity is race riots. Most accounts of race rioting in Britain start with the wave of violence in 1919 (e.g. Jenkinson 2009). But, as traumatic as those events were, they actually continued a tradition stretching back over decades and one which followed the conventions of other identity-based riots. The first race riot I can find occurred on Liverpool's docks in April 1878. Historically, white sailors had been given preference in hiring over black sailors and were paid 10s more a month, leading to tensions between the two groups. On April 1st, a row took place near Sailors' Home and then, on the 2nd, a black sailor passing through the shipping office was insulted by a white sailor. This led to a scuffle and the sailors charged out onto the street where a crowd of 2-3,000 people fought all the way along Paradise Street, attacking the homes of black sailors (*The Times* 03/04/1878). These events echoed the battles between American and English sailors in 1809-10 and also prefigured the attacks on black sailors in Manchester (June 1919 and August 1921), Liverpool (June 1919) and Glasgow (January 1919).

There were also other similarities between race riots and anti-Irish rioting. In June 1892, a Mosque near Brougham Terrace in Liverpool was attacked in much the same way as the 'ritualist' churches (*Liverpool Evening Express* 17/06/1892). In April 1911, huge crowds of people attacked the house of a Chinese man in Birkenhead who was thought to have given offence to two women by taking his shirt off in the window of his house (*Liverpool Echo* 03/04/1911). The sexual element of this attack again prefigures the fears of black, male sexuality which coloured reporting of the 1919 attacks (Rowe 2000) and mirrored attacks on Irish-English couples (e.g. *The Times* 24/05/1825). In that same year, there were repeated attacks on Mormon churches across Liverpool (*Manchester Courier* 22/04/1911) and, in 1925, an Indian silkweaver was beaten to death in his home in Port Dundas, Glasgow (*Evening Times* 18/05/1925). The willingness of rioters to invade people's homes and places of worship, along with the indiscriminate targeting of people because of who they were, indicate underlying similarities between these racial riots and the older tradition of anti-Irish violence.

Over the course of the 19th century, rioters stopped targeting local elites. The dense, reciprocal and hierarchical relationships, which structured 18th century rioting slowly, disappeared and violence became tokenistic, targeting people because they represented some alien group. This does not mean that particular people were never the victims of riots. In Glasgow in November 1870, a crowd of 500-1,000 people attacked the house of someone who was suspected of giving information about deserters to the police (*Glasgow Evening Post* 07/11/1870). And, in Liverpool in February 1902, an anti-war pamphleteer's home was attacked by a pro-war mob (*The Times* 06/02/1902). But, the general trend was away from these sorts of personalised, individual attacks. This meant that economic, political and

identity-based riots became more similar over time, adopting the same mode of tokenistic targeting.

Rioting as a local practice

Throughout these different accounts, I have tried to set individual riots in their particular local contexts. But, as is obvious from Figure 1 above, the historical trajectory of rioting also varied considerably from place to place. The clearest example of this is the wave of riots in interwar Glasgow, which occurred at a time when the rest of the country had become significantly more peaceful. This wave was composed of two trends: growth in sectarian riots and the rise of anti-police and gang violence. The sectarian unrest in Glasgow in the 1920s and 1930s grew in part out of long running structural trends. In the late 1870s, Glasgow experienced a wave of Irish Protestant migration, which swelled the ranks of the local Orange Order (Hutchison 1987) and, by 1900, unionist politicians, held every seat in Glasgow and had a majority of support from the local working class (Donnachie, Harvie and Wood 1989). However, there is some evidence that sectarianism was held back by a liberal 'commonsense' and a strong trade union movement (Smith 1986; Foster, Houston and Madigan 2011). Certainly, my catalogue shows that Glasgow never saw the same levels of anti-Catholic rioting as Liverpool and Manchester did in the 19th century. This started to change after World War I. The 1918 Education Act guaranteed state support for Catholic schools, which led to a fierce backlash. This was exacerbated by the Irish War of Independence and, in 1920, by Alexander Ratcliffe, who founded the Scottish Protestant League and helped to stoke sectarian tensions by turning religious identity into a live electoral issue (Smyth 2000). This same connection between politics and violence had been a key part of the Liverpool Conservative Party's popular appeal throughout the 19th century (Waller 1981; Neal 1988, 1992). But there, the wave of riots from 1900-1911 had proven to the Tory establishment that street violence could not be contained or managed. They quickly distanced themselves from more militant protests and, by the 1920s, open anti-Irish rioting had become relatively rare on Merseyside.

Political sectarianism was not on its own enough to maintain this wave of Irish-English violence. One of the other key changes was the growing importance of football to Glasgow's working class culture.⁴ Celtic FC was formed by and for Catholics in 1888 and, from the start, it was aligned with Irish nationalism and home rule. Rangers FC quickly assumed a similar role for Protestants (Davies 2013; Taylor 2014; this is another contrast with Liverpool: Roberts 2015). During the 1920s, this 'Old Firm' rivalry inflamed sectarian hostilities with a weekly calendar of violence. The extent to which these riots were embedded in the local community is shown by the case of Rangers fan, John Traquair, who was arrested for stabbing a train guard while trying to ambush a Celtic train at Bridgeton Cross Station. Despite his violent

⁴ Average attendance at Celtic games increased from 10,637 in 1890-1914 to 13,720 during the interwar period, while the number of games increased from 9 to 19. Rangers went from 11,746 to 19,284 with a similar increase in the number of games per season (Sinnet and Jamieson 2010).

actions and chequered past, he was turned into a 'Protestant martyr' by the Scottish Protestant League and a campaign to have him released from jail received over 40,000 signatures and was even supported by James Maxton, the local MP (Davies 2013). The fact that these sectarian riots were part and parcel of social life in Glasgow suggests that they formed a localised practice, that they were a learned, scripted way of making political claims for the local community. Certainly, the growing use of these tactics was out of step with the rest of the country.

A similar story can be told about anti-police violence, which again highlights the way it functioned as part of the local repertoire of protest. The initial imposition of police forces on British towns and cities in the mid-1800s quickly led to a violent backlash from the local working class population who saw the police as an affront to English liberties (Storch and Engels 1975; Storch 1976). In many areas, these attacks continued into the late 1800s, where they functioned as ways of spiting authority and expressing a general belief in the "illegitimacy of the police role in enforcing street order" (Churchill 2014: 257; Bailey 2014a). Nevertheless, the strength of anti-police rioting in Glasgow in the interwar years stands out compared to Liverpool, Manchester, and the rest of Britain (see Figure 1 and Klein 2010).

In Glasgow, these attacks were tied up with the growth of gangs. Catastrophic economic collapse, high rates of unemployment and poor living conditions after World War I (Donnachie, Harvie and Wood 1989: 50; Foster 1990; Pope 2002; Gazeley, Newell and Scott 2011) created a situation in which many young men saw gangs as a rational way of finding comradeship and passing the time (Humphries 1995; Davies 1998). This led to a sustained and proactive campaign by Glasgow's police force (led by the future head of the British secret service, Percy Sillitoe) with police officers ready to use force and even provoke collective confrontations (Davies 1998: 267). Aggressive policing was met with pushback from gangs who frequently tried to mob police officers and draw in members of the public against the police. Although the gangs always had ambiguous relationships with the working class community, the string of anti-police riots throughout the 1920s and 1930s suggest that the police were more often seen as the common enemy.

Therefore, by 1930, rioting in Glasgow was enmeshed in local politics, culture and group formation and this gave the practice a new lease of life at a time when, in the rest of Britain, it was on the way out. In many ways, these riots that marked interwar Glasgow anticipated the post-1945 world in which violence between the police and marginalised communities became the dominant type of riot (Waddington 1992; Newburn 2015). Events like the battle between supporters of Irish independence and the police in Glasgow in April 1920 (*Glasgow Herald* 28/04/1920), could therefore be seen as prefiguring the Brixton riots of 1981, the riots in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds and Burnley in 2001 and possibly the 2011 riots in London (Keith 1993; Bagguley and Hussain 2008; Stott et al 2017, 2018). More importantly, this wave of rioting in interwar Glasgow helps to make the case that

rioting was a markedly *local* practice. In a period in which the rest of Britain was becoming more and more peaceful, Glasgow was engulfed in an unprecedented wave of violence. And significantly, these events were not spontaneous ruptures, but rather, they were deeply embedded in local dynamics and local conditions.

Discussion

Many popular accounts of 21st century riots have treated them as unpredictable outbursts of irrational violence. During the 2011 riots in London, newspapers frequently returned to these themes. On the 9th of August *The Sun*'s headline was "Anarchy", the *Daily Star* went for "Anarchy in the UK" and the *Metro* chose "Riots: the madness spreads". But this myth of the 'madding crowd' is seriously misleading (McPhail 1991). Riots have always been structured in various ways, shaped by norms which emerge during the events themselves (Turner and Killian 1957), by people's pre-existing identities (Stott and Reicher 1998), by traditional rituals and beliefs (Thompson 1991: 467-539) or, more generally, by the expectations people carry with them into the riot (Ketchley 2014; Tiratelli 2018). Over the *longue durée*, the practice of rioting has also evolved in particular ways, reflecting a range of cultural, material and organisational changes. In Britain, as I have just shown, urban rioting went from being a largely autonomous practice to one which was often subordinated to newer forms of protest like the strike and the demonstration. It also moved away from targeting particular individuals with whom rioters had concrete personal relationships, to targeting people as tokens of some wider type. Although local particularities remained significant, this represents an important shift in the overall use of collective violence.

At a theoretical level, this history of urban rioting allows us to extend and refine Charles Tilly's famous account of the history of protest (Tilly 1995, 2008). There are two parts to Tilly's historical argument, which, unfortunately, are often collapsed into one another. The first argument looks at a particular history: the development and diffusion of the modern social movement. The second is an attempt at periodisation: Tilly argues that in the early 1800s there was a shift as a 'new' repertoire came to replace the 'old'. These are significantly different arguments. One tries to explain the historical development of a particular institutional form, the other to establish discrete periods of history (Tilly 1981: 6). Although social movements are paradigmatic of the 'new' modern repertoire, they don't exhaust it. Most significantly, the trade union movement and strikes became probably the dominant form of contention for much of the 20th century, at least in terms of the numbers of people involved (Office for National Statistics 2015; Biggs 2015).

It is the second argument that is relevant here. According to Tilly, the early 1800s marked a shift between an 'old' repertoire which was parochial, patronised and particular, to a 'new' one which was national, autonomous and modular (Tilly 1981, 1993; Tarrow 1993). This argument continues to be enormously influential today. It

occupies a central place in the broader 'contentious politics' framework formalised by Tilly and colleagues in the early 2000s, a framework which has dominated research and teaching in the field for nearly two decades (Edwards 2014: 3). And it is also taken for granted by many contemporary writers (e.g. Bloom 2015: 395; Fallon and Moreau 2016: 325-7; Hechter, Pfaff and Underwood 2016: 184).

My catalogue of urban rioting suggests that this story needs to be refined to more explicitly acknowledge continuity in the repertoire of contention, regional variation, the uneven reach of the state and to clarify the concepts being used. First, there is clearly a substantial amount of continuity between 18th, 19th and 20th century protests. In particular, rioting continued to play a key role in urban life until the final decades of the 19th century, much later than Tilly suggests. Therefore, when Tilly says, "British experience from the 1750s to the 1830s features... [a] massive change in repertoire" (Tilly 1993: 266, my emphasis), he understates the continuity and complexity I described above. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is his dataset, which records protest events for southeast England for 13 scattered years from 1758 to 1820 and for Great Britain as a whole from 1828 to 1834 (Tilly 1995). Tilly's historical narrative is therefore based on a contrast between protests in the early 1830s (a period dominated by Reform agitation and the events known as Captain Swing) and protests in southern England in the late 18th century. He then explains this shift with reference to the growth of parliamentary politics and national markets, which leads to a fairly linear (and almost teleological) depiction of the changing repertoire, something which many historians have been sceptical of (see e.g. Rule 2000; Navickas 2016). Indeed, it is hard to reconcile this linear picture with the continual interplay of 'old' and 'new' elements suggested by my history of rioting or with the evolution of 'old' practices in response to 'modern' conditions. This, therefore, problematises not just the specific dates that Tilly suggests, but also the very project of periodisation itself.

Second, different cities seem to have had remarkably different repertoires. Glasgow, for example, saw a resurgence of rioting in the interwar years, while the rest of the country was becoming relatively peaceful. Although Tilly was certainly aware of these regional differences (Tilly and Wood 2003), much of the wider literature on repertoires has followed his earlier focus on the links between national conditions and the national repertoire (Tilly 2006) or examined the international diffusion of tactics (e.g. Seifert 2017; Pirro and Gattinara 2018). Both of these approaches ignore smaller geographic scales. I don't want to argue that we should abandon larger units of analysis. Rioters in Manchester and Glasgow in March 1848 spoke of France, raised the tricolore, tried to raid the gasworks and liberate the bastilles (*Manchester Courier* 11/03/1848, *Manchester and Salford Advertiser* 11/03/1848, *Glasgow Herald* 13/03/1848). By the 20th century, communist-inspired rioters were singing the 'Red Flag' as they fought the police in the Battle of George Square (*Daily Record* 01/02/1919). Instead, we should try to unpick these multiple spatial dimensions, from the hyper-local to the regional and the international.

Third, my history of riots reveals how uneven and contingent the intrusion of the modern, parliamentary state into everyday life was. Because my sources focus more on the actions of rioters than of law enforcement or the central state, I can only offer some tentative suggestions here. Nevertheless, they reveal several significant points. Most obviously, the state itself remained a massively violent actor. During the Luddite unrest of 1812, nearly 12,000 troops were deployed to put down the growing rebellion, far more soldiers than the Duke of Wellington took with him to fight Napoleon in 1808 (Darvall 1969: 260). In 1819 there was the infamous Peterloo massacre and, throughout the first half of the 1800s, live ammunition was often used to disperse crowds of striking workers (e.g. Cowdroy's *Manchester Gazette* 29/04/1826, *Liverpool Mercury* 19/08/1842). This continued into the 20th century. During the Liverpool transport strike in 1911, 3,500 troops and several gunboats were deployed on Merseyside and three workers were shot dead (*Liverpool Echo* 14/08/1911, *The Times* 14/08/1911).

Moreover, this kind of state violence was concentrated almost entirely on economic unrest. The Home Office records show a massively disproportionate concern with strikes, compared with political or sectarian violence (see e.g. HO 40/1-2, HO 44/16, HO 45/53 & HO 45/249C). In fact, some kinds of sectarian riots were even partially condoned by the state, or at least by self-interested politicians who wanted to use them for their own ends (Waller 1981). This condoning was particularly evident during the anti-German riots of 1915. The *Manchester Evening Chronicle's* headline on the 10th of May called the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* a 'Crime that must be punished by Britain's Manhood'. They also played up the idea that the violence was a natural outpouring of emotion (a common trope in depictions of riots - Paulson 2009) and emphasised the role played by distraught mothers and widows who led the attacks and whose femininity excused their violent and uncontrollable emotions (e.g. *Manchester Courier* 12/05/1915, *Manchester City News* 15/05/1915, *Manchester Evening Chronicle* 10/05/1915).⁵

It's worth noting that, although these riots never seriously troubled the state's monopoly of organised violence, the level of rioting suggests that its ability to enforce everyday 'orderliness' was severely limited (see also Stevenson 1979; Bailey 2014a). Conversely, rioting itself was often organised to some extent and many organisations seem to have encouraged and supported rioting. These include sectarian organisations like the Orange Order (Neal 1988), political parties like the Liverpool Tories (Waller 1981), trade unions like the brickmakers union in 1860s

⁵ It's particularly poignant that these images were so consistently deployed only a year after suffragette activists had fought to proclaim women's seriousness and rationality, even when acting violently. After being arrested for smashing of windows of military recruitment centre on Gallowgate in protest at the violent arrest of Mrs Pankhurst, Helen Crawford said "I want to say that I did this deliberately... As it was a premeditated act I plead guilty". Even when prompted by the judge who said "Of course you were very much excited at the time" she replied "emphatically - 'I was quite calm'" (quotes from the *Glasgow Herald* 13/03/1914).

Manchester (Price 1975) or gangs (Gooderson 1997; Davies 1998, 2013). This makes it hard to sustain a strict distinction between spontaneous, unplanned violence and formal, respectable, organised interests. More work is needed to flesh out all of these suggestions. However, they imply that the interactions between rioters and the state could reveal much about the contours of state power and the uneven expansion of its geographic reach.

The fourth aspect of Tilly's history of protest that needs addressing is more conceptual. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, practices from supposedly separate repertoires, like demonstrations and riots, coexisted and interacted with one another. Here Tilly's theatrical metaphor starts to break down. Bands and theatre troupes might have a repertoire of shows and tunes to perform, but they rarely perform different songs simultaneously. However, collective actors often blend different practices together, mixing, reconfiguring and interweaving different elements within the same sequence of interactions. This is captured in Tilly's history of the social movement as a composite form, a cluster of particular political practices, ideas and organisational structures (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). But the social movement is not an individual practice in the same way that strikes, demonstrations or petitions are. Nor does it capture the whole repertoire of available scripts for claim making. We therefore need to properly distinguish between individual practices, composite forms and the overall repertoire, and also, to be able to trace their different combinations and evolution over time.

Finally, my history of urban rioting suggests an alternative research agenda, one which draws on a different aspect of Tilly's theatrical metaphor. Rather than searching for broad shifts in the national repertoire of protest, we would benefit from shifting our attention onto the individual histories of particular practices. There are some fascinating precedents to build on, from studies tracing the global genealogy of suicide protest (Biggs 2013), the European tradition of the barricade (Traugott 2010) and the French tradition of the demonstration (Tartakowsky 1998), to E. P. Thompson's famous account of the development of the English bread riot and its particular roots in the notion of a 'moral economy' with 'fair prices' (Thompson 1971). These individual histories allow us to flesh out the microsociological foundations of repertoires, something Tilly himself was keen to do (Tilly 2008: xv).⁶ He famously described those microfoundations as a "relatively deliberate process of choice" (Tilly 1993: 264), but did little to unpack what that process looked like (and in fact backed away from that formulation later in his career - Krinsky and Mische 2013). Using theories of practice to supplement those microfoundations has two central advantages. On the one hand, it forces us to recognise the importance of meaning, as well as instrumental reasoning, in explaining how would-be protestors decide what action to take (Reckwitz 2002; Gross 2009). Again, this was very much part of Tilly's project. For him, the shift from 'aggressive supplication' to 'orderly protest' seems to have been at least as

⁶ I am extremely grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

important as changes in event frequencies (Tilly 1981; Tilly and Wood 2012). On the other hand, a practice-based, microsociological perspective gives us space to examine *small-scale* changes in meaning, rather than just the grand shifts in national political culture which Tilly alludes to. This should therefore help to uncover the interconnections between different practices and their interrelations across space and time.

The history of urban rioting that I have presented is an example of the kind of research I have in mind, but it could be expanded in many ways. Most importantly, it could be updated and connected to the wave of riots that have recently swept across Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East. This would allow us to engage with a series of significant sociological questions. Do those events represent a new shift in the repertoire of contention? And if so, should that be conceptualised as a return to earlier traditions? Or is there something intrinsically modern about these riots? Framing those questions within the history of urban rioting allows us to account for the way the practice itself has evolved over time and space, to connect it to other practices and institutional forms and to focus on how rioters themselves understand the meaning of their performances. If the sociological imagination normally works to help us see connections between personal experience and wider society (Mills 2000), then, in its historical mode, it can also illuminate the connections between those particular performances and the traditions of which they are a part.

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