Rioting and time

Collective violence in
Manchester, Liverpool and
Glasgow, 1800-1939

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Abstract

The 19th century is seen by many as a crucial turning point in the history of protest in Britain and across the global north. In Charles Tilly’s famous history of the period, the first few decades of the 19th century mark the transition from the violent, direct action of the premodern era to our modern, respectable, social movements (Tilly 1995, 2004). A study of rioting in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow from 1800 to 1939, therefore, allows for a unique window onto that momentous period of upheaval. But it also has a sociological aim. The last decade has seen a resurgence of rioting in Europe and the USA, prompting many to suggest that riots will be the dominant mode of protest in the coming years (e.g. Badiou 2012, Mayer et al 2016, Clover 2016). But, as I will show, our existing sociological theories of riots tend to be overly narrow, to focus exclusively on one or two master variables without paying due attention to the variety of forms and behaviours that make up rioting. These are the two challenges I take up in this thesis.

My main empirical contribution is a catalogue of four hundred riots across the three cities. This was produced by searching through national and local newspaper archives, Home Office documents, local police reports and secondary literature. The catalogue is presented in the Appendix. Using the rich, narrative accounts provided by these sources, I try to analyse the riots on their own terms, as a set of interactions and behaviours, as well as to embed them in the local history of each city. This reveals that riots are not the chaotic, unpredictable moments of madness that we so often think of them as. Riots are rather patterned by people’s everyday use of time and space – they expand to fill the growing urban landscape of each city and their timing follows gradual changes to the working week. Riots are also embedded in culture and society more broadly. In fact, as those roots in local society were eroded in the last few decades of the 19th century, this led to a decline in the number of riots in Manchester, Liverpool and most of the rest of the country. Meanwhile, the actual way in which people riot also evolves over time. Riots changed from an autonomous form of protest, to one that was subordinated to the strike and the demonstration. Rioters also move away from targeting specific (often powerful) individuals to targeting people because of their identity as, for example, scabs, Irish Catholics or fascists. This history undermines the orthodox account of protest presented by Charles Tilly. Violent direct action continued to be a key part of urban life until far later than his account suggests. And those later riots are not accidental hangovers from a previous era, but in fact adapted to changing conditions. My catalogue also suggests that existing theories of riots can be synthesised and broadened by concentrating on the way that individual riots unfold over hours, weeks or months, on what I think of as their career through time. This sets up a flexible framework for analysing riots which I hope can be applied to other riots around the world. Finally, and more abstractly, this study suggests that riots have a particular relationship with time, that they are of the present but face the past, drawing on its traditions as well as their own history. This has implications for our vision of history itself, suggesting that time is not punctuated by spontaneous, era-defining events, but rather evolves gradually over the longue durée.
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Chapter 1
Rioting and time

Extract from a letter published in *The Times*, Friday April 17, 1812:

On perceiving them [the mob]... coming down the road, I assembled the children and nurse in the parlour, and fastened the windows and doors; the gardener presently rushing into the room and conjured us to fly that moment, if we wished to save our lives... each snatching up a child, we escaped at the great gate just in time to avoid the rabble. We proceeded to Mrs Syke’s; but before we reached our destination we saw our cottage enveloped in flames. Every thing, I have since learnt was consumed by the fire and nothing left but the shell. The mob next proceeded to the factory, where they broke the windows, destroyed the looms and cut all the work which was in progress; and having finished this mischief, they repeated the three cheers which they gave on seeing the flames first burst from our dwelling...

It is now nine o’clock at night, and I learn the mob are more outrageous than ever at Edgeley. Fresh soldiers have been just sent there. Another troop of horse are expected to-night.

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1 In the following chapters, I have tried to keep the text legible by not including in-line newspaper citations when I am describing individual riots (unless I am quoting directly). Instead all references for each riot are listed in the Appendix, which is arranged chronologically by city to make it easy for the reader to look up all the references for a given riot in one go.
Manchester Mercury, Tuesday April 21, 1812:

The potatoemarket, in Shudehill, was on Saturday morning the scene of great disorder and confusion, owing to the much-increased price in that indispensable part of the sustenance of the poor. Between the hours of ten and eleven o’clock, a number of ignorant unthinking people, most of whom were women, failing in their endeavours to purchase the potatos at the reduced rate which they required them, immediately put themselves in possession of most of the produce in the Market, and never did we behold industry more conspicuous than in the seizure and conveyance of this spoil to the various abodes of the busy depredators.

The Times, Thursday April 23, 1812:

To-day large mobs having assembled at New Cross and at Knot-mill, they entered the shops and houses, taking meat, flour, and potatoes, with every other article that fell in their way. There is also a mob assembled at Middleton, and in every other direction. The town is now in confusion, not knowing where it will end.

Manchester Mercury, Tuesday April 28, 1812:

It is one of the most painful duties of our province to observe and record the desperate excesses of those of our countrymen who have so far suffered the machinations of disaffection to triumph over their good sense and every principle of rectitude, to prompt them to acts which reduce them to comparison with uncultured barbarians — with the very Goths and Vandals of antiquity. Let our artisans enquire of the aged, what were the number fed by our different branches of manufacture, before our machinery had acquired such perfection (for in most districts it is yet within the recollection of many), and they will soon be satisfied that the accumulation of goods in our warehouses is to be ascribed to the present
deranged state of commerce throughout Europe, and not the multiplying power of machinery...

Monday, (as noticed in our last) the weaving mill of Messrs. Burton’s, at Middleton, was attacked by an infatuated mob, who had assembled in immense numbers at a distance, from various quarters. They came nearly in one body in density up to the building, fired a pistol, and then suddenly threw a shower stones, which was so violent, that those who defended the place, began directly to fire over the heads of the rioters, in hopes they would desist… finding their expectations disappointed, and as [the] assault continued with desperate fury and loud cries of “break in and murder them,” they were obliged for the preservation of their lives, to fire upon the mob, till in consequence three men being killed and several wounded, two of whom afterwards died, they withdrew from, the factory.— They continue in the town destroying the furniture belonging Messrs. Burton’s servants, and threatening their lives, till a troop of Cavalry arrived... On Tuesday [a Mill] was surrounded by about fifty of the Militia, the mob... after ransacking and dividing the spoil, they set fire to the house, barn... [illegible] which consumed the whole, with the furnishings, fixtures &c. The damages is supposed to be upwards of £2000... The conduct of the Military has been highly praiseworthy. The number of the wounded is we understand 27, nine of whom very severely.

+++ When sociology first emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, crowds and riots were at the centre of the new discipline. In France, Émile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde were engaged in fierce debates about the dynamics of crowds, debates which they hoped would shape the distinction between sociology and psychology. In Germany, Georg Simmel and Theodor Geiger’s work on ‘groups’ also put crowds at the heart of discipline, although Simmel’s idiosyncratic theory of sociation led to very different conclusions when compared to Geiger’s marxism. Meanwhile, in the USA, Robert E. Park was exploring the way that crowds could liberate individuals and create new
forms of sociability. These reflections on crowds and riots were largely, as Christian Borch (2012) has argued, a way for sociologists to try to comprehend contemporary industrial society as a whole and to understand what was distinctive about modernity. Crowds became emblematic of “the dark side of modern society… something which is intrinsic to the edifice of this social order, and which is associated with all sorts of negative features – and therefore looked upon with terror” (Borch 2012, p. 15).

By the middle of the 20th century, crowds were still a central sociological topic. Some of the leading sociologists of the era, like Neil Smelser, Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, explicitly engaged with and built on the work of earlier crowd theorists. Even Robert K. Merton, one of the founders of modern positivist sociology, was involved, writing the introduction to a 1960 edition of Gustave le Bon’s classic, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. But, while crowds themselves continued to be an important object of study for the next few decades, those earlier theories came under sustained methodological and conceptual attack. Stanley Lieberson, Clark McPhail and others pioneered the systematic collection of quantitative data on riots and used this to reject many of the conclusions of earlier, armchair theorists (see McPhail 1991 for a summary). Meanwhile, Charles Tilly subsumed riots in the much wider field of collective contention, within which crowds were seen not as de-individualised, irrational mobs, but as purposive collective actors (e.g. Tilly et al 1975).

By the start of the 21st century, the weight of those 1960s critiques and opposition to earlier theoretical traditions displaced crowds and riots from the centre of discipline. On the one hand, the increasing focus on rationality and the ‘liberal, autonomous subject’ made many sociologists sceptical of the very notion of a ‘crowd’ (Borch 2012). On the other hand, the study of collective contention came to focus on the narrow, but supposedly more scientific, question of ‘mobilisation’ (see Walder 2009). Research on riots and crowds ended up somewhat marginal, at least compared to the grand sociological traditions of research into social mobility, inequality or secularisation. There have been several attempts to push back against this loss of status, from Steve Reicher’s call to
restore the study of crowds “to its rightful place at the center of social scientific inquiry” (Reicher 2004, p. 232) to Borch’s more modest suggestion that we revisit themes from earlier theories especially the notion of suggestion (Borch 2012). But, so far, they have had little impact.

However, riots themselves have not become marginal just because sociologists lost interest. In recent years we have seen riots in England in 2001 and 2011, France in 2005 and 2017, the USA in 2014, Turkey 2013, Romania 2012, Northern Ireland 2011, Stockholm 2013, Oslo 2008, Latvia 2009; even the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 began as riots. This wave of riots has prompted talk of a return to earlier times when riots were the dominant form of protest for large swathes of the population (e.g. Badiou 2012, Mayer et al 2016, Clover 2016). Even if such talk is exaggerated, their recent resurgence surely means that riots merit further study. However, many recent attempts to engage with the subject have inherited the narrow parameters of mainstream mobilisation studies. This has meant spending too much time worrying about who was involved, why particular cities seem particularly prone to rioting, and what variables we can associate with the changing incidence of rioting across nations (in order: Kawalerowicz and Biggs 2015, Myers 2010, Lagi et al 2011). I don’t want to sound too dismissive here, these are all significant questions and can give us valuable insights. But they have drawn us away from other, equally valuable perspectives.

One theme which can hopefully cast riots in a revealing light is their relationship with time and history. The riots in Manchester in April and May 1812, with which I started this chapter, broke out in a world where collective public violence played a central, almost institutional, role. One element of this was what Eric Hobsbawm (1952) described as “collective bargaining by riot”: a set of violent tactics which workers used, often successfully, to preserve their quality of life at a time of unprecedented industrial turbulence. These tactics were a key part of the wave of Luddism and machine-breaking which swept across England in 1812 and of which the events in Manchester were just a part. But this collective public violence was also embedded in a wider repertoire of protest which included price fixing, massive rallies and political demonstrations. The response of the state
was predictably overwhelming. In the end, 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, p. 260).

The riots of the 2000s broke out in a very different kind of world, one in which rioting seemed like an outburst of prehistoric, primordial, animalistic savagery. British Conservative MP Ken Clarke called the 2011 rioters ‘feral’. While historian David Starkey, using an explicitly racial logic of primitivism, said on primetime TV that ‘the whites have become black’. This depiction of riots as prehistoric is a common trope in much writing about riots. In the quote above, the Manchester Mercury described rioters as “uncultured barbarians… the very Goths and Vandals of antiquity” (28/2/1812). The chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, William H. Parker, described the 1965 Watts rioters as “acting like a bunch of monkeys” (quoted in Debord 1965, p. 7). But, the most memorable of all these various descriptions of rioters as primitive beasts belongs to Émil Zola, who described rioting miners as having “wolf-like jaws open to bite... dirty skins and tainted breath… an overflowing flood of barbarians”; he prophesied that “they would return to the savage life of the woods, after the great rut, the great feast-day, when the poor in one night would emaciate the wives and empty the cellars of the rich” (Zola 1894).

There is a more moderate vision of this connection between riots and the past, where they are presented as a regressive, premodern force and an obstacle to inevitable progress, but not as prehistoric madness. This attitude is represented by the Liberals and Fabians who Eric Hobsbawm criticised for preserving “the assumption of 19th century middle-class economic apologists, that the workers must be taught not to run their heads against economic truth, however unpalatable” (Hobsbawm 1952, p. 57). Those ideas have entered into the English language and, today, the very word ‘Luddite’ implies a resistance to progress and a kind of wishful antiquarianism. This assumption has also coloured academic scholarship, where the dominant narrative about the evolution of protest sees riots as a premodern phenomenon, one with little relevance to today’s prosperous, non-violent, democratic societies (e.g. Pinker 2012).
Conservative thinkers, especially those writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, often took the opposite approach, locating riots firmly in the present. For Edmund Burke, riots were the terrifying harbingers of modernity, a new threat to the order and stability of tradition (1790). Gustave le Bon, the bête-noire of crowd studies, said much the same thing: “While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS” (Bon 2002, p. x). You can also find these ideas in the writings of Hippolyte Taine and François Furet, whose anti-democratic feelings surface in an almost paranoid description of revolutionary crowds as “proof of the terrifying threat which increasingly hung over their [the bourgeoisie’s] destiny, and over the future of civilisation” (Furet 1992, p. 506). In Furet’s account, the violence of those crowds was inherent to the Jacobins’ conspiratorial imagination, and he used this as a critique of modern democracy as a whole, where the impossible ‘dream of democracy’ leads inevitably to violence and terror (Furet 1981).

This connection between fear of the rioting crowd and different visions of democracy has a long heritage. The Greek idea of the kyklos argued that there was an almost inescapable cycle of different political regimes through which the Greek city states passed, with democracy eventually degenerating into chaotic ochlocracy: the rule of the mob (McClelland 1989). Today those fears have resurfaced under the banner of populism, which supposedly poses a terrifying new threat to representative democracy, peace and prosperity. These new populists have been defined in a dizzying variety of ways, including: anyone who makes emotional appeals and promises they know they can’t keep (Alastair Campbell 2016), has a moralistic conviction that they are right (Müller 2016), goes against the current economic orthodoxy (or even just the EU) (Financial Times 2018), makes rhetorical appeals to ‘the people’ (Laclau 2005) or favours a plebiscitary mode of governing which by-passes established institutions (Scruton 2017). It’s not clear to me that there’s anything particularly new about any of this, or that these definitions help us to identify a coherent political
tendency. Indeed, the term probably says less about the so-called ‘populists’, than it does about the people who use it as an insult and whose interests are threatened by it. Two features come to mind straight away. First, their desire to reassert boundaries around the political process that they believe have been violated, reveals immediate affinities with the conservative reaction to the French Revolution. Second, the fact that the word ‘populist’ can be used as an insult at all reveals a shift between different visions of democracy and the role of the people within it (D’Eramo 2013, 2017). Gradually, the crowd, or the idea of people acting as an assertive, collective public, has been moved outside the boundaries of acceptable political action. In its place we have visions of a passive and individualised ‘silent majority’, where public opinion is funnelled through various institutional mechanisms and occasionally overruled, either by technocratic expertise (as in the imposition of Mario Monti and his cabinet of ex-bankers as the unelected government of Italy in 2011) or by mighty foreign powers (as is the case of Greece which accepted massively reduced sovereignty in exchange for a bailout loan in 2015).

Certain groups of left-communist and anarchist writers, like earlier conservative theorists, have also situated riots in the present moment. However, for them, crowds and riots are something to be celebrated not feared. Riots are forward-looking, an opening onto a brighter future, the emergence of real democracy in action. One of the most famous examples is The Invisible Committee, an anonymous French collective who were brought to wider attention by Fox News ‘shock-jock’ Glenn Beck (2009). Their pamphlets are a call to arms, celebrating the transformative effects of rioting at the individual level:

Those who dwell on images of violence miss everything that’s involved in the fact of taking the risk together of breaking, of tagging, of confronting the cops. One never comes out of one’s first riot unchanged. It’s this positivity of the riot that the spectators prefer not to see and that frightens them more deeply than the damage, the charges and counter-charges. In the riot there is a production and affirmation of friendships, a focused configuration of the world, clear possibilities of action, means close at hand. (Invisible Committee 2017, p. 9)
Alain Badiou extends this transformation to society as a whole, describing riots as the ‘rebirth of History’ (2012). Badiou argues that we are living through an interval, a period (beginning in the early 1980s) in which the teleological march of History has been halted by forces trying to return us to a previous time. In our case, to the free-wheeling, laissez-faire capitalism of the 19th century. Riots therefore mark a rupture in this prolonged pause and announce that forward movement is possible again. Obviously not all riots have this potential within them (he calls those lesser events ‘immediate riots’). But, properly historical riots open up the possibility of the birth of something new, a real future which is not a return to the swashbuckling capitalism of years gone-by. He argues that to become truly ‘historical’, riots need to spread across diverse sections of the population and move out of the working class, poverty-stricken neighbourhoods where they normally begin. They also need to animate a guiding ‘Idea’, which allows them to transform themselves from transient mass movement into a sustained political project. For Badiou this ‘Idea’ is communism which, together with riots, signals “the emergence of a capacity, at once destructive and creative, whose aim is to make a genuine exit from the established order” (Badiou 2012, p. 15).

I want to lay out an alternative vision of riots’ place in time. Riots are not outbreaks of primordial savagery, normally held in check by civilisation. They are infected with contemporary concerns, tactics and politics, while rioters themselves are often purposeful, rational and selective. Nor do riots belong solely to the 18th century. My historical findings and events today show that urban riots have continued to be a fact of life long after the birth of the modern social movement. But I’m also not content with the image of riots as looking into the future, whether that future is a communist utopia or Furet’s paranoid nightmare. Instead I want to suggest that we think of riots as Walter Benjamin’s angel of history (Benjamin 2006, p. 389-397). Drawing on Paul Klee’s monoprint Angelus Novus (Figure 1), Benjamin describes the angel: “The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm” (Benjamin 2006, p. 392). This wonderfully evocative image suggests an essential truth about rioting: while they exist in the present and drive us into the future,
they face the past, drawing on its traditions and orienting their flight according to its patterns. And, although the idea of novelty is built into the name *Angelus Novus*, riots don’t normally mark the start of a new era. Riots’ capacity to open up a new future is limited by the contexts in which they’re born. They might be a vital part of urban life, but they are rarely spontaneous agents of change. This has implications for how we understand the storm of history itself, whether we see it as a gradual evolution or as punctuated by revolutionary ruptures. My pessimism about how much of an imprint individual riots have left on history leads me towards the first view, one which emphasises long, drawn out processes of change. That in turn opens up a particular terrain for political struggle and demands a strategy which suits that vision of history. In broad terms, while individual events might not leave much of a mark on history, their cumulative weight does. The political challenge is to develop a strategy which doesn’t wait for sudden dramatic changes to the world, but instead links together different waves of protest and builds a lasting tradition of resistance. I will return to this political impulse in Chapter 8.

![Figure 1: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920](image)

But if riots look backwards, then we need to understand what they are looking at. One of those things is the past history of rioting itself. Incorporating this insight means arguing that rioting can be seen as a practice which is shaped by a particular repertoire of action. There are many, very
different, theories of practice and I am not going to align myself with any particular philosophical school (for references see Schatzki 1996, Warde 2005). Rather than refining particular theories, my aim here is more modest: to describe the practice of rioting and its evolution over time. I therefore understand practice in its broadest sense as routine social activity. These involve physical and mental action, the use of particular tools or objects, embodied know-how, codifiable knowledge, emotional states, internal goods, motivations and styles (Reckwitz 2002). Although I will touch on many of these, my focus will be on what rioters do, on the repertoire of different behaviours that they draw on when they riot. This concept of a repertoire is what really guides my empirical inquiry and it will recur throughout the thesis. The idea was first introduced by Charles Tilly who used this theatrical metaphor to describe the range of actions and interactions available to would-be protesters. He explains that:

The word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle. People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organize special-interest associations. (Tilly 1993, p. 264)

I want to argue that the same is true within a riot, that people learn a certain way of rioting, that they perform particular routines which constitute the practice of rioting. This highlights the fact that the existence of a repertoire is an empirical question and not an empty truism. Indeed, Tilly often complained that researchers took his provocative analogy with theatrical performances and treated it as an established fact rather than testing its usefulness (see Tilly 2008). Drawing on my historical cases I will argue that riots do indeed follow patterns of behaviour and that the practice as a whole evolves over the 19th and early 20th century. Riots go from being an autonomous form, to one which is subordinated to other elements in the wider repertoire of protest. At the end of the 18th century riots had assumed a central position as one of the defining modes of plebeian struggle. They
had their own internal logic and were deployed as an independent tactic. However, by the end of the 1800s, as they came away from their roots in local society, riots lost this quality and came to play a secondary role supporting other tactics like the strike or the demonstration. Over the same period they also move away from targeting specific individuals (like Mrs Goodair from Stockport whose letter I quoted earlier) and start instead to target people as tokens who represent certain categories, such as Irish Catholics, fascists or strike breakers. This history shows that the practice of rioting evolved in response to changing conditions and continued to play a central role in urban life well into the final decades of the 19th century. It therefore undermines the orthodox narrative about the evolution of protest in Western Europe, which claims that the emergence of the modern social movement in the early 1800s marked a shift away from the violent, localised rioting of the premodern era. Rejecting this narrative brings into question this whole project of periodisation and forces us to concentrate on the differing patterns of change and continuity affecting different practices and lineages of protest.

But, as I just hinted at, riots look back at more than simply their own history. In a famous speech in 1968, Martin Luther King reflected on the race riots sweeping through the USA, saying:

And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity (King 1968)

His call for Americans to listen carefully to riots was a call for them to understand what the riots were about by placing them within their social and historical context. For him that context was obvious: a “long cold winter” of economic distress, political injustice and systematic oppression. But the language of rioting is often far more opaque than this. Interpretations of the 2011 English Riots, for example, have ranged from moral decline, consumerism and entrepreneurship, to a
reaction against police hostility, socio-economic distress and unstable communities (in order: Malthouse 2011, Treadwell et al. 2013, Harvey 2013; Lewis et al. 2012, Kawalerowicz and Biggs 2015, Mayor of London’s Office 2012). Treating rioting as a practice helps us deal with these contradictory accounts by focussing our attention on the actual behaviours and interactions which constitute rioting. This is a deceptively simple recommendation. But, until we know what actually happened during a riot, we will struggle to determine which aspects of social and historical context are relevant to it. We need to know ‘who did what to who, when and where’, and the concept of a repertoire helps us to frame that discussion.

Another framework for comparing different accounts of a riot returns us to the importance of time. As well as looking at the practice of rioting as a whole, we can also examine individual riots as they unfold over different time scales. This implies that riots should not be treated as a homogenous outcome, but, instead as a process with its own internal dynamics. And the best way of approaching this is through the concept of a career. This term was introduced by the Chicago School of sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, where they used it to refer to processes which follow a more-or-less stable path through time. Focussing on the common patterns in the development of a riot, I will distinguish two phases of its career: the trigger and the processes which sustain it. Each of these phases reveals various empirical clues which allow us to move from the rich detail of actions and behaviours back to the wider context, to understand what elements of the past this particular riot is looking back at.

Locating riots within their larger context is also important for another reason. After a riot people often want to know what it was about, what it meant and where to go from here. Answering these questions forces us to develop a symptomatic reading of the events, to interpret them and give them meaning. I will not approach this directly; there is very little political incentive to provide alternative, provocative readings of riots from the 1850s. Instead I want to approach the problem of how to interpret riots obliquely, and set out several empirical strategies which can help us to navigate through the contradictory accounts of what a riot might mean. However, ultimately, it will
be future events which determine what a riot means. During those riots in Manchester in 1812, England was “in confusion, not knowing where it will end” (The Times, 23/4/1812). It was only with their eventual defeat and the very different reform movement that emerged in the late 1810s, that the final significance of those Luddite uprisings became apparent.

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The thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2 I address the definitional issue: what is a riot? As a word it has a strange etymology, and its origins make it sound closer to the antics of Oxford’s Bullingdon Club than a popular uprising. Robert Cawdrey’s (1604) dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall*, lists ‘riotous’ alongside ‘luxurious’. Nathan Bailey’s (1756) dictionary defines riotousness as a kind of hedonistic lifestyle. The third edition of Samuel Johnson’s famous *Dictionary of the English Language* (1768) also defines ‘a riot’ as “wild and loose festivity”, and the verb ‘to riot’ as “to banquet luxuriously”. However, by the mid 1700s, if not earlier, ‘riot’ was also commonly used to describe acts of collective, public violence. It is that idea that forms the bedrock of most definitions today, including my own. But, this definition has come under serious attack. The first is Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain’s argument that riots are so internally heterogeneous, contested and chaotic that we can’t speak of any really existing ‘thing’ to which the word refers (Bagguley and Hussain 2008). The second comes from Joshua Clover who wants to retain the concept of rioting, but purge it of its association with violence (Clover 2016). I deal at length with these two arguments and suggest that, ultimately, both overstate their case. I therefore try to preserve their insights while rescuing the traditional definition of riots as public, collective violence.

In Chapter 3 I then lay out the methodological foundations for my thesis. I begin by justifying the theoretical importance of a historical study of urban rioting. Most importantly, by working from a large, systematically produced set of riots, instead of one or two case studies, I hope to overcome some of the challenges which have beset previous studies. I then describe and critique the process I
followed in my attempt to find all the riots which took place in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow from 1800 to 1939 and compile reliable, accurate descriptions of them. This approach obviously limits the type of questions I can attempt to answer and I describe some of the most important limitations.

Chapter 4 then begins the real empirical work. The first conclusion is that people riot for all sorts of reasons: to settle petty personal disputes, out of frustration, as part of wider ethnic conflict, to enforce a strike, to defend customary rights, to bring about political revolution, as part of a battle within the existing political system, and so on. But, across these different types, general patterns emerge. I start by demonstrating the various ways in which riots were embedded in people’s everyday use of space and the temporal rhythms of their daily lives. I then argue that, over the course of the 19th century, riots lost their central position in wider society. They became culturally de-legitimised and the social space within which they appeared to be acceptable responses to political problems shrunk. I use this to explain the gradual decline in rioting over the 19th century and the exceptional case of Glasgow, where there was a resurgence of rioting in the interwar years. Nevertheless, the fact that riots remained a common part of urban life until the very end of the 19th century poses a real challenge to the orthodox history of protest that I described earlier. I return to this at the end of the next chapter.

In Chapter 5 I explicitly address the historical evolution of rioting as a practice. As I suggested earlier, riots go from being autonomous and individualised to subordinate and tokenistic. There are three historical trends which exemplify this transition: the narrowing of the repertoire of economic rioting, the changing role of marching and movement within riots and, finally, the shift away from targeting individuals with whom the rioters have a specific, personal relationship. The fact that riots remain so common into the late 19th, early 20th century and that they evolve in response to changing conditions allows me to offer a sustained, critical assessment of the orthodox history of protest. I suggest that the standard periodisation can’t deal with the reality of urban violence and that we would be better off concentrating on the lineages of individual forms of protest, rather than
trying to chop history up into discrete ‘ages’ (Corfield [2007] makes a similar argument with reference to history as a whole).

In the next two chapters I then pivot to look at the internal dynamics of riots. This involves a change in style, moving away from historical detail and towards isolating and documenting the mechanisms involved in triggering and sustaining riots. It also means that I interact with the empirical evidence in a different way. Instead of using cases of riots to complicate and reflect historical trends, I use them as the starting point for a process of abstraction as I try to tease out and simplify the most significant patterns and processes involved in rioting. It also means introducing the idea that riots have a career which is divided into two phases, the trigger and then the processes which sustain a riot.

Over these two chapters, each phase of that career is taken up in turn. So, in Chapter 6 I explore the different kinds of events which trigger riots, concentrating on the role of provocation. I also examine the different mechanisms through which these events cause people to suddenly start attacking the police or raid shops, offering a critical synthesis of various existing theories. Finally, I try to explore the causal status of triggers: do they bring something genuinely new into the world or are they merely part of a longer chain of cause and effect? Ultimately, I think this is an empirical question not a philosophical one. Some riots might well have happened anyway, but others seem to have been genuinely generated by their trigger.

Chapter 7 then moves onto the second phase of the career of a riot: the processes which sustain it over time. Drawing on my historical cases I stress three key processes which help to sustain a riot: creating an identity, evoking emotional energy and justifying the riot. These processes then feed off four different factors: organisations, symbols, the rhythm of external events and routines. I also argue that these mechanisms work across different time scales. Whether a riot last minutes, hours, weeks or years, the same set of processes seem to be involved.
I conclude with Chapter 8 in which I return to riots’ relationship with time. I argue that, ultimately, riots are very rarely agents of change. Although they’re not completely without effects, those effects are often the result of a whole tradition of rioting, rather than a particular event. This has implications for how we view the storm of history itself. Rather than imagining it as a series of revolutionary ruptures, the history of rioting leads us to an image of gradual, evolutionary processes. I then end with a call for us to embrace a politics founded on an uneventful view of history, one where change happens slowly and where struggles last for decades.
Chapter 2
Don’t call it a riot?

The term ‘riot’ is a common part of everyday speech. It’s used in newspapers, political speeches, police manuals and academic research. Despite this, its meaning remains highly contested. In the public sphere, debates about what the term means are normally political: was this a ‘riot’ or an ‘insurrection’? were they ‘rioters’ or simple ‘criminals’? I will return to these political questions later on, but there is another dimension to this debate: is the term ‘riot’ a useful analytic category? Does it help us to pick out a coherent set of events? And does lumping them together help us to understand them and the wider world?

Ultimately, I want to answer ‘yes’ to all those questions. But, over the last ten years, there have been two significant challenges which remain unanswered. The first comes from Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain (2008) who suggest that, when we use the term ‘riot’, we risk reifying a complex, contested and indeterminate event. In simple terms, they argue that the diversity of participants, actions and meanings shows that different riots do not share “the same formations, characteristics or patterns” (p. 12), and that lumping them together clouds our understanding of them. The second challenge comes from Joshua Clover’s (2016) Marxist historicisation of rioting. Although he doesn’t dismiss the category altogether, he radically redefines it. Traditional definitions have tended to focus on the violent form of the riot, for example, according to English Law a riot occurs “Where 12 or more persons who are present together use or threaten unlawful violence for a common purpose” (Public Order Act 1986, s 1, 1). Clover instead wants us to focus on the content of rioting,
which he links to the practice of ‘price setting’ (p. 13). These struggles over the price of goods are connected to periods of stagnation and economic decline which in turn produce large the surplus populations who become the rioters. It is only in this sense of the term that he thinks we can link the food riots of the 18th century with the riots in Ferguson in 2014.

Both of these works contain vitally important insights and it is not my intention to argue against them directly. Instead, I think it is possible to defuse their more stringent criticisms while still holding on to the spirit of their critique. This is because they both overstate their case somewhat. For Bagguley and Hussain, their warnings about reification seem to collapse into a more simple warning about the generalisability of theories of riots. Meanwhile, Clover seems to end up relying on the violence-based definitions of riots he earlier rejected when his account moves into the present period. Defusing their arguments in this way opens up the space to incorporate their critiques within a more traditional definition.

My argument will be largely theoretical but, ultimately, we can only find out how useful a concept or category is by applying it to real examples. This is an explicitly pragmatist position which asserts that a definition is good if “it works, it clears up difficulties, [and] removes obscurities” (Dewey 1910, p. 164; see also Peirce 1878). This is meant in a practical sense. Good definitions make a concrete difference, are validated, corroborated and verified, have a ‘cash value’ (James 1907). So, in many ways, my whole thesis works as a test of the category ‘riot’. If there are no connections between different events, no common patterns or mechanisms, then this confirms Bagguley, Hussain and Clover’s scepticism. But, if there is evidence of a pattern, particularly if that pattern seems to change in a systematic and explicable way, then we may want to rehabilitate the more traditional definition of rioting. There are two points which lead me to be optimistic on this front. First, quantitative research has shown that it is possible to trace variation in rioting back to, for example, ethnic tensions, resentment towards the police or austerity politics (in order: Olzak et al 1996, Perez et al 2002, Ponticelli and Voth 2011). This indicates that we can advance our understanding of these different events by considering them as examples of ‘rioting’. Second, there
is a voluminous historical literature which has found common patterns of rioting across 18th and 19th century Britain. To take just two examples, John Bohstedt found that the way rioters behaved could be traced back to local political conditions, therefore bread riots in traditional small towns were restrained, disciplined and largely non-violent (Bohstedt 1983). Meanwhile, Peter Jones has argued that rural rioting continued to be patterned by belief in a traditional ‘moral economy’ of just prices and paternalistic intervention until at least the 1830s (Jones 2007).

**Rioting in the face of diversity**

Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain’s book, *Riotous Citizens* (2008), aims to clear away the ‘theoretical baggage’ (p. 4) which has distorted existing theories of riots. Their critique is based on a rich case study of the 2001 Bradford Riot which they use to demonstrate that riots are ‘essentially contested’ (a phrase they use eight times; p. 4, 5, 31, 36, 175) and to make three central claims:

Much of what has passed for the analysis of violent crowds, riots and similar collective violence has been characterized by [1] a failure to define precisely what it seeks to explain, [2] a lack of empirical evidence to support its claims and [3] the use of a reified view of those involved and the meaning of their actions. (p. 36)

Of these, the third seems to be the most significant critique of modern approaches to riots. Criticism by Mark Harrison of E.P. Thompson and George Rude for confusing riotous crowds with all crowds has little critical bite these days (Harrison 1988). Even at the time, as Thompson pointed out, definitional battles about ‘crowds’ and ‘mobs’ were very much alive and historians were generally careful to pinpoint what the real object of their study was (Thompson 1991, p. 260). The anti-empirical, armchair theorising of Gustave le Bon and Gabriel Tarde also has few contemporary parallels and is of little critical relevance. The real force of Bagguley and Hussain’s argument comes from their third argument, which questions the utility of the category ‘riot’ as a starting point for analysis. Their focus on the diversity of behaviour and their resistance to any overarching
narrative seriously undermines the status of the ‘reified event’ under investigation. Most telling, instead of situating the Bradford Riot in the context of other riots, they locate it within a broader wave of ethnic contention and far-right activism. By shifting focus in this way they offer a powerful critique of all those theories which try to find common patterns in ‘riots’.

Their argument begins by setting out the dangers of reification, a trap which researchers fall into when they treat “something [as] having characteristics or a reality that it does not in fact have” (p. 12). This is dangerous for at least three reasons. (i) Analytically, it “disguises and distorts social relations, processes and identities” and means we ignore the diversity and indeterminacy which characterises riots (p. 13). (ii) Normatively, it privileges the voices of the powerful over the powerless (p. 12). And (iii) methodologically, searching for “a coherent single description of what they believe ‘really happened’” (p. 13) leads researchers to mistakenly favour particular methods, notably triangulation.

The cumulative impact of these three problems is that many studies end up essentialising the crowd, “the central theoretical and methodological trap to be avoided at all costs” (p. 12). These studies mistakenly see all crowds as sharing an essential pattern of behaviour or causality. For Bagguley and Hussain this is particularly worrying because their study of the Bradford Riot shows that its central features were indeterminacy and diversity. In chapter four (p. 79-97) they develop this theme explicitly, revealing the huge variety of participants, behaviours, emotions and motivations. They also give three particularly powerful examples which show that even the same individual may behave in extremely different ways over the course of a riot.

In the first case, Mudasar Khan, who was imprisoned for riot, was, early on in the events, protecting a white-owned property in the city centre. In the second case, Mohammed Bashir served drinks to the police, but was jailed for four years for his later activities during the riot. Finally, Mohammed Ali Zaman was jailed for two and a half years for throwing three
stones, but had also tried to protect a garage and persuade others to stop the violence and leave the area. (p. 87)

This emphasis on the diversity of behaviours in a riot echoes the findings of many previous studies. For example, Jules Wanderer’s famous index of riot severity included killing, sniping, looting, interference with firemen, and vandalism as possible riot behaviours (Wanderer 1968, 1969). Donald Warren also made an important distinction between rioting and counter-rioting, and between areas of high and low activity (Warren 1969). Margaret Abudu Stark’s research on the Los Angeles riots in 1965 separated rioting into arson, looting, rock throwing and assemblies (Abudu Stark et al 1974). But this line of research is most closely associated with Clark McPhail, who has done a huge amount to shatter the image of rioting as a monolithic, homogenous activity (McPhail and Wohlstein 1983, McPhail 2014). His typology of crowd behaviour added milling, collective focus, collective locomotion, queuing, collective vocalisation and civilian social control to the list of possible riot behaviours. Within this diversity, it’s important to recognise two equally important levels, the marked differences across riots and the huge diversity within any single riot. Any adequate theory of riots must therefore address the historical specificity of each riot and the heterogeneity within it. But doing so does not require us to go as far as Bagguley and Hussain suggest.

In order to avoid the trap of reification Bagguley and Hussain, dramatically narrow the scope of their inquiry, making it clear that they “have not attempted to construct some general theory of rioting” (p. 4) and that they are referring only to crowds “which engage... in violent collective conflict with the police in situations of ethnic or racial hostility” (p. 36). This narrowing means that they end up abandoning ‘riot’ as a category of analysis. Riots are depicted as being so varied that we gain nothing by grouping them together. They also put so much emphasis on the internal heterogeneity of a riot that it is unclear whether the authors think the ‘riot’ itself has a reality beyond being the site of discursive contest. This means ignoring the interconnections between riots of different types and isolating them from one another. But it is also unsustainable because the two
levels of diversity pull in opposite directions. How can we separate out purely ethnic riots, when they are so internally heterogeneous that they have no fixed meaning?

Instead, I think we can accept the spirit of their critique and still hold on to ‘rioting’ as a useful analytic category. The most important point is that a broader categorisation doesn’t have to distort our understanding of the events in question. Bagguley and Hussain’s most telling criticism is of those theories of riots which generalise from one or two specific cases and so see “all crowds as sharing some kind of essential characteristic” (p. 12). This is obviously dangerous and raises serious questions about the logic of inference being used. But warnings against hasty generalisations are not specific to the study of riots and need not undermine the category as a whole. As David Waddington (2010) has argued in his careful response to Bagguley and Hussain, having a general model does not lead to homogenisation across different types of riot. Rather it demonstrates the uniqueness of each situation by allowing the dimensions of difference to be spelled out and gives us a framework within which to explain them. The models that I put forward in chapter 6 and 7 are, like Waddington’s, based around placeholders which give structure to more specific explanations. I admit that mine is unlikely to be exhaustive and that it is clearly rooted in the context of Britain over the long 19th century. But, nevertheless, the success of such models across a variety of different cases shows that we can develop historically specific explanations by comparing across different sorts of riot.

Bagguley and Hussain also seem to suggest that the variation in behaviours, participants and meanings within a riot is essentially random or, at least, so complex that it is basically unexplainable (Bagguley 2011). However, this impression may be in part an artefact of their methodology. The way they generated their sample of interviews means that they tended to bypass those who were actually involved in the riots (Bagguley and Hussain 2008, p. 70). In that context it is hardly surprising that respondents expressed such divergent views of what happened. And, even if it is true that people probably do not know what has happened (p. 13), that does not necessarily mean that events did not pan out in a particular, explicable order. In fact, Waddington (2010)
manages to use Bagguley and Hussain’s own data to re-analyse the Bradford riot in terms of his much broader model of rioting.

Diversity within and between riots does not mean that we have to abandon the category as a whole. We can respond to the dangers of generalisation, reification and essentialism but still see a value in grouping diverse events together as different examples of a ‘riot’. As with any definition of a situation, categorising something as a riot does not need to homogenise it. A football match can have very different types of participants, who play different roles on the pitch, who take part with different motives and who ascribe very different meanings to the match. Their behaviour can also change dramatically over the course of a game from shouting and swearing at the opposition or referee before happily shaking their hands at the end of the game. But variation within and across football matches does not mean that there are no common patterns to be drawn out and explained or that any more general theory must be guilty of ahistorical essentialism.

We can also answer Bagguley and Hussain’s other two central critiques. Methodologically, a broader definition need not to force us to think that there is some single narrative of ‘what really happened’. Any attempt to explain an event must attempt to resolve some ambiguities or else there would be nothing to explain. But, even Bagguley and Hussain seem to accept this when they say that the challenge for analysts is “to produce data that show that their interpretations of events are the most plausible ones” (p. 32). Understanding the role played by the different narratives which emerge within the event itself is essential, but it need not lead us to abandon attempts to verify or critique particular details. Normatively, I also see no reason why adopting a broader starting point must lead us to favour the voices of the powerful. Any account based solely on police reports or newspapers (as most of my accounts are) must be aware of the limitations of these sources. But this is true of almost all historical inquiry and using sources which reflect the views of the powerful need not mean reproducing them (see e.g. Fetterley 1978, Bartholomae et al 2011).
Bagguley and Hussain seem to come close to agreeing with all this when they say that “this is not to deny that there is some pattern, some structure and some degree of collective purpose”, citing the police as “one obvious source of patterning” (p. 13). But there are many other sources of patterning, including a learned repertoire of behaviours (Tilly 1993), cultural factors (Behagg 1982, Bushaway 1982, Storch 1982) or patterns of everyday movement (Sewell 2001). Most importantly, when people think of themselves as ‘rioting’ they may interact in accord with certain norms, expectations and traditions. Although rioting has not always been done in the same way or in response to the same things, it does form itself into specific lineages, each with their own histories. And, despite this specificity, general patterns do emerge, even over 140 years and across three different cities. But in order to properly describe and explain these patterns we need to start our analysis with a wider definition of rioting.

Having my cake and eating it

The definition I have provisionally adopted is in many ways a familiar one: riots are instances of public, collective violence against people or property (this follows Lieberson and Silverman 1965, Stevenson 1979, Bohstedt 1983, Rummel and Tanter 1984, Oberschall 1993, Tilly 1995, Olzak et al 1996, Perez et al 2003, Ponticelli and Voth 2011). Obviously that definition is not exhaustive. I also wanted to exclude instances of planned violence such as terrorism or assassinations. ‘Riot’ normally refers to something with a degree of spontaneity and this is qualitatively different to the carefully executed bombing of a factory. However, the dividing line here is extremely blurred. One problematic case would be a ‘black block’ on a protest who are looking to instigate or take advantage of violence. Is this ‘planned’ or ‘spontaneous’? A riot or terrorism? I have no clear cut answer to this and, for reasons I will return to below, am not sure that we should look for one. But these problem cases force us to look again at the motive behind my definition. If I am interested in the practice of rioting, then I am ultimately interested in situations where people think of themselves as rioting. Not everyone will agree on what situation they are in, and they may even openly contest it (c.f. Goffman 1959), but once a critical mass of participants think of themselves as ‘rioting’ then
that will shape how the event plays out. It is that more-or-less conscious practice of rioting that I want to try to explain, both its internal dynamics (the trigger and the processes by which the riot sustains itself) and its historical evolution.

It’s important to ask whether or not I think my sources allow me to have access to this, whether they allow me to know if participants did think of themselves as rioting. The nature of historical sources and the fact that very few first-person accounts have survived means I normally have to accept an external definition of the situation. But I don’t think this completely invalidates my approach. From a theoretical perspective it’s important to note that the definition of a situation is not a purely subjective issue. Situations are made up of different actors interacting with each other, and the connections between them help to establish the meaning of that situation. Moreover, for any definition of a situation to be meaningful and guide people’s behaviour, it must be broadly shared across a community. Tilly’s notion of a repertoire makes this explicit (e.g. Tilly 1993). Repertoires are structured sets of interactions between different parties, including those external observers who produce most of the surviving historical sources. At a practical level, my sources don’t suggest that these definitions were particularly contested. And, where there is debate about whether this was a riot or something else, that is often mentioned in newspapers or in the courts. The fact that the sources allow me to discriminate in this way, gives me some confidence in them and is something I will return to in the next chapter.

I think the more serious issue with this approach is the tension between this relatively abstract model of a riot’s internal dynamics and a commitment to avoiding ahistorical essentialism. This tension emerges because any ‘model of rioting’ seems to suggest that riots share some kind of essential pattern, which remains the same throughout time and space. But, the truth is that, even the most complete causal models (the kind which can be represented in path diagrams) have a limited scope, and generalising beyond the range of your data is always speculative. My model of a riot’s internal dynamics emerges out of specific set of 19th and early 20th century British riots and whether or not it is transferable to other times/places remains to be seen. However, limiting the
scope of my conclusions does not completely dispel the sense that there may be a deeper incompatibility between these two aims.

We can illuminate what is at stake in this apparent incompatibility through a discussion of the so-called problem of universals. This is a complex ontological debate which has recurred in a variety of ways throughout the history of philosophy and I can not fully explore it here (see Quine 1980, p. 13-19). But its relevance to the problems of definition and categorisation has not gone unnoticed (e.g. Ragin 1992). Arguments about particularly contested terms have often been seen as a debate between ‘universalists’ who think that the term refers to some stable, codifiable and really existing property, and ‘nominalists’ who instead treat terms as ever-changing labels which can themselves be made the object of study (e.g. D’Eramo 2017). As Isaiah Berlin (1967) argued, both of these approaches can be somewhat unsatisfactory. On the one hand we need to avoid the ‘‘Cinderella complex’, by which I mean the following: that there exists a shoe [the term in question]… for which somewhere there must exist a foot”. But, on the other hand we need also to avoid assuming “that the word… is simply a homonym”. In the case of riots, the first is the problem of ahistorical essentialism identified by Bagguley and Hussain; the second is the trap they seem to fall into.

Universalism implies that a definition is a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for membership of a set. This is basically an Aristotelian approach to categorisation and one which is dominant in the natural sciences. In the social sciences this normally proceeds by gathering together examples of other definitions and trying to find a way of capturing their key properties. The aim is then to include as many as possible of those things which most people would count as a riot, while still excluding as many examples as possible of things most people wouldn’t accept as a riot. When this is done successful we reach a kind of ‘reflective equilibrium’, where the definition is broadly accepted as capturing the essence of the category in question.

The alternative approach is nominalist, and in its most sophisticated forms it builds on Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘family resemblance’ (1976, §65-74) and its more modern variant
‘prototype theory’ (Rosch 1973, 1975, Mervis and Rosch 1981, Lakoff 1987). Here concepts are defined not according to criteria, but by their similarity to a central, paradigmatic example. Intuitively this is much closer to the historical project of tracing the evolution of a practice and its connections to other practices. But such an approach is limited by the concept of ‘similarity’. Almost any two things can be called ‘similar’ in some respect and this means that chains of family resemblances can continue in an unlimited way. So sand-dunes are like sand castles, which are like castles, which are like concrete bunkers, but concrete bunkers are surely nothing like sand dunes.

Wittgenstein’s response to this problem takes us back to the use of language in everyday contexts: the fact that firm definitional boundaries do not exist around words does not normally trouble us when we use them (1976, §68). Language is like other games: “It is not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too” (§68). The question is, as sociologists, should this lack of clear boundaries trouble us?

I want to argue that within the practical process of empirical research there may be a way to do justice to the appealing aspects of both the nominalist and universalist approach. So my research begins with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which are used to help build a catalogue of riot events. This ensures that the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of events are public and replicable. But my understanding of riots as a practice allows me to then try to trace the connections between different riots, even going outside of the set boundaries when it seems necessary.

Wittgenstein offers us a way to evade this apparent incompatibility by departing from both nominalism and universalism. We can reject universalism by arguing that you can call a collection of objects which share no common feature by the same name, and that such a name doesn’t have to have fixed boundaries (1976, §65). But, following Wittgenstein again, we can also argue that “I can give the concept… rigid limits” (§67). He argues that the only reason we “do not know the boundaries [is] because none have been drawn. To repeat, we can draw a boundary” (§69). This rejects nominalism by allowing that, in some cases, a group of objects can be defined according to a
common feature (see also Wittgenstein 1980, p. 24-5). Richard Raatzsch’s (1993) reading of this is
to cases where we do adopt a rigid definition are part of a specific (often scientific) linguistic
practice, but cases where we go by family-resemblances are part of alternative linguistic practices
(like everyday language). Crucially, neither of these approaches is appropriate in all cases.

Raatzsch seems to imply that the different linguistic practices are the domains of different
communities, which would make it difficult to sustain both approaches simultaneously (although
the need to speak to both communities would say a lot about the position of sociology within the
university). But Wittgenstein himself suggests another option when he says “To repeat, we can draw
a boundary - for a special purpose” (§69, my emphasis). This remains much closer to
Wittgenstein’s image of words as tools which can be put to various uses (§10-12) and allows us to
focus on the specific purpose of our definition. The reason for adopting a rigid definition of riots is
not to commit us to ahistorical essentialism, but to ensure that our analysis starts from a position
which is public, replicable and which mitigates against choosing cases selectively to support a pre-
existing argument. However, this definition need not exhaust our understanding of what it means to
riot. We can continue to resist our “craving for generality” (Wittgenstein 1980, p. 17-18) and focus
on individual riots and the connections between them. But we do so from a firmer base.

The tension between using fixed definitions and tracing the family resemblances between different
riots and protests is real. But we do not need to fall down on one side or the other, treating the term
either as Cinderella’s shoe or a misleading homonym. Words are tools which are used differently in
different contexts and there is no deep inconsistency between clearly defining a set of cases and
admitting the historical specificities and peculiarities of each. And, in the case of riots, failing to do
justice to broader patterns alongside specific details would seriously distort our understanding of
them.
Riot for communists?

However, there is a further challenge which needs addressing. Joshua Clover (2016) argues that the association of rioting with violence is the “primary difficulty in defining the riot” and a dangerous and confusing conflation (p. 11 & 35). There seem to be four strands to his attack. First, this definition includes too much - notably the link between violence against people and against property is purely ideological (p. 11). Second, it is politically suspect because it obscures daily, systematic violence (p. 12) and implies that riots are always illegitimate and apolitical (p. 37-39). Third, it stops us from distinguishing strikes from riots and forces us into the “evident absurdity” of calling violent strikes riots (p. 37). Fourth, by collapsing the distinction between strike and riot, it prevents us from developing an adequate periodisation of protest (p. 2-10, 43). These last two points are obviously interrelated. The third is only a problem if you have some reason for wanting to keep strikes and riots as mutually exclusive categories. It turns out that the reason for this is that it helps with his periodisation (point four). By moving beyond this mistaken definition of riots in terms of violence Clover aims to provide a “properly materialist theorization of the riot. Riot for communists, let’s say” (p. 6).

The ‘lodestone’ (p. 13) for his redefinition of riots is E.P. Thompson’s classic essay *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (1971). There Thompson offers a vision of bread riots as a practice which centres on ‘setting the price’ and which “reproduces, sometimes with great precision, the emergency measures in time of scarcity whose operation, in the years between 1580 and 1630, were codified in the *Book of Orders*” (p. 108). This picture of rioting as a historical practice, rooted in a particular traditional political culture, has been immensely influential across many different disciplines but has never before, as far as I know, been adopted as a unifying definition of rioting. For Clover it implies that:

The riot is the form of collective action that
1. struggles to set the price of market goods (or their availability, which is much the same thing, for the question is similarly one of access);
2. features participants with no necessary kinship but their dispossession;
3. unfolds in the context of consumption, featuring the interruption of commercial circulation. (p. 16)

This definition focusses on the level of practice, or what people actually do when they riot. But a full theory of riot requires us to extend and translate this definition onto other levels. The first is the level of periodisation. Here Clover draws on the historical work of Giovanni Arrighi to split history into phases dominated by production (the valorisation of commodities: increasing the value of capital through the application of labour e.g. factory production) and circulation (the realisation of values: selling commodities to turn value in money e.g. financial trading) (p. 17-21). Clover argues that recent history from the 19th century falls into successive phases dominated by circulation, production, then circulation, which map onto the evolution of protest (riot, strike, riot). It is not clear to me that these align as well as Clover suggests they do. Conventional accounts of the evolution of protest from pre-modern riots to modern social movements and strikes put the shift somewhere in the early to mid 19th century (e.g. Stevenson 1979, Sewell 1990, Tilly 1993, 1995). However, according to Clover’s diagram, the 19th century shows a move out of a period of production into a period of circulation (i.e. from what should be strikes to riots) (p. 18). Indeed his description of these transitions seems to completely ignore the period of circulation at the end of the 19th century (p. 17). Here Britain lost its preeminent global economic position while experiencing a wave of trade union activity known as New Unionism. Ultimately there may be too many economic cycles to fit onto the fairly simple transition from riot to strike to riot. I will touch on this again in Chapter 5 when I use my history of the changing practice of rioting to challenge the orthodox periodisation of the British repertoire of contention. But, here I want to address the Clover’s theory, rather than his historical assumptions.
A second level is then required to show that the supposed alignment of periods is not merely a coincidence. This is the level of “history itself” (p. 21). The preliminary answer to how circulation is linked to riot is straightforward: “phases led by circulation will see struggles in the marketplace, over the price of goods”; unlike phases led by production, which will see struggle over wages (p. 21). But in order to see what is different about the contemporary era, we need to complicate this picture somewhat. Phases dominated by circulation are characterised by stagnation and economic slowdown which produces surplus populations of the unemployed. And, today, “this surplus population is racialized” (p. 26). This different surplus population is what primarily distinguishes ‘riot prime’ from earlier riots. We thus have a definition of riot which ties it directly into Clover’s materialist account of history and the different moments of capital accumulation.

From this starting point Clover offers a fascinating account of the evolution of social protest and the various theories which are immanent in those struggles. But it seems to me that too much of that narrative is already implied by his definition. He is on fairly strong ground when he likens the freeway takeovers of late 2014 in St Louis, Los Angeles, Nashville and other cities to earlier export riots (they both attempt to halt the circulation of capital). But it is not clear how he can then assimilate these to the riots in Ferguson which were characterised primarily by violence against the police (p. 186). He even admits that modern riots can not “be understood adequately within the framework of price-setting” (p. 16) but doesn’t offer any alternative. The only clue Clover provides as to how his definition functions in the modern period is when he says that “the situation of riot is… the domination of the marketplace” (p. 44). But this is obviously too broad a definition. Struggles over rent (to set the price of housing) can take on many different forms from political lobbying, to rent strikes, to violence. And the differences between these are as significant as the fact that they share a common aim. Indeed, when Clover brings in the Ferguson riots, he seems to be implicitly falling back on a violence-based definition.

At the root of my disagreement with Clover is a different interpretation of E.P. Thompson’s work. Thompson’s central concern in that essay was to combat the ‘spasmodic’ view of popular protest,
the idea that food riots are an automatic, animalistic response to hunger (Thompson 1971, 1991). Rioting is rather a learned response and, crucially, it is one of many possible responses. “Begging, in which the children again are assigned their roles, is another learned response, or strategy. So also may be threats to the wealthy, or the theft of food-stuffs”, or even passivity (1991, p. 266). Thompson is also keen to describe the particular historical roots of food riots in a kind of political consciousness which is specific to 17th and 18th century England, and to demonstrate how this routine becomes more elaborate over time, while shifting setting from the marketplace to the mill (1991). To me this looks less like a theory of riot and more like a history of the evolution of a particular practice and its connection to a specific set of beliefs. Thompson’s primary purpose is not to distinguish (bread) riots from other forms of protest but rather to describe the genealogy of one specific form of protest, in a specific historical time and place. This is the challenge that has been taken up by other historians looking, for example, at anti-Irish rioting as a form of community policing (Miskell 2004), the barricade (Traugott 2010) or ‘bargaining by riot’ (Hobsbawm 1952). It is also what I will go on to suggest should replace our attempts to break the history of protest into discrete periods.

The value of this alternative reading of Thompson is that it does not render riots transparent, revealing particular moments of the whirring machine of capital accumulation behind them. Forms of protest have their own, more idiosyncratic, convoluted and contingent histories (see e.g. Traugott 2010, Biggs 2013, Fallon and Moreau 2016). And researchers can not completely ignore these traditions in deference to structural shifts. Instead, the challenge is to connect long term forces with the internal, contingent histories of particular repertoires.

In order to do this we need to return to Thompson’s more properly historical approach and to adopt a different definition, one which does not already have a particular narrative inscribed within it. But this conclusion doesn’t mean that we need to totally dismiss Clover’s work. In fact his restatement of the importance of price-setting to riots is extremely powerful and it is only by paying close attention to the content of specific riots that we can hope to understand their connection to wider
historical context. His materialist response to those teleological marxists who think that organisation through a party or union has once and for all supplanted the riot as the default form of collective action is also sorely needed.

Traditional violence-based definitions open up new possibilities because they allow us to draw links between different types of riot. This is important for empirical reasons as well as theoretical ones. Andrew Charlesworth’s criticism of John Bohstedt’s work on price-setting food riots focusses on this very point (Charlesworth 1993). Bohstedt’s major examples of the traditional, small towns he associates with disciplined food riots come from Devon. But, as Charlesworth points out, Devon was also unique in having an industrial culture based around weaving. It was the coexistence of industrial and communal protest which gave those towns a plebian tradition of riots. Small, stable towns without that industrial base were instead often very passive, ‘kept communities’ which didn’t dare disobey local elites. Bohstedt’s analysis of Manchester is similarly distorted by focussing on food riots, but ignoring industrial conflict and the battle over wages which had been an important aspect of the city’s politics since at least the 1740s. It is only by adopting a broader definition which allows us to link these different types of violent protest that we can fully understand them.

These violence-based definitions are also not as dangerous as Clover thinks. First, they need not end up including too much. As Randall Collins has shown (2008) violence of all sorts shares significant features. Moreover, violence against people and property seem to have both been assimilated into contemporary understandings of what it was to riot. This may well have been ideological, but that does not mean that it was not real for participants and that it did not shape the way people acted and reflected on their actions. Second, this definition also need not be politically suspect. As long as riots are kept as a subcategory of violence, we can continue to uncover the everyday, systematic and symbolic violence which is so often ignored. We can also connect riots with politics without defining them in such a way that they must necessarily refer to the logics of capital accumulation. A properly political reading of a riot as signifying something about society must be true to the particular details of that specific riot, not just to overarching economic trends. Third, a violence-
based definition allows us to trace the varying use of violence in strikes and the way that riots emerged out of industrial disputes. Finally, it opens up space for a more complex periodisation which is properly responsive to the fact that riots are “a set of practices in the face of practical circumstances” (Clover 2016, p. 43).

**Conclusion**

I began this chapter trying to defend the utility of ‘rioting’ as a category, arguing that lumping together spontaneous acts of public, collective violence helps us to understand them and their connection to society as a whole. Such an approach is not particularly novel. As I argued earlier, some of the great historians of riots seem to have implicitly adopted this sort of position. But in the face of recent attacks it needed to be spelled out explicitly and defended. I have circled around this argument from a variety of perspectives: initially defending it from Bagguley and Hussain’s claim that in using this definition we are guilty of reification; then trying to philosophically justify a stance somewhere between essentialism and nominalism; and finally considering Clover’s radical redefinition of riots. The centre of gravity for this circling motion has been the idea that the justification for any definition must ultimately come from its usefulness, its practical effects. So, despite the theoretical ground clearing that I have attempted here, the final validation of my definition will be the strength of my overall account of rioting.
Chapter 3
Finding riots and describing them

I didn’t begin this research with a specific, empirical research question. Instead, it began with several theoretical ambitions: to refine existing theories of rioting, to examine how the practice changed over time, to propose some new analytic starting points and to reimagine the way that riots relate to local urban history. This required a grounded approach, using real cases to test existing hypotheses and to look for empirical clues which suggested new perspectives or alternative theories. The basic methodological challenge was to find the material to enable me to do this. My response was to build a catalogue of riots from Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester (from 1800 to 1939) and then use those cases to intervene in the several different theoretical debates.

This catalogue was produced in two stages. First, I systematically searched three digital newspaper archives using keywords to produce a list of riot events in each city. This list was then expanded using secondary literature and searches of Home Office archives. The second stage was then to produce detailed, narrative accounts of each riot. These accounts came mostly from physical and digital newspaper archives. Where possible these were supplemented with local police records and Home Office documents. This left me with a detailed set of four hundred different riots across three cities. There are three sets of methodological issues which arose during this process: the overall research design (section 1), the procedure used to build this catalogue of riots (sections 2 and 3), and finally the way I approach this evidence (sections 4 and 5).

Research design
Many of the best existing sociological studies of riots are built around case studies (e.g. Waddington 1989, Keith 1993) or surveys of particular waves of rioting (e.g. Olzak 1996). These have produced valuable insights and allowed researchers to investigate the specificities of riots within particular local contexts. However, this approach runs the risk of tying theories too tightly to individual cases. The most notable exception is Randall Collins’s work on violence which deliberately draws on a broad range of violent situations from all sorts of different settings (Collins 2008). However, the major drawback of this approach, selecting cases because evidence is readily available, is that it makes it difficult for him to analyse the interplay of long and short run factors. Indeed, he focusses almost exclusively on the micro-situational details of violence. It has only really been historians who have managed to avoid both of these traps by examining large numbers of riots over the long run. These crowd historians played a key role in defining the contours of British social history in the 1960s and 1970s. However, their sampling strategy was traditionally implicit, based on narrative histories or thematic surveys of public disorder in particular periods (e.g. Rudé 1964, Thompson 1971, Stevenson 1979).

Other historians have used explicit criteria to build a catalogue of riots from various sources (e.g. Richter 1965, Wells 1988, Bohstedt 2010). This approach is far closer to social movements research, a large part of which was inspired by the pioneering historical sociology of Charles Tilly (1975, 1978, 1986, 1995). From the mid 1960s, Tilly began compiling long run catalogues of ‘contentious events’ in order to better understand the historical trajectory of protests and how they have evolved over time. At the time this data was stored on machine-readable punch cards and analysing it was a cumbersome and expensive process. However, by the 1990s, this approach had become commonplace and it continues to play a vital role in research today. Protest Event Analysis, as it is now known, is a largely quantitative affair which focusses on events counts as a way of measuring and categorising unrest or testing certain theories about how it evolves over time (for appraisals see Earl et al 2004, Ortiz et al 2005 and Biggs 2016). Although I draw heavily on this tradition and have quantified certain research questions, the nature of my historical data and the kind of questions I am interested in prevents me from relying entirely on statistical methods. Instead I want to marry these two methodological traditions: Tilly’s historical sociology and the older generation of ‘historians of the crowd’. Both agree on the need for a systematic evidence base and their principle difference is how they use historical sources, something I will touch on in the final section. But, these are mostly differences in degree. At their best, both traditions employ a variety of
subtle and sensitive forms of analysis and, taken together, they offer a fruitful paradigm for how to make the kind of theoretical critiques that I think are necessary in the study of riots.

However, after accepting the need for a large, systematic, long run evidence base, there are still many methodological choices which need to be made. The first was the decision to look at three British cities: Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester. Instead of cities I could have looked at rioting across the whole nation/state (probably the default in historical research, e.g. Randall 2006, Bohstedt 2010), or particular regions (e.g. Navickas 2009), or even whole continents (e.g. Mayer et al 2016). However, cities are a useful starting point because they allow us to focus specifically on urban rioting. The early 19th century saw enormous waves of rural riots such as the bread riots of 1800-1801, the Swing Riots, the Rebecca Riots and the Tithe Wars. However, there are reasons to suspect that rural unrest follows different dynamics to urban riots (the stability and isolation of communities, differences in social structures and availability of police forces being the most obvious factors). Therefore, in order to stay relevant to today’s much more urban world, and to speak directly to a sociological literature which has mostly focussed on riots in cities, it seemed prudent to concentrate on urban riots.

But, I also wanted to locate riots in their particular local contexts. This would have been an unmanageable task if I was looking at cities across the whole of the Europe or even the UK. Taking three cities as my case studies is therefore a compromise between giving myself some comparative leverage and still being able to address the local patterns of rioting. It does, however, mean that I cannot address questions of how riots diffuse across space. Investigating these diffusion processes presents a number of empirical challenges (see Aidt et al 2017, p. 2-3). In contemporary riots, ease of transportation and instant communication make it difficult to separate contextual from endogenous effects. But, with historical riots like mine, there is rarely good enough data to measure those contextual factors at all. Compiling a long run wage series for each city would, on its own, have been an enormous task and there are many other potentially confounding factors which I think would have been impossible to measure accurately. Because of this, I will leave the problem of diffusion untouched.

Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester were then chosen as case studies because they are three of the largest cities in the UK (after London, which has already been the subject of extensive historical research). 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. These similarities and differences allow me to compare across the three cities and throw a new light on the patterns that emerge in each place.

The second methodological choice was to focus on the period 1800 to 1939. There were three theoretical and three practical reasons for choosing these dates. First, and most importantly, this time period allows me to investigate how riots fit into the wider evolution of the repertoire of contention. The standard narrative is that the modern repertoire of social movements was born in the first part of the 19th century and displaced older forms of direct action (Tilly 2004). Meanwhile, the trade union movement developed in stages across the 19th century so that, by the early 20th century, the labour movement was one of the most powerful forces in Britain (Charlesworth et al 1996). As I will argue in chapter 5, riots pose a particular problem for these linear, sequential narratives. Second, it encompasses many different kinds of riots. The first few decades capture some examples of more ‘traditional’ forms of rioting like bread riots. And, although nationally rioting seems to have already been on the decline in 1800, the ‘transition to order’ does not fully take hold until the 1870s and urban rioting continues to be fairly common throughout the Victorian era. The period also captures the escalation of industrial unrest leading up to World War I and the turbulence of the interwar period. It therefore allows me to compare riots during periods when they were fairly common, with riots which happen in times of relative stability. The third advantage is that these dates are fairly arbitrary. This makes it harder to fall into the trap of interpreting history as a straightforward teleological process leading up to or out of a particular event. As Chris Wickham argues, arbitrary dates allow a period to tell its own history (Wickham 2017).

These dates were also useful on a practical level. First, I needed a large number of riots over a long time period so that I could avoid the traps which have shaped so many other sociological studies of riots. Given that rioting has become less common over time, this meant looking at historical riots, despite all the problems that historical evidence brings (Goldthorpe 1991). Second, starting in 1800 avoids repeating the numerous, already-existing studies of 18th century rioting (although they can be usefully used to provide a ‘ground zero’ for comparisons). Third, this period allows me to adopt the same research procedure throughout, relying on historical newspapers, police reports and Home Office documents. If I had pushed back into the 18th century then I would have had to switch to different sources (as it stands, my data is significantly worse for the first decade of the 19th
century). And, if I had gone forward into the 1950s, then I would have had to confront alternative approaches like oral history and video/photographic records. Having such different evidence sources would have made it much more difficult to compare across cases and across time.

Choosing these dates and these three cities means excluding some extremely significant events. I don’t dwell on the Church and King riots of the late 18th century, the huge riots in Bristol in 1831, the Gordon Riots of 1780, Nottingham 1812, Hyde Park 1866. Nor do I address the race riots of the 1950s, or the anti-police riots of the 1980s and 2000s. These all have their own fascinating dynamics and I will occasionally mention them in passing, but unfortunately they fall outside the scope of this study. It is also important that in building this catalogue, although I have been strict about the dates, I have been fairly flexible when it comes to geography. I therefore include riots in surrounding towns like Birkenhead, Ashton, Stockport, all of which were part of Manchester, Glasgow or Liverpool’s spheres of influence. Cities are not isolated islands, and treating them as if they were can seriously distort your understanding of them. For example, Andrew Charlesworth criticised John Bohstedt for examining the City of Manchester in isolation from the much larger urban sprawl of which it was a part. When Manchester is properly located within its surroundings, it becomes impossible to maintain an image of the working class as isolated strangers in a city wrecked by anomie. In fact, Manchester’s weavers and spinners had been organising since the 1740s and had developed their own traditions (including ‘bargaining by riot’) which shaped the way protest was conducted in the city (Charlesworth 1993, see also Rule 1981).

The final methodological choice was to come up with a definition which would allow me to decide which cases counted as ‘rioting’. This is a hotly contested subject and I have chosen a fairly orthodox definition which I defended at length in the previous chapter: riots are instances of public, collective violence against people or property. I then chose an arbitrary cut-off point in that something only counts as a riot if there are more than 20 people involved. This is a middle ground, others have picked a higher number (Bohstedt chose 50, 1983) and others a lower number (Tilly chose 10, 1995). This means excluding some events which you might expect to see. Most noticeably, I have nothing to say about the massacre at Peterloo in 1819. This is because this event was a massacre not a riot, violence was entirely one sided and led by the local yeomanry. In fact, the orderliness of the crowd became a central feature of the trial, with the defence citing it as evidence of their good intentions while the prosecution took it to be a sign of their militaristic intent (Poole 2006).
This definition raises the issue of how to define the borders of my cases, where does a riot start and end? I began by identifying each individual riot as a more-or-less continuous occurrence of public, collective violence, what John Bohstedt calls a ‘dramatic unity’ (2010, p. 16). I then also identified waves of riots extending over months and years. This is a difficult and imprecise science but several factors were used to determine whether acts of violence counted as part of a single wave of rioting: explicit references, more-or-less continuous action and a common set of actors or grievances. I have also followed the original reporting as much as possible here, focussing on riots which were experienced (at least by newspaper reporters) as constituting a single event or wave. The importance of working across different scales is central to my argument in Chapter 7 and I won’t go into it in much detail here. But, it’s worth noting that there is a widespread agreement that the value of mechanism-based research depends on the mechanisms in question being sufficiently general and transferable to other sites of study (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998, McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow 2008, Gross 2009). This is normally thought of as moving from one empirical example to another, however, as Charles Tilly (2003) has demonstrated, there is also much to be learned from applying the same mechanisms to different scales.

With these elements in place, the challenge was then to find all the riots in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow between 1800 and 1939.

Finding riots

The standard approach to producing event catalogues, whether the process is automated or manual, takes samples or is systematic, is to trawl through newspaper articles in search of particular kinds of events. My research is no different. I searched three digital newspaper archives (of the Annual Review, The Times, and all the local newspapers from the three cities that had been included in the British Newspaper Archive as of August 2016) 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 as well as the widest possible sample of local publications. The list of search terms was developed by reading a sample 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. I doubt that this process will have picked up on every single incident of violence involving more than 20 people. However, as I will go on to show, I am fairly confident that the four hundred riots I found cover the ‘near universe’ of riots and certainly the most significant ones. The appendix contains a chronological list of all the riots in each city with the corresponding sources. This appendix runs to over 40 pages and can be used as a reference to check the sources for each of the riots I describe in the following chapters. The coding for each riot is also available online.

There are two potential problems with using newspapers to produce catalogues of events. The first is specific to searching digital archives. The process of digitisation involves three stages: first, scanning high-resolution images of the newspaper pages; second, using optical character recognition software to produce electronic text versions of these images; and third, segmenting each page into classified zones and indexing the electronic text to enable searching. As a researcher you follow this process in reverse, starting with a keyword search and then working backwards to the scan of the original article. This way of interfacing with the archive raises the problem of the reliability of the technology, specifically the optical character recognition software. Although the advantages of keyword searching (especially when you are trawling for riot events over a long time period) are immediately obvious, it is also an imperfect process. There are numerous false positives (for example the word ‘not’ being mistaken for ‘riot’) and, therefore, presumably also false negatives i.e. some relevant articles and riots which are missed out from search results. The only way to address this is through the use of numerous related search terms and by cross-checking with different publications. However, the more search terms and publications you include then the larger the eventual list of search results becomes.

The second is the wider problem of selection bias. 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. Indeed, Ortiz et al suggest that “newspaper data often do not reach acceptable standards for event analysis… [because] selection biases are resistant to correction procedures largely because they are unstable across media sources, time, and location”

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2 My full working notes, which includes my coding for each riot and summaries of each source, are available online at www.matteotiratelli.site. These are rough notes and are not yet in a fully polished state so I apologise in advance for any spelling or grammar errors which makes them difficult to follow.
Most quantitative researchers are interested in using these catalogues to provide a measurement of the level of protest (see Silver 1995). In that context, unstable selection biases could be a source of insurmountable measurement error. The only way to attempt to calibrate for this is to compare across different newspapers and different sources - itself an imperfect solution (see Maney and Oliver 2001) and often not possible if researchers are interested in, for example, every protest event across a continent over a large number of years. Historians who aim to ‘count’ riots have also been sensitive to this issue and, again, try to correct for it by relying on a variety of sources (for discussion see Wells 1978, Archer 2000, Bohstedt 2010). Even for those who use newspaper sources qualitatively (e.g. Stevenson 1979, Richter 1981 or Neal 1988), it is still important to consider whether the particular subset of events which are reported in newspapers give a representative impression of rioting as a whole.

I want to suggest that, for my particular purposes, the problem of selection bias isn’t fatal. The first reason is that when checking my results against Home Office records (HO 40, 44, 45 and 144) and secondary sources, I found almost no large riots which I had not already picked up. This may reflect genuine gaps in the historical record (i.e. events for which all evidence has disappeared and which we will never know about), but, it seems implausible that a very large riot would have left no traces in any of the many newspapers and records which are now available for this period. I use the caveat ‘very large riot’ deliberately and this is the second reason why I believe that selection bias is not a fatal problem for my research. Traditionally, most quantitative studies have used counts of events as their key variable. This means that events with thirty participants are given equal weight to those with 10,000. As Michael Biggs (2016) has pointed out, it seems strange to focus on events when most of our theories actually refer to people. This is largely a result of the methodological individualism that dominates this kind of research. Even questions like ‘why do riots break out?’ are normally answered with theories which relate to why individuals would want to riot. But there are important methodological implications which follow from this. Counts of events are only weakly correlated with the actual number of people in those events, in fact, a few very large events count for the vast majority of total participants. Biggs therefore recommends focusing our efforts on accurately documenting those large events, instead of worrying about every small riot with 21 people in it.3 This is reassuring because I am far more confident that my approach to finding riots

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3 This is a very uncontroversial piece of advice for anyone who looking at industrial disputes where we can usually rely on data covering the number of working days lost or number of workers on strike. It’s often much harder to get this kind of data for marches and demonstrations, let alone for riots.
will provide detailed accounts of extremely large riots, than I am that it will pick up every possible incident of collective violence.

In order to rigorously apply Biggs’s advice in a quantitative context I would need to have some measure of the size of each riot. However, this is simply not possible with my data. Only about 10% of the cases offer an estimate of the size of the crowds and these estimates may themselves be worryingly inaccurate. Although some riots led to a large number of arrests, this doesn’t seem to be correlated with the sense of the size of the riot conveyed in the newspaper descriptions. The disproportionate attention given in the sources to industrial disputes also made it difficult to use the amount of newspaper coverage as a proxy for the size of riots. Instead, I have to use Biggs’s advice implicitly, trying to focus my analytical points on the largest and most notable riots, even if that can’t be quantified.

This comes close to E.P. Thompson’s famous advice that “[i]f we are looking for the characteristic form of direct action, we should take, not squabbles outside London bakeries, nor even the great affrays provoked by discontent with the large millers, but the ‘risings of the people’” (1971, p. 107-108). This is because he thinks that these dramatic events are the best lens onto the deeper structural processes of class formation and class struggle which shape society. However, I think he pushes this a bit too far. These moments of heroic rebellion are certainly significant, but, they emerge out of a society characterised by much more mundane, everyday forms of rioting. Indeed, I’m not sure that you can understand the practices and norms which gave these great bread riots their characteristic restrained form, outside of the pattern set by other, smaller riots. It’s also worth noting that two of the largest riots in the 20th century not ‘risings of the people’ at all: the anti-German riots of 1915 and the Liverpool police strike riots of 1919. So, although I do concentrate on large riots, I have tried to avoid slipping into a normative definition of ‘great’ riots. Riots which were significant because of their role in larger processes like class formation or the development of popular radicalism are not necessarily representative of the wider practice of rioting, or even of radical class politics (Harrison 1988). Throughout my analysis I have tried to give equal weight to riots of different sorts, whether or not they seem relevant to wider narratives or political currents.

The leading alternative way of finding riots would have been to systematically read a sample of newspapers, for example looking at one day per week for every other month. Reading them cover-to-cover would remove the need for digital searching and would be much closer to the original
approach of Tilly and others (e.g. Bohstedt 1983, Tilly 1995). However, this approach would be inappropriate for my purposes. Riots, especially large riots, are comparatively rare and so looking only at a sample of dates would run the risk of missing the most significant events. This is similar to the problem of trying to measure inequality by relying on random samples of 1000 people, the chances of you coming across extremely wealthy individuals in those samples are simply too small for it to be worth it.

There is one final point that needs to be raised about this way of finding riots. Relying on keyword searches means relying on the newspapers’ categorisation of something as a riot. Given that my approach is grounded in the situationist insight that people’s behaviours are shaped by the situations they find themselves in, accepting a newspaper’s definition of that situation is a significant leap, especially as those newspapers were often catering for a relatively elite audience. This is a more general problem for historians who are forced to rely on ‘official’ perspectives, instead of first person accounts, because of the types of evidence that survive. However, as I argued in the last chapter, the meanings and norms that are associated with a particular situation are not purely subjective. To be intelligible they must be roughly shared across a community and so it seems plausible that contemporary definitions, even if they are given in a newspaper, will mirror actors’ own definitions. In cases where these definitions are uncertain or being actively contested, then this is also often visible in the newspaper accounts or reports from trials.

**Describing them**

The challenge of describing these four hundred riots raises problems of its own. I started with a variety of sources: the digitised newspapers I’ve already mentioned; the newspapers stored on microfilm at Glasgow City Archives, Manchester Central Library and Liverpool Record Office; local police records; and Home Office records (HO 40, 44 and 45) (a complete list of sources is available in the Bibliography). The major question is whether these sources can be relied on to give accurate accounts of those riots. But, the answer depends on what you are looking to these sources to document. I want to suggest that they can be relied on to provide narratives of the events on the ground, but that they are far less reliable when it comes to answering other questions like ‘who riots’.
The narratives that I managed to put together from these sources are wonderfully detailed, providing dates, times, precise locations and descriptions of the actions of rioters and law enforcement. Often they also provide descriptions of the crowd and their banners, flags or uniforms. They also cover the political content attributed to or claimed by the rioters, as well as the things that rioters said, songs they sang and chants they shouted. However, some cases present difficulties. For example, in Liverpool in October 1839 there was a riot on the Chester-Birkenhead railway line. A single account in *The Times* (15/10/1839) gives three possible stories: in one a group of Irish labourers broke in and attacked the English men; in another the English were the aggressors; in the last it was a purely industrial affair with mixed ethnic groups. Similarly in Manchester in September 1883 a riot broke out on Ashton New Road between the police and a late night crowd which led to someone dying and a police officer being sentenced for manslaughter. However, the court case featured extremely contradictory accounts given by different witnesses with no obvious way to judge which is the most accurate.

This opens up the problem of description bias, or whether the sources provide an accurate and reliable description of the event in question. The first general point is about whose perspectives are preserved in the archival process. Newspaper archives (ideally) provide a systematic record of every copy of the newspaper in question. The Times Archive, for example, covers the entire period of its publication, from 1785 to today. But that leaves open the question of which titles deserve to be archived. This has a contemporary aspect in that only titles which were considered worthy of preservation at the time have survived to today. But, we are now faced with a decision about which of those surviving titles we should continue to preserve and digitise. Therefore archives embody contemporary and present judgements about the relative value of different newspapers and the power relations underpinning them. These issues are most concrete in the case of the British Newspaper Archive which is continually adding to its collection and even invites users to suggest which titles they should digitise next. This represents something of a democratisation of the process of archive creation, although it is difficult to know how much attention the archivists pay to those suggestions. When these archives are being used to document contentious events like riots, the political orientation of the publication in question is extremely important. Although archival efforts have tended to concentrate on high-profile (which often means elite-orientated) newspapers such as *The Times*, a fairly wide range of titles are now available and this should allow us greater scope to judge the relevant biases.
The second point concerns the actual documents themselves. By relying on newspapers, police
records and Home Office documents, there is a danger that I will end up reproducing the ‘official
record’ of events. As oral historians like Alessandro Portelli (1991) have long argued, these ‘official
records’ are often politically motivated and used to absolve authorities of responsibility or to tarnish
the images of protesters. This provides the moral impetus for his historical detective work, using
oral testimony to uncover the truth and overturn ‘official’ narratives. The only way to deal with this
potential danger is by gathering as many different sources as possible, something I have tried to do
for each event. Looking across different newspapers allows us to build richer descriptions, but, it’s
also a way of corroborating claims made in different papers. However, it is worth noting that
reporters (especially in national newspapers) often base their accounts on other newspaper reports.
So what looks like reassuring corroboration may in fact be all the articles deriving from the same
original source. In social history this problem is sometimes addressed by looking for similarities of
phrasing which indicate that various accounts are based on the same source material (e.g. Bushaway
1982). The other approach is to look for alternative archival materials, such as eye witness accounts,
court records or Home Office Disturbance Reports. However, each of these faces their own
methodological problems: few eye-witness accounts survive, court testimonies have obvious biases
of their own, and the Home Office letters are equally performative and often better evidence of elite
attitudes towards riots than descriptions of the riots themselves. This is a constant danger for
historical research and provides a hard limit to how far I can push these narratives. But, in general,
there seems to be a fairly high level of corroboration between the sources which hopefully indicates
that my narratives are sufficiently accurate.

A major focus of past research has been on who riots, what George Rudé refers to as the ‘faces in
the crowd’ (1964). Here my sources are extremely limited and I will only attempt to give some
brief, qualitative remarks. In general, the impression given by the sources is that there is huge
variation in the kind of people who riot: men and women are involved, young and old, people from
different trades, ethnic backgrounds and even from different classes. It is almost impossible to say
anything more specific because of the methodological difficulties in this area. The qualitative
descriptions of the crowd given by newspapers are extremely case-specific: in industrial riots they
often refer to people’s trades, in food riots to their class, in anti-Irish riots to their ethnicity, etc etc.
Sometimes they only give a normative assessment, for example, describing a crowd as the ‘dregs of
society’ (The Times, 20/2/1855). A quantitative approach would therefore have to rely on arrest
records, something which is still used to analyse rioters today (e.g. Kawalerowicz and Biggs 2015).
However, very few riots in my catalogue saw large numbers of arrests which means that the sample of rioters per event is often tiny or non-existent. And, given the difficulties I mentioned earlier in relating the number of arrests to the size of the riot, I remain skeptical about how representative that arrest data would be. So, instead of giving any rigorous assessment of who riots, I will limit myself to sketching out the variety of participants.

Although almost all of the historians and sociologists writing about riots have been men, women seem to have been there as rioters throughout this period. Women are explicitly mentioned in more than 10% of my cases and, although they rarely appear on their own, they seem to have played a fairly prominent role in rioting. The extent of their participation has been the subject of some debate amongst historians. J.L. and Barbara Hammond (1987), E.P. Thompson (1971, 1991) and Lawrence Stone (1990) have all suggested that women played a leading role in bread riots. This has led to exaggerated descriptions of riots as ‘revolts of the housewives’, an idea which overstates women’s participation and misinterprets the significance of their involvement. John Bohstedt has argued quite convincingly that, although women played a serious role in food riots, they were by no means the majority of participants. Moreover, rather than being a sign of their role within the household economy, their participation in food riots was a political gesture and a claim of citizenship (Bohstedt 1988, 1993). It also seems possible that men and women were involved in slightly different ways in different types of riot (Bouton 1990). The evidence I have accumulated shows that women were present in a whole range of different riots, some of which were far removed from their ‘traditional’ roles as consumers and homemakers. But, it’s probably fair to say that the majority of rioters were generally men.

The involvement of women in riots also has a complicated representational politics (Rowbotham 2013). Sometimes women who riot are presented in foreign, unnatural terms as ‘viragoes’ and ‘amazons’ (e.g. Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser 25/6/1909, see also Davies 1999). Or their participation is frowned on as ‘unbecoming’ for the fairer sex (e.g. Liverpool Mail 4/6/1839). However, at other times, women’s involvement seems to justify the unrest. For example, during the 1911 Transport Strike, the wives of striking workers marched from Salford into Manchester, carrying their infants in their arms, with placards reading “Our Poverty is Your

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4 In many other cases the gender of the crowd is not mentioned so it is safe to assume that 10% is a lower bound for the true extent of women’s involvement.
Danger”. The newspaper coverage of the 1915 anti-German riots used a similar trope, focussing on the image of bereaved mothers and wives leading crowds of angry rioters. But, this innocent femininity could be something of a double-edged sword. In 1871, The Times (6/4/1871) reported that the number of councillors supporting women’s suffrage in Manchester has fallen after the 1868 municipal elections where “not only were women voters introduced into scenes of disgraceful disorder at the polling, but drunken women were brought to the poll by drunken men”.

Women also played a particular role within the wave of scuttling violence that shook Manchester and Glasgow in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. ‘Scuttling’ was a complex phenomenon composed of a youth counter-culture, gang warfare and organised crime (Pearson 1983, Humphries 1995, Gooderson 1997, Davies 1998a,1998b, 2013a, 2013b). Within it, women took on numerous roles. When they were members of the gangs who were involved in violence, they were often castigated in the press as ‘unwomanly’, but then went on to receive lenient sentences from magistrates who assumed they were marginal and easily malleable because of their gender. They were also the object of male scuttlers’ attention, as men fought over them and tried to impress them through acts of daring and violence (Davies 1999). The wives and girlfriends of prominent scuttlers also received some of their male partner’s fame and notoriety; in Glasgow, women associated with the Beehive Boys were known as the ‘Queen Bees’ (Davies 1998a).

Despite modern stereotypes of rioters as angry teenagers, riots also don’t seem to have been exclusively the preserve of the young. There are certainly examples of riots led by ‘young boys’ like those who attacked the house of a wealthy gentleman on Faulkner Street in Manchester (Manchester Mercury 12/5/1829). The scuttlers and gangs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also seem to have been overwhelmingly young. But, there are also many examples of respectable fathers and mothers being involved in riots. This is most obvious in industrial unrest where unionists of all ages took part in violent attacks on scabs and factories.

The class and occupational background of rioters is also extremely varied. They were weavers, colliers, bricklayers, builders, dockers, ships carpenters, sailers, railway workers and the unemployed. Beyond the working class we often hear of fashionably dressed men being spotted in the crowds (e.g. in Liverpool February 1819 and June 1859), of gents rioting in theatres or on the Exchange (e.g. in Manchester January 1819 or Liverpool February 1865). Middle class students in Glasgow also rioted frequently, tearing up Sauchiehall Street and attacking university buildings. So,
although it is probably true that the middle and upper classes had their own avenues of political participation (see Randall and Charlesworth 1996), they still occasionally took to the streets.

Newspapers also often made the distinction between the deserving poor and habitual roughs and criminals (e.g. Liverpool Mercury 19/1/1867) or blamed the violence on hired thugs and gangs. (e.g. Liverpool Mail 27/7/1837). It is difficult to know what to make of these normative distinctions. As Peter Bailey (1979) has argued, the strict division of the working class into ‘respectable’ and ‘unrespectable’ is untenable. In Manchester in April 1837, *The Times* (22/04/1837) reported a remarkable sequence of events when a large group of weavers marched down to the police station to disowned the actions of the previous day, when other groups of weavers had seized bread from the town’s bakeries. They said that those actions had not been sanctioned by the weavers and they “stated their tale of woe in strong, but not exaggerated terms, and conducted themselves with the greatest propriety”. They thanked the authorities for hearing their case and the crowd soon broke up. However, as they separated, a group of them went down to two shops on Ancoats street and Oldham road demanding bread! Clearly these weavers felt able to move across the imposed, middle-class barrier of respectability. In that context, it’s impossible to think that rioters might be distinguishable from ‘normal, law-abiding folk’ on the basis of their moral standards.

There are two other significant limits to my reliance on these data sources. The first is that I have little to say about the police. All riots involve (at least) two sides and the interactions between police and rioters were almost certainly extremely important. In order to address this I have drawn on police records and on histories of the three local police forces where possible. But there are rarely extensive police documents related to specific riots and a more general history of how they approached public order lies outside the scope of my research. The second major limitation is that I have to focus on rioters’ outward facing behaviour. The number of first-hand accounts of riots is vanishingly small and court reports are extremely difficult to interpret. This means that I am not able to address questions about rioters’ state of mind or their self-image. I will return to this issue in later chapters, but I’m fairly pessimistic about whether we will ever be able to definitively answer those kinds of questions for these historical riots.

So, although it’s difficult to give a more detailed account of who riots and what they thought of their own involvement, it is possible to build rich narratives describing the riots themselves. In the following chapters I will use these narratives to examine when and where riots took place, what
rioters actually did when they rioted, the events which triggered riots and the different mechanisms which then sustained them. This is only possible because of the remarkable level of detail provided by the various sources.

**Forms of analysis**

In a revealing chapter about E.P. Thompson from *Contentious Performances* (2008), Charles Tilly says:

> Over the years, many a personal encounter with E. P. Thompson made me painfully aware of Thompson’s deep suspicion when it came to the sort of social scientific formalization... [Tilly] advocates. But (as Thompson reassured me not long before his death) at least we agreed on the necessity for solid evidence concerning popular contention as a bulwark against postmodern skepticism. My effort to document the operation of performances and repertoires follows a double Thompsonian inspiration: to identify common properties and principles of contention at the level of existing regimes and to avoid the obfuscation produced by such authorities’ terms as “riot” and “disorder.” Yet it breaks with Thompson by hewing to a middle ground between Thompson’s supple literary narratives and the stiff numbers of classified event counts. (p. 65)

In trying to do justice to these two paradigms, I have had to balance their respective impulses: one drive to formalise, abstract and generalise, and another which remains wedded to local specificity and thick descriptions of historical experience. Although Tilly is already reaching for a middle ground, I’m not convinced he always reaches it. As William Sewell (1990) explains:

> [Tilly has] related scores of dramatic incidents of collective violence with all the considerable rhetorical resources he can muster… [But] the incidents related in such loving detail were actually marginal to the central argument... They were merely secondary consequences... [He] recounts hundreds of events, but those events are not consequential to the central story Tilly wishes to tell (p. 533)
By relying on time-series, innovative displays of event counts and macro-historical processes which take place off-stage, Tilly actually leaves little room for local particularities and the nuances of human interaction. Recovering that thick historical detail means returning to E.P. Thompson’s ‘literary narratives’ and narrowing the scope of my argument. That is why I dwell on local history and only briefly link riots to larger trends in the development of capitalism and the modern state. My focus is on the riots themselves, on their internal dynamics and the interactions that constitute rioting. Unpacking that means looking closely at narratives and descriptions which are not easily quantified.

But, I have tried not to completely abandon Tilly’s formalising impulse. My methodological choices are in service of the arguments I make. Therefore, chapters 4 and 5 include tables, maps and basic regressions. I geolocate riots and analyse the places in which they broke out. I also code the time and date of each riot to explore how they fitted into people’s calendars. Finally I coded each riot for the inclusion of particular kinds of behaviour, like factory visiting or begging, and for who was targeted and where (I have included a definition of each type of behaviour in the notes of each table). These allow me to simplify and test some of my theories about long run trends in the practice of rioting. But, these are very minimal tests which need to be buttressed by more detailed arguments relying on qualitative evidence. I have tried, therefore, to weave together quantitative and qualitative elements and to resist the urge to impose a rigid straightjacket of labels and categories onto the historical data. Presenting cases in full, with all their complicating nuance, limits the extent to which I can make grand theoretical predictions, but, I hope that it provides a richer sense of the historical experience of rioting.

Having said that, I suspect that historians will find chapters 4 and 5 far closer to their traditional practice of close reading of primary sources and placing facts in their context. This is my explicit aim in that I place riots in their spatial, temporal and cultural context as well as considering how they fit into the wider practice of rioting. Chapters 6 and 7 are closer to traditional social science in that I explicitly abstract from individual cases in an effort to build a general framework for analysing riots. This follows what Anthony Abbott describes as a ‘pattern-based approach’, where I have tried to describe the different processes and tropes which characterise different types of riots.

5 All of these coding decisions were based on the narratives of the events in question and are available in my working notes: www.matteotiratelli.site
I then use these generalised processes to test and extend existing theories about what is going on in a riot.

It’s worth expanding on the reasons why I don’t attempt a time-series analysis of the level of rioting over time. The most important reason is that I don’t want to replicate studies which look at rioting as an outcome to be explained. My explicit interest is in the internal dynamics of rioting and it is difficult to see how a set of time-series models would help with that. The second reason is that the dependent variable would have to be counts of riots, not the number of rioters. As I mentioned before, there are lots of reasons to be suspicious about whether looking at event counts is a sensible way of testing theories of rioting. The third reason is that there are very few reliable data sources which cover the whole period (especially at the local level) and so I would be unacceptably short on independent variables. As I said before, this doesn’t mean that I completely exclude any statistical analysis, but, the following chapters don’t have much for people who are looking for the familiar, quantitative sociology approach.

My focus on the internal dynamics of a riot also means paying close attention to endogenous processes. These involve the riot itself causing some change which makes further rioting more likely. This is why riots are so unpredictable: fairly similar conditions can result in wildly different outcomes as escalating cycles of positive feedback take hold. These sudden swings and dramatic spikes also characterise the wider history of protest. Waves of protests like the sit-ins in the U.S. South, the Iranian Revolution, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the Italian protests of the late 1960s or riots in 18th century France reveal the limits of purely exogenous explanation (see respectively Biggs 2005, Tarrow 1989, Rudé 1964). In newspaper accounts, journalists often recognise this, falling back on the idea of contagion or copycatting. For example, the riots in April 1812 in Manchester was seen as a copy of earlier riots in Nottingham. Similar explanations were offered for the Lusitania riots which spread from Liverpool to cities across England and for the riots by unemployed workers in 1932 which struck towns across Britain (Ewing et al 2000, p. 220).

These narratives of contagion are often criticised for implying that the process is mindless and irrational (McPhail 1991). But, while we undoubtedly need more sophisticated accounts of how this feedback works, they are valuable in that they reveal the importance of endogenous processes.

Finally, it’s worth pointing out that I have no control group of ‘potential riot situations’ to compare against (in that sense I am guilty of selecting on the dependent variable). This means that, in
chapters 6 and 7, I have to examine these processes from within each riot and follow a process tracing approach. This puts the emphasis on ‘description’ as a way of discovering and verifying the existence of causal processes, as opposed to counterfactual comparison of events where riots might have broken out with those where they actually did (Bennet and George 1997, Collier 2011, Mahoney 2012, 2015). This poses some limits to the kind of claims I can make, which I briefly reflect on at the end of chapter 7. Nevertheless, this descriptive approach is invaluable in allowing me to tease out a variety of different processes which help to trigger and sustain riots over time.

Theory and history

Despite starting out with theoretical ambitions, most of the following chapters are resolutely empirical. Above all, the two paradigms set by E.P. Thompson and Charles Tilly force researchers to focus on the historical detail and remain close to the evidence. That’s why most of my methodological discussion has focussed on how I collected the evidence, rather than on the intricacies of analysis or epistemology. I have argued that my searches through various newspaper archives, Home Office records, local police reports and secondary literature have allowed me to catalogue the near universe of riots in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow, to compile richly detailed accounts of them and to corroborate those details across different sources. This is the essential foundation for the theoretical critiques and suggestions I want to make.

The idea of a dialogue between history and theory opens up a knot of philosophical and practical problems. Tilly (2007) distinguishes between several different visions of this dialogue. The simplest is one in which theory provides tools which a historian can then use to explain particular historical episodes (this echoes Jon Elster’s approach to social science in general, 2015). These theories cannot, however, be simply ‘applied’ because they are invariably too simplistic. So, as well as adapting the tools of theory, historians also supply reminders of the complexity and variety of human experience. This implies that history is a self-contained practice which draws on and critiques theory, but, because it focusses on explaining particular historical events, never enters into a deeper synthesis with theory. In other words, there's no attempt to produce properly historical theories. History, therefore, adapts and complicates theory, while remaining external to it.
Tilly’s preferred visions attempt to synthesise history and theory in a single enterprise. While there are different ways of doing this, his preferred approach is a ‘systematic analysis of context-specific processes’ (Tilly 2007). This breaks with the idea of theory as eternal laws, but, makes the development of systematic explanations an integral part of historical research. Historical theory, therefore, looks something like a menu of fairly transferable causal mechanisms, which then combine in a certain configuration (Tilly calls these configurations ‘processes’), to produce particular historical events. As examples, he takes this approach to explaining outbreaks of mass violence in northern Uganda and Chechnya in the 1990s (Tilly 2001, Tilly 2003, McAdam et al 2008). Here history and theory are brought much closer together: doing history involves producing specific theories in a systematic way from historical evidence.

E.P. Thompson’s discussion of the ‘poverty of theory’ (1978, 1981) starts from a similar position. The historical method is about bringing models into dialogue with evidence, an approach he uses to explain certain historical processes like class formation, class struggle and the imposition of labour discipline. But, he pushes further than Tilly in his advocacy of History, arguing that its ‘open system’ is far superior to the ‘closed system’ of theoretical structuralism. It’s interesting that both Tilly and Thompson took aim at structuralism. But while Tilly was vexed by Talcott Parson’s American version of structuralism, Thompson targeted Louis Althusser’s school of Structural Marxism and in so doing, he introduced a third term: politics. As with all Marxists, E.P. Thompson starts from the premise that theory has implications for political practice. So part of his critique of structuralist theories concerns their anti-democratic, elitist implication that intellectuals can ‘substitute’ for an organised working class in the struggle for socialism (Wood 1982). My approach is again an attempt to bridge the gap between Thompson and Tilly. The models that I bring into dialogue with my historical evidence are attempts at theoretical abstraction, at identifying fairly general processes which can be transferred from site to site. But I also want to bring them into dialogue with politics. Not in the sense of an ethical limit to the kinds of methods I employ (although those limits would be crucial in other contexts). But, in the sense that the history of riots suggests a particular vision of historical change and demands a political strategy which suits that vision.

However, Stuart Hall raises a prescient objection to this kind of approach, one which applies equally well to Tilly or Thompson. He asks:
Whence do the ‘models’ arise? They cannot arise from the evidence itself, since this is what they are tested against. Either they are heuristic constructions - like Weber’s ideal types: or the question must be faced as to how concepts are constructed, and the necessity to any form of theorising, Thompson’s included, of modes of abstraction (Hall 1981, p. 382, emphasis added)

The essence of Hall’s critique is the danger of circularity, deriving theories from data which you then use to test those same theories. This echoes Karl Popper’s view of science as a system for falsifying hypotheses, a system which is completely independent of the question of how hypotheses themselves are developed. In its crudest form this implies that we shouldn’t really care where those hypotheses come from at all, as long as they are independent of the data you use to test them. This is an important challenge, but I don’t think that it means we have to return to the first vision of history and theory, where they were kept entirely separate.

One way of overcoming this challenge this is pragmatist and involves refining theories against historical evidence in an iterative cycle: deduction of hypotheses, inductive testing and abduction of new theories (Peirce 1974, Strauss 1987, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Reichertz 2013). This is fairly close to the traditional practice of historical research and also to the process tracing methods I discussed earlier. The essence of this cycle is the idea that theories can be drawn from historical evidence and then tested against further historical material without being guilty of a dangerous circularity. The key point is that, although you might have only one case, you can generate new historical evidence which you can use to test the implications of earlier theories. This is made easier for me by also having four hundred riots to compare across, so that theories which emerge from one riot can also be tested against another riot. But the distinction between cases and evidence is central to understanding how we can escape from Hall’s critique.

The abduction of new theories is the least well-described part of this cycle. Without claiming to have a complete account of how we should theorise, I want to suggest that abduction often takes the form of what Hall calls ‘modes of abstraction’ (Hall 1981). This fits fairly closely with Tilly’s approach of identifying general features from historical detail, features which can then be transferred to other sites. The way this is done is certainly political and will also have implications for the kinds of political strategies that are derived from it. E.P. Thompson’s populist impulses served him well here. It is only by remaining close to the richness of historical experience that
theorising can remain embedded in the struggles it hopes to shape. The further these theories take us from that experience, the further they take us from actually existing politics.

Ultimately, these different visions of the relationship between theory and history are not about how much of each you do. They are about the way you bring them into dialogue with each other. My historical research is an attempt to test and refine existing theories, but also to develop new ideas and advance systematic explanations for some of the patterns that I observe. This means holding theory and history close together. But, at the root of all that work lies a catalogue of riots, and my arguments stand or fall on the basis of that empirical material.

**Conclusion**

My research set out to refine the theoretical frameworks which we use to understand rioting. I have tried to draw on as wide a range of riots as possible, while still being able to address their local specificities and their long run evolution. This meant building a catalogue of riots in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow from 1800 to 1939. Unfortunately, this also means ignoring certain important events and questions which are beyond the limits of my sources. But, hopefully it does allow me to justify several arguments: one about the way riots are embedded in time, space and society; another about the way the practice of rioting has changed over time; another about how the career of a riot unfolds, the ways they are triggered and the processes which sustain them; and finally about the particular image of history that is implied by the practice of rioting.
Riots tend to catch people by surprise. They come like a bolt from the blue, like unexpected thunderclaps. In the aftermath, commentators scrabble around for explanations, but, there’s often a feeling that riots are simply unpredictable, the accidental coinciding of chance events (e.g. Granovetter 1978, Bagguley 2011). And, when explanations are offered, they just as often turn riots into mechanical responses to hunger or deprivation (e.g. Lagi et al 2011, Ponticelli and Voth 2011). Neither of these approaches can do justice to the fact that riots are deeply embedded within their social and cultural settings. This is the point that E.P. Thompson famously made when he argued that 18th century bread rioting was one of many learned and scripted responses to hunger and that it was shaped by the particular cultural legacy of Tudor paternalism (1971, 1991). What I want to show here is that throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, rioting in Britain continued to be intricately woven into urban society and culture. At the level of space, riots evolved with the city, filling the urban landscape and occurring across the everyday spaces of urban life. At the level of time, riots followed the day-to-day pattern of working hours and changes to the structure of the working week. They also clearly cluster around particular recurring events like elections, St Patrick’s Day or the Glorious Twelfth of July. However, during the 19th century riots also came unmoored from some of their other social foundations. In particular they lose their connection to local political structures and the cultural field that once gave them legitimacy. This is not an argument for the supremacy of culture as an explanation for change, those cultural and political changes may well have material roots. But the most immediate cause of the decline in rioting seems
to have been its unmooring from its social and cultural roots. This contributed to the general pacification of city life and the end result was that, by the mid 20th century, rioting had been displaced from its central position within the repertoire of contention by alternative forms of protest.

**Riots in space**

The topic of space has attracted a rich and varied theoretical literature, most notably work by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel de Certeau (2011). The central point which these theories revolve around is that space is produced by us in various ways but also shapes us and our actions. I will focus here on the second part of that dialectic and ask how people’s everyday patterns of movement and uses of space around the city shape the distribution of rioting (see also Sewell 2001, Wood 2007). Due to the long timescale I am trying to cover, I will only be able to address the very broadest trends in the use of space across the city, but, even those reveal interesting and significant patterns. Most importantly, rioting fills the whole of urban space. It is coextensive with the city and reflects the full diversity of spaces within it. This is only surprising in the context of the modern stereotype of rioting as an ‘inner city problem’. It would not have been news to Glaswegians at the time of the ‘real mean city’ that violence was common in central areas like Saltmarket, but, also in Gorbals south of the Clyde or out in Bridgeton to the east.

I make this argument by investigating space at three levels: location, locale and sense of place (Agnew 1987). These correspond to an event’s bare geographic location (for example its longitude and latitude), the type of space the event happens in (for example in a pub or at a train station) and the emotional or cultural sensibilities associated with a particular place (for example the specific

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6 For some of the better recorded riots it would be fascinating to trace their movement across the city at a micro-level and compare that to micro-historical reconstruction of local people’s everyday movements. However, this would have moved the thesis into a whole new territory and would have been an unmanageable task across three cities and one hundred and forty years.
associations of Shudehill Market in Manchester). Each of these three levels shows rioting embedded and woven into the fabric of everyday life.

The easiest way to demonstrate this is to begin with the geographic location of riots. By plotting every road and address mentioned in the accounts of the riots, you can map the distribution of riots and examine how that changes over time. The pattern is the same for all three cities: rioting becomes less clustered and covers a wider area, filling the city as it grows. The heat maps presented in Figures 2, 3 and 4 demonstrate this graphically. For each city I grouped all the locations affected by rioting per year and then divided them into four equally sized groups and plotted each group separately. This has the advantage of preventing the heat maps being distorted by having different sized groups, but, means that the panels all cover slightly different time spans. For what it’s worth, if you divide the riot locations into four equally spaced time spans (1800-1835, 1835-1870, 1870-1905, 1905-1939), then you see the same pattern of riots spreading across the city as it grows outwards. It is also worth noting that within each city there don’t appear to be any strong differences in the location of different forms of riot. For example, both sectarian and economic rioting in Manchester are concentrated in the northern part of the city around Ancoats and New Cross. The same is true of Liverpool and Glasgow.

All three of these cities grew dramatically over the period as industrialisation and urbanisation took hold. Liverpool and Birkenhead went from a population of 77,653 in 1801 to 318,852 by 1841 and then on to 1,101,056 by 1911. Manchester and Salford experienced similar growth: from 94,876 to 311,269 and then to 1,034,690 over the same time frame. That’s the equivalent of a town the size of today’s Wigan being added to both cities every decade. Glasgow’s growth was slightly slower, moving from 77,058 in 1801 to 261,004 in 1841 and 784,496 by 1911. But even Glasgow had well over a million inhabitants by the start of the 1920s (Bennett 2012; for Glasgow after 1841 the data comes from the 1911 and 1921 censuses). Along with this expansion in population, the cities grew in area, spilling out into the surrounding countryside and engulfing neighbouring towns and villages. And rioting followed this expansion. A by-product of this is that rioting becomes less
clustered. For example, as Figure 2 shows, in the first half of the 19th century, rioting in Liverpool was roughly contained in the old part of the city around the docks and between the two bridges over to Birkenhead. In contrast, by the interwar period, riots had spread as far south as Brunswick and as far north as Bootle. This shows that rioting affected the whole urban landscape and was coextensive with it. However, I don’t want to suggest that rural villages did not experience rioting until urbanisation came along. Rural rioting was also extremely common, especially during the early 1800s (Charlesworth 1983, Wells 1988, Jones 2007). My point is that urban rioting was not contained within particular neighbourhoods, but rather, affected the whole city.
Figure 3: Geographic spread of rioting in Manchester

Figure 4: Geographic spread of rioting in Glasgow
As well as covering the geographic extent of these three cities, riots also seem to have covered a range of different types of space, different locales, within them. Table 1 shows that riots covered all areas of life, from church and workplace to private homes and pubs. As you might expect, there is a significant concentration in public streets and fields. But, in general, around a half of all riots took place in other types of space and the streets where rioting happened were not confined to particularly rough neighbourhoods.

Table 1: The spaces where riots started

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liverpool</th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places of worship</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplaces</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private homes</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting halls</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets and fields</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places of leisure</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Figures show the percentage of riots in that city which started in each type of space. Workplaces includes factories, workshops, docks etc. Places of leisure includes pubs, theatres, clubs, football grounds etc. Anything which was being used as a Meeting Hall at the time is counted as one even if it normally serves a different purpose. Place of worship almost always means a Church but also includes Mosques. This table shows only the 6 most common types of space for riots and so the columns do not sum to 100%.

However, these three cities also have different distributions of riots across space and this reflects underlying differences in the dominant types of riots. Manchester, for example, stands out with nearly one in five riots happening in workplaces. That reflects the importance of economic distress and strike riots to the history of the city. For the most part, these economic riots happened between the 1820s and the 1840s as part of the various waves of working class struggle during the Reform and Chartist movements. But violence remained a feature of Manchester’s economic conflicts throughout the period, with vicious attacks on strike breakers in Stalybridge and Ashton during the cotton strikes of the 1890s, running battles with the police during the 1911 Transport Strike and again during the unemployed protests of the 1930s. The importance of religious and sectarian strife to Liverpool’s history is reflected in the large number of riots beginning in and around churches. Meanwhile Glasgow’s reputation for street violence (particularly by the 1920s) is reflected in the very high percentage of riots taking place in the open air.
A further difference concerns rioters direction of travel. For most of the 19th century rioters, strikers and protesters often marched into Manchester from the surrounding towns. However, in Glasgow and Liverpool, the direction of travel was reversed, with people marching from the city centre outwards (this is confirmed by Harrison 1988, Navickas 2015). Part of this is to do with legislative differences. Liverpool and Glasgow eventually banned Orange marches from the city centre which led to the establishment of a tradition of leaving the city for processions and unrest. However, it is also a reflection of the class consciousness that characterised some of the working class towns that sprung up around Manchester. Towns like Stalybridge were centres of radicalism and so they acted as a vanguards rather than following the lead of the central city.

But, the fact that rioting happened across urban space doesn’t mean that it was randomly distributed. Particular places acted as hubs for everyday life in the city and also for riots. These included places of civic importance like St George’s Plateau in Liverpool or 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. Table 2 shows the most prominent hubs and the total number of riots which began in a notable place for each city. Taken as a whole, 22% of the riots I have documented started in a notable place of some kind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: The places where riots started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># riots in notable places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riot hubs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: A ‘notable place’ was counted as anything which was given a proper name apart from streets, towns or other generic addresses.

Although this may seem like a significant concentration of riots around particular places, it actually makes something of a contrast when compared to the role of place in protests more generally. In
recent years the Occupy Movement have made this most explicit, physically claiming places like Wall Street or the London Stock Exchange. But this is nothing new. The various historic struggles in England which established (only ever temporarily) the right to public assembly, often involved protesters returning repeatedly to the same sites (Channing 2015). In 1866 this culminated in the famous Hyde Park Reform League riot where protesters battled through some 3,000 police officers to hold their meeting and establish Hyde Park as a space for political discussion and protest (Richter 1981). Katrina Navickas’s (2015) database of political meetings from 1775 to 1848 also reveals the importance of particular places. In Manchester, meetings are clearly clustered around St Ann’s Square, Market Street and Ancoats, while individual locations like the Bulls Head inn, Stevenson Square and Carpenter’s Hall make up a substantial proportion of meetings (taken together those three account for one sixth of all meetings)\(^7\). In contrast to these findings for protests in general, riots, perhaps because of their inherent spontaneity, seem to be more thinly spread across the city and more firmly embedded in everyday, rather than spectacularly symbolic, places.

**Riots in time**

Time has been the subject of less theoretical work than space (at least in sociology), but the case of rioting suggests that it would reward further study. The fact that riots are embedded in people’s everyday use of time can be seen at two levels: first, riots reflect the everyday rhythms of urban life, and second, they follow a calendrical cycle with particular occasions being marked out as times for violence. The first point can be made by considering the ‘availability argument’: riots can only happen if there are enough people available to join the crowd and go rioting. While this might sound mundane, it suggests that riots will be patterned by people’s daily routines and cuts against the suggestion that riots are random and irrational outbursts. A straightforward test of this is whether riots tend to happen inside or outside of normal working hours. Although riots are not always recorded with precise start and end points, there is a decently sized sample of 359 riots with

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\(^7\) Katrina Navickas very kindly made her data publicly accessible at: http://protesthistory.org.uk/places-maps/manchester
accurate enough records to test whether riots were patterned by people’s working hours. Following research by Marc Harrison (1986) and Hans-Joachim Voth (1998), I code normal working hours as 6am to 6pm. I then code the working week as Tuesday to Saturday (1800-1875) and Monday to Friday (1875-1939). This reflects the demise of St Monday (irregular absenteeism from work on Mondays) and the establishment of the modern weekend. The date for this transition might seem quite late, however, as I will expand on below, my data suggests that the tradition of St Monday went on far later than some historians have previously thought. Moreover, when I repeated this analysis but moved the date of the transition back to 1850, the results remained essentially the same.

The central conclusion of Table 3 is clear: more than three quarters of riots happen outside of working hours. When we exclude industrial riots during strikes (which by design happen inside working hours), then the proportion is even greater, rising to 85%. This gives significant support to the idea that urban riots continued to be embedded within and structured by people’s everyday time use patterns, just as food riots used to be structured around regular market days (Thwaites 1996). However, it is worth noting that large riots do generate their own availability. For example, many of the economic riots which affected Manchester in the early 1800s began during working hours and were spread through ‘factory visiting’ where rioters would march from factory to factory calling on workers to turn out and attacking places where workers refused or where employers locked the gates.

As well as following daily and weekly routines, riots are also embedded in longer running, calendrical cycles. In total, 17% of riots happened on notable dates such as the Glorious Twelfth of July, St Patrick’s Day or during elections (Table 4). The impact that particular dates had on the prevalence of rioting is remarkable. In Liverpool, the 12th of July was not celebrated consistently throughout the period and yet that date saw riots on at least 14 occasions (it’s safe to assume that the 12th saw smaller scale violence even more frequently). Elections also seem to have been plagued by

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8 For 56 riots (13% of my cases) I couldn’t determine whether they happened inside or outside of working hours.
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. The fact that these two calendrical events dominate all other recurring annual events suggests a contrast with the pattern of riot’s spatial hubs. There, each individual hub was only a small part of a larger set of significant locations. In this case, the long term temporal rhythm of riots is dominated by two particular types of events which account for nearly one in eight of all the riots I have recorded.

Table 3: The number of riots happening during normal working hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liverpool</th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All riots</td>
<td>21 out of 135 (16%)</td>
<td>41 out of 124 (33%)</td>
<td>26 out of 103 (26%)</td>
<td>88 out of 362 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-industrial</td>
<td>15 out of 124 (12%)</td>
<td>19 out of 91 (21%)</td>
<td>12 out of 87 (15%)</td>
<td>46 out of 302 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>6 out of 11 (55%)</td>
<td>22 out of 33 (67%)</td>
<td>14 out of 16 (88%)</td>
<td>42 out of 60 (70%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Working hours are defined as follows: 1800-1875 = Tuesday to Saturday, 6am-6pm; 1875-1939 = Monday to Friday 6am-6pm. However, I have used my own discretion and if the sources clearly state that rioters were in or out of work during the time of the riot this would override the rule. Elections are also coded as being out of working hours following the normal practice of closing factories and workshops on those days.

Table 4: The number of riots which happen during particular calendrical events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Liverpool</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On a special date</td>
<td>22 out of 138 (16%)</td>
<td>34 out of 164 (21%)</td>
<td>13 out of 116 (11%)</td>
<td>69 out of 418 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th of July (#)</td>
<td>6 riots</td>
<td>14 riots</td>
<td>6 riots</td>
<td>26 riots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election (#)</td>
<td>10 riots</td>
<td>14 riots</td>
<td>1 riot</td>
<td>25 riots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Other notable dates include St Patrick’s Day, the Glasgow Cup Final and Royal anniversaries and birthdays.

The fact that riots seem to follow people’s everyday use of time suggest that they could be used as a proxy for broader trends in time use. This was most famously done by Marc Harrison, who used his collection of ‘crowd events’ to argue that, by the early 19th century, “the working week in Bristol was ordered, predictable and long” (1886, p. 136; this led to a reply from Landes 1987 and another comment by Harrison 1987). Since then there have a number of studies which have resurrected and tested arguments originally made by E.P. Thompson (1967) about the establishment of ‘time discipline’ and the decline of St Monday. One strand of research has focussed on estimating the total
number of hours worked in a year (Voth 2001, de Vries 2008 and Humphries and Weisdorf 2016; see Clark 2018 for a critique). They have amassed a variety of fairly compelling evidence that before and during the industrial revolution people started to work much more and that this ‘industriousness’ may have fuelled Britain’s industrial growth. Part of the explanation for this increase in working hours is the decline of St Monday before the later establishment of the modern Saturday-Sunday weekend. The origins of the St Monday tradition are obscure but the orthodox history suggests that it grew through the 18th century before beginning a slow and irregular decline throughout the 19th and possibly even 20th century (Thompson 1967, Reid 1976, 1996, Hopkins 1982, Harrison 1986, Kirby 2009, Griffith 2010, Walton 2014). However, Hans-Joachim Voth, in his pioneering study based on court witness statements, claims that St Monday had disappeared from London by the start of the 19th century and that it did not exist at all in the north of England (Voth 2000). This is an integral part of how he explains the dramatic rise in working hours that he also documents.

In order to make an intervention in this debate I use non-industrial riots as a proxy for time use and compare the day of the week that each riot started on over time and across the three cities. For the most part my results reinforce the orthodox history (see Tables 5 and 6). They show that Mondays became a less popular day for rioting over time and that Saturday became more popular. Overall, the week also assumed a more rigid character with an increasing concentration around a Saturday-Sunday weekend and much less mid-week rioting (the Gini coefficient almost doubles from 0.17 to 0.29 for the periods before and after 1850). This last point suggests that Marc Harrison (1986) might have gone too far when he claimed that modern time discipline was already firmly in place by the early 19th century. The fact that rioting continues to slowly coalesce around a fixed weekend until the late 1800s suggests that an irregular and flexible working week may have been common until much later in the century.
Table 5: The proportion of non-industrial riots by day of the week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: The likelihood of a given non-industrial riot being on a certain day of the week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probability of a given riot being on a...</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Saturday or Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-2.48 ***</td>
<td>-1.34 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>-0.016 ***</td>
<td>0.015 ***</td>
<td>0.015 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Logit regressions with coefficients reported as log odds. The first and third models have an ICC not significantly different to 0 so were left pooled. The ICC was significantly different (though still very small: 0.05, i.e. 5% of total variance happens between groups) for the second model (Saturday). A random effects model with cluster robust standard errors and a conditional fixed-effects logit model both gave similar and statistically significant results, although the size of the coefficient was reduced slightly. I have presented the pooled results for the sake of consistency.

Significance codes: *** = 0.001, ** = 0.01, * = 0.05

The most significant finding, however, is that, even in the later part of my period (1850-1939), Monday is still the third most popular day for rioting (after Saturday and Sunday). This is true for all three of the cities and when looking at the combined scores and suggests that people were available to riot on a Monday well into the late 19th century. This seriously undermines Voth’s claim that the tradition of St Monday had disappeared by 1800. Given that his broad conclusion about the increase in working hours seems to be supported by other evidence, we will need to find new explanations for where those extra hours came from. Possible explanations might include a reduction in other holidays (something Voth himself mentions), the stricter imposition of general
time discipline (Thompson 1967) or changing preferences for leisure and working time (Dyer 1989, de Vries 2008; see also Koyama 2012). Evaluating those explanations is beyond the scope of my research but it represents an interesting intersection of economic, social and leisure history which could produce valuable insights into the ways that time structures the various practices of everyday life.

The decline of rioting and its strange persistence

Although riots remain embedded in people’s everyday use of time and space to this day, over the 19th century they unmoored themselves from their broader social foundations. The main result of this was a remarkable decline in the number and intensity of riots across Britain. Although accurate counting of incidents is fraught with difficulties (see Wells 1978, Bohstedt 1983, Maney and Oliver 2001, Ortiz et al 2005, Biggs 2016), there is a broad consensus that at some point in the early or mid 19th century rioting fell out of favour (Stevenson 1979, Gatrell 1980, Randall 2006, Bailey 2014b). By the time of the cotton famine in 1861-5, journalists were praising the pacification of Britain, saying that “in the 'gold old times' it might have happened that under similar circumstances riots would have been created” (The Times, 22/12/1862). In this case the journalists were proved wrong when riots broke out in Stalybridge and Ashton a few months later. But, they were right about the general trend, which saw riots and violence becoming less and less common.

The classic account of this shift locates it within a wider change of the repertoire of protest. As the British repertoire of contention evolved from the parochial, particular and bifurcated repertoire of the 18th century to the cosmopolitan, modular and autonomous repertoire of modern social movements, riots fell out of fashion and were replaced by public meetings, marches and petitioning. Tilly’s overarching explanation for this transformation focusses on the growth of the national state, which came to dominate local government and local affiliations (1995; he proposes a similar explanation for the transition in France: Tilly 1986). Together with the newly emerging ‘British’ national identity (Colley 2005), this reorientated society and transformed the way in which
competing groups made claims on one another. Direct and immediate tactics were gradually replaced by indirect and mediated protests which focussed on the central state as either an arbitrator or as the object of the claim. This was accompanied by a shift in the focus of economic protest away from the prices of goods (classic bread riots) to wages (strikes and unions) (Hobsbawm 1964).

But, although the number of riots might have declined, they didn’t disappear. Traditional food riots became fairly rare after 1819, but nevertheless continued throughout much of the century including Liverpool 1855, Stalybridge 1863 and Oxford and Devon in 1867. The 1880s saw almost continual rioting against the Salvation Army marches, as well as the infamous events of Black Monday in Pall Mall and the Bloody Sunday demonstration in Hyde Park. 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. Likewise anti-Catholic violence continued to rear its ugly head from time to time. After the Irish famine, Liverpool saw a wave of anti-Irish riots from 1850-3. Then, during the 1860s, William Murphy’s scandalous lectures caused violence across England. A later wave of Irish migration to Scotland caused intense rioting in Glasgow in the late 1870s. Ethnic rioting then continued into the 20th century, with sectarian unrest in Liverpool in the early 1900s, the anti-German riots of 1915, the race riots of 1919 and beyond. Jacqueline Jenkinson suggests that, even as late as 1919, “in expressing their feelings in violent terms, the crowds of rioters... were acting out a familiar scenario” (2009, p. 19). All in all, across Britain there were at least 450 riots from 1865 to 1914 (Richter 1965). Looking only at my three cities, I found 162 riots in that time period and a further 54 up to 1939.

This suggests that riots remained a common feature of city life until far later than most commentators assumed. They certainly lasted longer than is assumed in those London-centric narratives which focus on 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 which John Bohstedt (2010) places at the turn of the 19th century. But I don’t want to exaggerate the extent of public disorder in the early 20th century. According to George
Dangerfield’s classic *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, by 1910 Britain was on the verge of revolution and only the shock of World War I prevented it. But this revolutionary threat seems to have been overstated (Bailey 2014b). So too does the violence of the 1930s by a society supposedly brutalised by war and infected by Bolshevism (Stevenson 1975, Lawrence 2003). Riots played a central part in urban life for most of the 19th century and the are marked differences between different cities, but, this doesn’t mean that the ‘transition to order’ was completely fictitious.

Figure 5: The number of riots per year (trend lines fitted by LOESS)

Overall, my data confirms a story of uneven and irregular decline (see Figure 5). As mentioned before, the low scores until roughly the 1820s are an artefact of my methodology in that coverage by local press was fairly thin in that early period. But, after that, my data seems to follow the broad trend, with the number of riots per year taking their cues from wider waves of political and economic struggle. This is most obvious in Manchester which sees a peak in riots during the 1820s and 1830s Reform agitations before declining significantly after 1860. In Liverpool the peak is slightly later and 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. Only Glasgow seems to diverge significantly from this trend, with fairly concentrated waves of rioting in the 1820s and 1840s and then a noticeable resurgence of rioting in the 1920s and 1930s.

**Interwar Glasgow: An exception**

This surge in rioting in interwar Glasgow is composed of two trends: growth in sectarian riots and the rise of gang and anti-police violence. The most dramatic example of Irish-Orange rioting took place during the celebration of the Glorious 12th in 1925. The parade saw 48,000 Protestant men, women and children march through the east end of the city. On the return leg, 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. Gang violence was less dramatic but still exercised a powerful hold on the popular imagination as fears of ‘razor gangs’ took off with the publications of novels like *No Mean City* (1935). Some of these riots took the form of traditional gang fights, like the fight between the Billy Boys and the South Side Stickers in Gorbals in April 1930. But gang members also often acted as leaders in general attacks on the police. For example, in May 1934, a fracas between two rival gangs in Castle Street ended when the police intervened and scattered the crowd. But, as they dispersed, the crowd came across two other policemen with a prisoner who they then tried to rescue in a running battle.

Taken together, sectarian and gang/anti-police violence account for more than two thirds of the riots in Glasgow during this period. What is surprising about this is that in Liverpool and Manchester rioting as a whole was declining by 1920 and so was sectarianism.\(^9\) Because Glasgow’s street gangs

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\(^9\) By this I do not mean that prejudice or crude forms of racism against the Irish had disappeared in general, but rather that public, collective violence in the name of Irish or Protestant identity seems to have been notably absent from the interwar period.
were generally based in territories rather than ethnicities (Davies 1998a), these two trends can’t be completely collapsed into each other. Taking them separately and comparing them with Manchester and Liverpool reveals four significant factors driving this surge in rioting: the rise in gang violence seems to have been driven by worsening economic conditions and the changing form of street gangs in the 1930s; meanwhile the growth of sectarian rioting can be traced back to the Old Firm rivalry between Celtic and Rangers football clubs and the growth of anti-Catholicism in Glasgow’s local politics.

World War I had a dramatic impact on Glasgow’s economy. The immediate effect was that huge numbers of young men volunteered to fight, driven by fear of unemployment as much as by patriotism (Donnachie et al 1989, p. 21). Coal exports to war torn Eastern Europe were decimated and wartime economic reorganisation led to a huge wave of strikes which climaxed in 1919 when 1.25 million days were lost in January alone (Foster 1990). When the war ended, inflation and unemployment led to an economic collapse from which Glasgow had barely recovered when the Great Depression struck in 1931. Unemployment peaked in 1933 at 33% of insured workers (Ministry of Labour) and the recovery only began in 1936 (Donnachie et al 1989, p. 50).

This economic collapse hit a city which was already suffering from significant deprivation, which was most obvious in housing. In the early 1900s Glasgow Cross was the most densely populated urban area in Europe (Gazeley et al 2011) and 26% of Glasgow families lived in one-room houses with a further 44% living in two-room houses (Pope 2002). Back in 1891, 59% of families lived more than two persons to a room compared to 10% in Liverpool and 8% in Manchester (Pope 2002). 40 years later little had changed, with tough tax laws distorting the rental market and forcing the Glaswegian working class into overcrowded accommodation (Gazeley et al 2011).

In these conditions of economic distress, many young men saw gangs as a rational way of finding comradeship and passing the time (Humphries 1981). However, unemployment was not the sole cause of gang formation. There was a long tradition of gangs in Glasgow going back to the 1880s.
The status of being a ‘hard man’ who had proved himself through violence went along with a certain style (and often disposable income) and made gang membership very attractive (Davies 1998a). Although the underlying processes which drove people into gangs was probably fairly similar, the scuttling gangs of Manchester and Salford have a very different history. There, gang violence had peaked in the late 1880s before fading out slowly through the 1890s (Gooderson 1997, Davies 1998b). It’s significant that during the interwar years Manchester had a very different economic experience with unemployment peaking at below 20% in 1930 (Stevenson 1984, Davies 1992, Ministry of Labour).

Crucially, increased unemployment in Glasgow in the 1920s transformed the character of gangs as men remained members into their 20s or 30s (something which had been very rare before). They then became more organised and more financially oriented (Davies 1998a). This led to a sustained campaign by Glasgow’s police force, headed up by Percy Sillitoe (who later became the Director General of MI5). This was a pro-active campaign with police officers ready to use force and even provoke collective confrontations (Davies 1998a, p. 267). Aggressive policing was met with push back from the gangs who frequently tried to mob police officers and draw in members of the public against the police. This battle for control of the streets was a difficult task for the police. Although the gangs always had ambiguous relationships with local working class community (Davies 1998a), the string of anti-police riots throughout the 1920s and 1930s suggest that the police were more often seen as the common enemy. Again this marks a contrast with the local police forces in Liverpool and Manchester, who saw improving relationships with working class communities, especially as drinking rates declined and the police began to target middle class offenders for traffic violations (Klein 2010). The combination of continued anti-police sentiment and the struggle to control the streets led to ongoing unrest and frequent riots which only came to an end with the outbreak of World War II.

Glasgow’s experience of anti-Irish violence is also noticeably different to Manchester and Liverpool. Manchester was the original home of the English Orange Order and Irish migration into
the city peaked in 1851, at which point 13% of the total population had been born in Ireland (Neal 1996). Anti-Irish violence (while never as bad as in Liverpool or Glasgow) seems also to have peaked in the middle of the 19th century. In Liverpool, Irish migration also peaked in the 1850s at 22% of the population, but, because sectarianism was tied in with local politics, the period of open Irish-English rioting went on much longer. But even there, violence had dropped off by the interwar years. In Glasgow the two largest waves of sectarian rioting were in the late 1870s and during the interwar years. The former was triggered by a wave of Irish Protestant migration into Glasgow and the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland in 1878 (Hutchinson 1987). The latter, however, is much more idiosyncratic and makes Glasgow an exception to the story of the gradual integration and assimilation of Irish Catholics into Britain.

Sectarianism didn’t disappear after that earlier wave of riots in 1878. By 1900, unionist politicians held every seat in the Glasgow area and had majority of support from the local working class (Donnachie et al 1989). There is, however, some evidence that sectarianism was held back by a liberal ‘commonsense’ and a strong trade union movement for much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially when compared to Liverpool (Smith 1986, Foster et al 2011). This started to change after World War I. In 1918 the Education Act guaranteed state support for separate Catholic Schools and this led to a fierce backlash. This was exacerbated by the Irish War of Independence, which saw IRA activity in Glasgow and violent attacks on local Irish Catholics. In 1920 this culminated in the founding of the Scottish Protestant League (SPL) by Alexander Ratcliffe who went on to win 23% of the vote in the 1933 local elections. This was a turning point for Glasgow’s municipal politics as the SLP stripped votes away from the Moderate Party and cleared the ground for the advance of the Labour Party. But, Ratcliffe also helped to stoke sectarian tensions and provoke riots by turning religious and ethnic identity into a live and popular political 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 the more
militant actions of George Wise and John Kensit and, by the 1920s, open anti-Irish rioting had become relatively rare.

Political sectarianism was not on its own enough to maintain this wave of Irish-English violence. One of the key things that also changed was Glasgow’s working class culture and the growing importance of football.\textsuperscript{10} Celtic had been formed by and for Catholics in 1888 and, from the start, it was aligned with Irish nationalism and home rule. Rangers quickly assumed a similar standard bearer role for Protestants which meant that the sectarian identity of the two clubs was firmly established before World War I (Davies 2013). During the 1920s this ‘Old Firm’ rivalry inflamed sectarian hostilities with a regular calendar of violence. Every Sunday Protestants football fans would march into Catholic streets looking for fights (Taylor 2013). And violence also concentrated around dramatic occasions like the 12th of July or Rangers vs Celtic games. Even gang loyalties were put on hold during Old Firm games, as Protestants and Catholics from the same gang would separate for a day and join rival gang members in attacking those from the opposite religious group (Davies 2013). The extent to which this sectarianism was embedded in the local community is shown by the case of John Traquair. He was a long standing member of the Billy Boys gang and was arrested for stabbing a train guard while trying to ambush a Celtic train at Bridgeton Cross Station. He was then turned into a Protestant martyr by the SPL and a campaign to have him released from jail received over 40,000 signatures and was even supported by James Maxton, the Independent Labour Party MP for Bridgeton (Davies 2013). Although football was not the root cause of sectarian rioting in Glasgow, the Old Firm rivalry reaffirmed ethnic identities and worked to repeatedly inflame tensions. This is again in marked contrast to Liverpool where the two local football clubs helped to build a new, non-sectarian Liverpudlian identity (Roberts 2015).

\textsuperscript{10} 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.
Therefore, by 1930, rioting in Glasgow was enmeshed in local politics, leisure and group formation and this gave it a new lease of life at a time when, in the rest of Britain, it was on the way out. In many ways the riots that marked Glasgow in this period anticipated the post-1945 world in which attacks on the police (particularly by ethnic minority communities) became the dominant type of riot. Although we are still waiting for the definitive history of those more recent events, it’s important to recognise that they were not complete novelties. Similar types of riots can be found in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow in the first few decades of the 19th century. But these continued into the 20th century when very few other forms of riot remained. The Notting Hill Carnival riots of 1976, the Brixton riots of 1981 or the riots in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds and Burnley in 2001 can therefore be placed in a much longer history.

The decline of rioting

Despite this late wave of rioting in Glasgow, the question remains, why did rioting in general decline over the 19th century? Two arguments which were fairly popular at the time were that growing prosperity meant there were fewer issues to riot about and that the introduction of police forces had helped to pacify the rowdy population. These arguments continue to have some support today (e.g. Bohstedt 2010, p. 1), however, I want to suggest that neither stands up to historical scrutiny. Instead, the most important factors seem to be the ways in which rioting came unmoored from its roots in local political relationships and a wider culture which legitimised violent protest. Over time, this meant that rioting was displaced from its central position in the repertoire of contention.

The most straightforward explanation for why riots declined is that there were fewer issues to riot about. This follows the, pejoratively named, “spasmodic” history of riots which sees them as “rebellions of the belly” (Thompson 1971). Rioting, on this view, is an automatic (but more-or-less rational) response to grievances; a useful corrective to the idea that rioters were hired ‘mobs’ or irrational collectives guided by omnipotent leaders. As an explanation for why riots declined over
the 19th century, it suggests that 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 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, Humphries and Weisdorf 2016), 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), real wages for casual workers were fairly stagnant until the mid 1800s when they started to rise (Clark 2005, 2007), and a recent composite welfare measure indicated that living standards rose steadily and significantly from 1781-1850 (Albarran 2016). 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 this 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 (Bohstedt 1983). However, this association may well be spurious because of the many other social and economic changes in the period. Indeed, John Bohstedt (2010, p. 165-244) has suggested that the decline in food rioting was already well underway by the grain crisis of 1810-12. 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, McAdam et al 2001) and should give us reason to doubt whether this is an adequate explanation for why rioting declined.

Another change which could have frustrated would-be rioters was the emergence of local police forces from the 1830s. Although the introduction of police did provoke riots of its own (Storch and Engels 1975), 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, unrest was kept to a minimum by the prompt response of the local police force. There does also appear to have been a shift in the severity with which authorities responded to riots. It seems unlikely that, after Peterloo or in the 20th century, people would have accepted so matter-of-factly scenes like this one reported by The Times: “execution done among the rioters at Middleton, on Tuesday, by the military is stated to have been considerably greater than was at first supposed... It is said that from 25 to 30 of the misguided populace became the victims of their own folly and criminality” (27/04/1812). 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. John Stevenson (1979) cites 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 violence and rioting. Morgan and Rushton (2007) also describe the multitude of ways that local elites managed to maintain order without recourse to the police. Victor Bailey (2014a) casts similar doubts on the effectiveness of the Metropolitan Police in establishing order in London, using evidence from Charles Booth’s police walks to suggest that the police were severely limited in their ability to intervene in working class neighbourhoods. There is also evidence from across the country that the police were a target for riots well into the last quarter of the 19th century (Price 1975, Storch 1976,
Weinberger 1981, King 1985, Klein 2010), something which my evidence from Glasgow confirms. This suggests that changes in law enforcement also can not easily explain the decline in rioting.

Instead, the gradual and inconsistent decline in rioting should be seen as a result of it being cut off from its social and cultural roots. This might appear similar to Koopmans and Statham’s (1999) concept of ‘discursive opportunity structure’. However, they were concerned specifically with the opportunities for particular types of ‘framing’, not for the act of protesting. It is also different from McAdam’s (1996) emphasis on the cultural aspects of political opportunities because he is concerned with the conditions that lead to protest of any kind. My approach instead looks at the cultural forces which help to shape the repertoire of contention, at the norms, tropes and memes which shape people’s attitudes towards particular practices. And my argument is that, overtime, the culture which legitimised rioting seems to have slowly disappeared.

There are several trends within this process. One which has been studied extensively is the changing political relationship between elites and would-be rioters, something John Bohstedt (1983) made the central point in his explanation for the decline in food riots. However, by focussing on political opportunities alone, he fails to account for the general decline in riots of all types. Instead, I want to locate these political changes within wider cultural shifts in the acceptance of public violence and the place of crowds within urban life. I will start by sketching out these two themes; then I will consider how they were reflected in changing political relationships and the difficulties of interpreting this as isolated shifts in political opportunities; next I will look at how those changes played out in elections and amongst the leaders of the growing working class movements; finally I will argue that the decline in attempts to overwhelm the police and rescue prisoners shows that the communal consensus which legitimised rioting was gradually disappearing. These should not be seen as discrete arguments. In fact real historical riots rarely fit neatly into one category or another. For example, the Chartist unrest of the 1840s included food riots, industrial unrest and outbreaks of criminality, while in Liverpool the riots during the general transport strike of 1911 also involved a pitched battle between Orangemen and Irish Nationalists. These different narratives are all different
facets of a broader cultural shift, structured by the changing place of crowds in urban life and a rejection of public violence.

The everyday use of violence within working class communities included everything from common assaults and ‘hooliganism’ to more ritualistic violence like ‘rough music’ (Bushaway 1982, Behagg 1982, Wood 2004). In this context it is noticeable that there was a general decline in interpersonal violence from the late 1850s (Gatrell 1980, 1990, D’Cruze and Crewe 2000, King 2013). 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, p.1). Some historians (e.g. Taylor 1998) have expressed scepticism about these claims, which are largely based on police data. But it seems unlikely that, while the scope and extent of the law and of police activity were expanding enormously, crime rates could have fallen so dramatically without there being any real decline in violence. It’s also difficult to pinpoint the precise causes of this decline. If we assume that the “powers of moral and punitive enforcement are distributed throughout society” (Ignatieff 1981, p. 186; see also Bailey 2014a), then this suggests that a whole range of cultural, institutional and legal changes will have contributed to the general decline in violence. Whatever the causes, as interpersonal violence became more exceptional and more unusual, this also seems to have helped to cut rioting off from the wider field of culturally accepted actions (see Gurr 1977).

The second theme is the importance of crowds to urban life. Nicholas Rogers (1989, 1998) describes the crowd in the early 19th century as both an extra-legal enforcer of community norms and as an essential symbolic component in the transmission (and contesting) of authority. Crowds followed loose conventions, had specific functions rooted in local politics and were seen as representing the people (Bohstedt 1983). However, over time this changed (Shoemaker 2004). 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, p. 235; Thompson 1963). There was also an elision of notions of cleanliness, order and modern efficiency which manifested itself architecturally in the ‘urban renaissance’ of the late 18th century (Griffin 2011). However, as many
of the riots described earlier show, elites continued to sponsor disorderly crowds when it suited their needs. It wasn’t until the 1920s that elites fully embraced the modern notion of the public as a passive, individualised ‘silent majority’ (Lawrence 2003, 2006).

These changes, through a gradual and convoluted process, transformed the political relationships within which rioters acted. The idea that protests respond to changing political opportunities has a long history, but, in the context of rioting it is mostly associated with the work of John Bohstedt (1983). He presents riots as quintessentially local politics in that they were based in and around dense local networks with multiple horizontal and vertical ties. These networks ensured mutual familiarity between rioters, which allowed them to engage in coherent collective action, and between rioters and authorities, which allowed them both to follow roughly scripted sequences of interaction. So when riots broke out in small market towns like Oxford or Canterbury rioters knew who the local elites were and how to negotiate with magistrates to force down the price of goods (Bohstedt 1983, p. 203; Thwaites 1996). This was what gave food riots their characteristically disciplined and restrained form with rioters preferring to sell goods at reduced prices rather than steal and very rarely reverting to extreme violence. But local community politics also determined whether or not a riot would break out. Over time, urbanisation and nationalisation eroded the community framework which was necessary for food riots to be effective and so redirected plebeian energy towards national political reform. There was also an ideological aspect to this. Until the early 1800s local and even national elites had lingering sympathies for food rioters which were grounded in a kind of benevolent paternalism (Thompson 1971; Bohstedt 2010, p. 171-2). As this was displaced by impersonal rule and a faith in free market principles, the sympathy of elites for the rioters’ demands disappeared (Randall 2006). These two processes dramatically shrunk the political space within which successful food riots could take place. So when potato blight broke out in 1811

11 More recently Bohstedt has implied that the mechanisms by which changing political structures reduced food rioting were greater ‘relief and repression’ (2010, p.1), precisely the two factors whose importance I have just undermined.
there were very few riots and the following year the ‘Winchester measurements’ (standardised
measures of wheat and other goods) were finally enforced, again without apparent conflict.

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, p. 10), “well known roughs”
(Liverpool Mail, 24/2/1855), “blackguards” (Liverpool Mercury, 19/1/1867) and “habitual
criminals” who had 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,
28/05/1808). Reports like these seem to have vanished by the midcentury, as changing attitudes
filtered through all levels of local and national press.

As I hinted at earlier, sectarian rioting in Liverpool and Glasgow also followed the logic of political
opportunities. This is most obvious in Liverpool where the sponsorship of the Protestant ships
carpenters, then the Orange Order and other working class Protestant organisations helped to foster
regular violence (Waller 1981, Neal 1992). The worst of these seems to have been 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. 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 different form of male, English, Protestant, working class Toryism (Waller 1981, Lawrence 1993).

Over time this decoupled ethnic violence from political and industrial unrest. In 1839 an industrial dispute amongst railway workers ended up pitting Irish against English. 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. Politics in Liverpool remained particularly closely connected to sectarianism right up until the early 1900s. In 1910 infamous Protestant rabble-rouser George Wise was still being invited to speak at election meetings, sparking vicious fighting and an attack by a nearby crowd of Irish Labour voters. Even the 1911 Transport Strike provided an excuse for a riot between Orangemen and Irish nationalists in Great Homer Street. However, gradually, ethnic violence became separated from economic and political unrest. The unemployed disturbances and political violence of the 1930s sees no sectarian elements, nor do the large outbreaks of looting in 1915 and 1919.

However, economic riots pose a problem for this narrow political opportunities approach. As well as the general repression of trades unions under the Combinations Acts of 1799 and 1825, violence during strikes seems never to have been condoned by elites. 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. Indeed, almost all the newspaper coverage of strikes begins with the introduction “We regret to learn that the strike continues”. And at a local level, newspaper reports rarely show any sympathy for the violence of strikers, even when local elites recognised their desperation. 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 the original). Rioting also seems to have been generally reserved to industries whose long run survival was at risk, rather than those in a position of political strength (Stevenson 1979). For example, John King (1985) argues that the violence of the 1878 cotton strikes was caused by their belief in the justness of their cause and the correctness of their diagnoses of the problems facing the
cotton industry. Crucially, they rioted despite seeing no chance of victory. In Glasgow, the fact that employers took such a hard line against any form of trades union (Johnston and Johnston 2000) has 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 that, instead of protests increasing linearly as more political opportunities open up, the relationship may be more complicated. People seem to riot from positions of strength and from positions of weakness and to respond to increasing and decreasing opportunities.

A further difficulty in interpreting the decline in riots as a result only of decreasing political opportunities is that it assumes a golden era of regularly successful riots. John Bohstedt (2010) claims that food riots led “often enough [to] winning relief supplies of food” (p. 1) and that they reach a peak in scale and efficacy during the famine years of 1795-6 and 1800-1. Indeed, he suggests that they were so effective that they threatened urban food supplies leading to a revolution in the ‘politics of provisions’ (p. 167). However, George Rudé (1964) has argued that “in terms of immediate gains, it must be admitted that it [the crowd] achieved comparatively little” (p. 259). E.P. Thompson (1971) is more agnostic, but argues that it was only in terms of long run, indirect effects on markets and expectations that 18th century riots can be said to have been effective. It’s also not the case that riots became completely ineffective as they moved into the 20th 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 a policy of repatriation.

Ultimately, a narrow political opportunities framework is limited in its scope. Although instrumental riots declined from the late 19th century, so did more expressive forms of collective 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 (e.g. in Salford 1835 or Liverpool 1911) but they could also be simple celebrations of the political process itself (Baer 2012, p. 111-3). I don’t want to suggest that all election violence was mindless ‘letting off of steam’ (Richter 1981,
Hoppen 1994), but, there clearly are expressive as well as instrumental elements here, both of which need to be taken into account. Indeed Jon Lawrence (1998) has particularly emphasised the instrumental and political side of election violence, echoing Wasserman and Jaggard’s (2007) finding that the number of contested constituencies is correlated with the general level of electoral violence. Spontaneous attacks on the police also quickly stopped being a real attempt to force the police out of town (Storch 1976), 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, p. 257). To understand why these riots also declined we need to recognise that shrinking political opportunities were part of a broader cultural change.

Changing attitudes to crowds and public violence also impacted election rioting. 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 19th century (e.g. in Liverpool in July 1802 and again in June 1816), election rioting picked up in the years following the 1832 Reform Act (Baer 2012). And this violence was generally accepted as a vital part of the political system in which the election was seen as a useful test of a politician’s character and mettle. There was also a sense that a healthy polity depended on a vigilant and assertive citizenry (Lawrence 2006). But rioting was not endorsed by all. It was ritually condemned in the press and often 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 (2/7/1841, p. 3). Election rioting was also 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” (Swinton 1838, p. 615). Nevertheless, it seems to have had some legitimate space as part of the political process, which, over the latter part of the 19th and early 20th 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 expanded electorate, changes in political tactics (namely the house-to-house canvassing techniques pioneered by the suffrage and temperance movements) and the felt need to appeal to new female voters 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 historical disagreement about the timing of this decline. Marc Baer’s (2012) study of Westminster indicates that electoral violence remained high until the mid 1800s with the last serious election riot in 1841. But Jon Lawrence (2003, 2006) has argued that the turning point didn’t come until the early 1920s. My survey 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, p. 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.

You can also see rioting coming unmoored from its social roots in its rejection by the leaders of various waves of working class protest (Storch 1982). The constitutional radicalism that dominated these movements at the start of the 19th century left an ambiguous space for physical force (Thompson 1963, Poole 2009, Navickas 2009). John Belchem (1985) uses this ambiguity to explain the decline of the radical movement after Peterloo. The leadership were unable to work through the implications of that massacre within the framework set by their rhetorical ‘constitutionalism’ and this paralysed the movement. They could not decide whether the constitutional social contract had
been definitively broken by the authorities and whether this legitimated violent resistance. During the desperate and uncertain uprising of 1820 in Glasgow and northern England this ambiguity was again made clear. 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.

Debates around the use of violence reached their pinnacle within the Chartist movement. However, these well-documented public spats between advocates of ‘moral’ and ‘physical’ force overplay the extent of this division. Both sides existed on a continuum contained within the constitutional 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 Manchester and Lancashire there is considerable evidence of arming by the local population in preparation for state repression which would trigger a wider rising (Sykes 1985, Turner 2008). Although this suggests a culture which condoned violence, the strategy actually left all the initiative in the hands of the state, as well as massively underestimating both the state’s support from rural and middle class areas and its capacity to deal flexibly with unrest. It was never an insurrectionary tactic. Meanwhile, in Glasgow the emphasis was on ‘moral force’ and there was far more cooperation between working class Chartist and middle class reformers who remained firm in their support of universal suffrage (Wilson 1970, Montgomery 1974, Fraser 2010). This helped to underpin the strength of Scottish liberalism in the second half of the 19th 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. In fact, despite the poor Parliamentary record of
Fergus O’Connor and other Chartist MPs (Chase 2009), it was as an electoral force in local
government that Chartism won some of its most surprising victories (Navickas 2015).

Violence was also disavowed within the labour movement (or at least it became subordinated to the
needs of the strike). In the early stages, efforts of union leaders such as John Doherty (during the
Manchester spinners’ strike of 1830) and Thomas Hepburn (during the North East miners’ strike
1831-1832) to prevent violence were largely unsuccessful. But, over time, these ideas became
dominant and in some cases leaders did manage to limit violence (as in the case of the 1871
Tyneside ‘Nine Hours League’). Trade union leaders in Liverpool were even thanked for their work
trying to keep the peace during the religious riots of 1900-11, the 1911 Transport Strike and the
1919 Police Strike (HO 45/11032/423878/42).

However, the peaceableness of this narrow group of agitators and community leaders should not be
overstated. Joan Smith (1980) has claimed that the Liverpool labour movement adopted a
syndicalist embrace of rioting in the early 1900s. And there are numerous incidents of leaders
seeming to control and direct violence. For example, in Glasgow in December 1932 a group of plain
clothed policemen were attacked at a NUWM demonstration after a speaker shouted that there were
‘spies’ and ‘detectives’ in the crowd. In April 1812 in Manchester a leading Luddite was heard to
give an order “Kill him, he is a spy!”, directing the crowd to hurl stones at someone. The presumed
spy managed to escape on horseback and was sheltered by a woman in some cottages a little way
off. When the crowd found him again they move forward to attack, but this time were held back by
their leader.

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 31 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. There were similar scenes three years later, in October 1862, while local Catholics were attacking a meeting held by the British Parliamentary Debating Society on the merits of Garibaldi. But, without a broader cultural change from the bottom-up it is unlikely that these leaders would have been able to shift the weight of tradition and significantly reduce the number of riots.

Looking from the bottom-up, E. P. Thompson has suggested that rioters were normally “supported by the wider consensus of the community” (1971, p. 78). This is obviously too sweeping a generalisation, but, as the 19th century wore on, the cultural shifts I have described also seem to have reduced communities’ support for rioting. One quantitative, proxy test of this is to look at the decline in the number of prison rescues. By this I don’t mean simple scuffles with the police as rioters tried to evade arrest, but rather, moments when the whole community turn against the police, often surrounding them and following them back to bridewells, even encircling or attacking the jails. Actions like this are simply foolhardy without the overwhelming support of the local population and even then were rarely successful. This means that prison rescues work as a rough proxy for the overall ‘consensus of the community’. As you can see from Figure 6, these incidents become much rarer after 1900, with Glasgow a clear exception. More importantly, once riots have broken out, the chance that rioters will attempt a prison rescue declines over time, from over 0.25 in 1800 to 0.09 by 1939 (Table 7, p=0.066). This should be surprising because, once a riot has started, there will almost always be an opportunity for rioters to attempt to rescue those who are arrested. The fact that rioters stopped doing this shows that this community consensus was breaking down.

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 of 1915 there were prison rescues in Glasgow and Liverpool, while in Manchester the courts themselves decided to release two young men and two young women who had just been arrested. In Liverpool in April 1903, a Protestant crowd shouted at the police ‘They are Wiseites, let them go!’ , again claiming a certain community cohesion. However, the overall trend seems to away from that level of normative
Figure 6: The number of riots involving prison rescues per year

Notes: Prison rescues were defined as moments when the whole community turn against the police, often surrounding them and following them back to bridewells, even encircling or attacking the jails.

Table 7: The likelihood of a given riot outside of Glasgow involving prison rescues

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<th>Likelihood of a given riot involving prison recuse</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.064 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>-0.0093 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Predicted probabilities by year | 1800 = 0.26
                         | 1939 = 0.09                                      |

Notes: Logit regressions with coefficients reported as log odds. The ICC was not significantly different to 0 so the model was left pooled. This model excludes riots happening in Glasgow. Significance codes: ** = 0.001, * = 0.05, + = 0.1

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. 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.

Although this transition was slow and uneven, traditional and ‘rowdy’ crowd culture eventually succumbed to systematic attack. This was partly legislative and police-led (Storch 1976), but it was also driven by elites simply withdrawing their sponsorship and eventually moving out of the city altogether, creating unprecedented social and spatial segregation (Bushaway 1982, Storch 1982). It also came under pressure from below as an authentic, but isolated, working class culture emerged around things like the music hall (Jones 1974, Bailey 1982). By the turn of the 20th century, these lively crowd traditions had been almost completely displaced by more consumer-oriented forms of leisure (Davies 1992). However incomplete this transformation was, there was a clear shift in the cultural field of working class cities. Violence declined, so did drinking, traditional ‘folk’ forms of leisure and crowd-life. And without those cultural roots, rioting was cut loose, leading eventually to its decline.

**Conclusion**

In the early 1800s riots were firmly embedded in urban life. They were patterned by the way people used time and space and deeply rooted in wider society. However, as society changed, the cultural norms which created the space for rioting were eroded, leading eventually to a noticeable decline in the number of riots. However, it’s significant that this decline was gradual and uneven. Underlying much of the historical literature is the implicit assumption that riots were ‘crowded out’ by other forms of protest. John Stevenson argued that by mid century there seem to have been sufficient forms of organisation, methods for expressing grievance and effective influence for major interest groups to contain conflicts within the existing institutional political framework. He then concludes 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, p. 323). Rioting in that sense went from being people’s only resort to their last resort.
formally, as the repertoire of contention expanded, alternative, lower-cost tactics became available, leading to fewer riots. 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. p.7). This is the kind of cost/benefit analysis that is sometimes implied by Tilly’s description of people engaging with repertoires through a “relatively deliberate process of choice” (1993, p. 264). 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. Tilly (2008) and Peter Stamatov (2011) both argue that the modern repertoire of protest became available in the first few decades of the 19th century. The examples set by the anti-slavery movement, the movement for dissenter rights in 1811, the Queen Caroline affair in 1820, the struggle Catholic emancipation in 1828 and for Parliamentary Reform in 1831 firmly established a new set of collective actions based around petitions, marches and public meetings. However, as Tilly’s own findings show (2010, Figure 2 and 4), the absolute number of violent protests doesn’t seem to be on the decline by the mid 1800s. My data suggests that the decline only really began in the last decades of the 19th century, and that even then different regions had very different experiences.

The fact that it took roughly 50 years for collective violence to be firmly displaced from its position in the centre of the repertoire of protest suggests that repertoires are sticky, durable phenomena. William Sewell (1990) made a similar point about the change of repertoire in France:

The French Revolution of 1789 was an utterly crucial turning point in the history of French collective violence… [But] the revolution did not change everything... The food riot, the tax revolt, the invasion of enclosure, and the charivari - lived on for another six decades... From 1789 to 1851, two different forms of collective violence based on two different forms of collective loyalties flourished side by side (1990, p. 540-1)

The emergence of alternative, low-risk ways of expressing grievances did not guarantee the decline of rioting. It wasn’t until wider cultural and political changes cut riots off from their deep roots in
urban society that they started to disappear from view. The importance of this embeddedness meant that riots coexisted alongside other forms of protest like strikes and public demonstrations well into the later part of the 19th century. And, as I will try to show in the next chapter, they didn’t survive as strange anachronisms from a past age. Riots were a living practice which evolved in response to the modernisation of the city and the transformation of urban life throughout the 19th century.
Chapter 5

The changing practice of rioting

During the 2011 riots in London, newspapers kept returning to the theme of chaos. 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”. These all suggested that the riots were spontaneous and irrational outbursts, moments of chaos when all rules were suspended. But this image of the ‘madding crowd’ acting beyond all rhyme and reason is seriously misleading. The first point is that, as I argued in the previous chapter, riots are embedded in people’s everyday use of time and space. They do not occur at random and, in fact, are clearly patterned. The same is true over the long run. As the culture which legitimised rioting disappeared, the number of riots seems to have declined with it. The second point is that rioters also often act for a reason and with a particular purpose in mind. They then riot in a recognisable way, following more-or-less stable conventions, norms and even rules. As I will argue in this chapter, the actual behaviour of rioters follows particular patterns. As Randall Collins argues “not everything necessarily breaks down at once” and riots “tend to specialize in particular kinds of violations” (2008, p. 243). He gives the examples of sexual violence (which normally remains prohibited) and looting (which is often legitimised). Pioneering work by Enrico Quarantelli and Russell Dynes (1968, 1970) revealed another set of rules structuring riots from the 1960s: those that occur after natural disasters tend to be collaborative and collective, unlike the individualistic robbery which sometimes takes hold in more opportunistic events. Riots
from the 19th century confirm this idea that riots follow norms. In 1822, a riot in Glasgow was started “as usual, by the younger descriptions throwing stones at the windows” (Glasgow Herald, 18/2/1822). Later, in 1877, *The Times* described a riot in Liverpool where people hurled stones at police from the rooftops as a “favourite mode of warfare in the Irish districts” (9/7/1877, p.11).

There are various ways of explaining why particular routines emerge in a riot. Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1957) focussed on ‘emergent norms’ which arise during the events themselves and guide the behaviour of participants. Steve Reicher has suggested that norms are instead shaped by people’s pre-existing identities, he argues that “the behaviour of a given collectivity will depend upon the precise meanings associated with the said category (what masculinity means; what Britishness means)” (Stott and Reicher 1998, p. 359). Other sources of patterning might include the way the police behave (Bagguley and Hussain 2008), traditional rituals and beliefs (Thompson 1991, p. 467-539) or, more generally, the expectations people carry with them into the riot (Ketchley 2014, Tiratelli 2018). But, despite these insights into the various individual sources of patterning, we still know very little about the way the overall practice of rioting has evolved over time (largely because sociologists in this field have tended to work from case studies rather than systematic surveys of rioting over the long run). One of the few attempts to deal with this comes from John Bohstedt (1983, 2010) who draws a direct link from increasing social disorganisation to increasingly violent riots. However, while there is some evidence for this for food riots at the beginning of the 19th century (although see criticism from Andrew Charlesworth 1993), the full picture of how rioting evolved and of the connections between organisation and violence is much more complex than his linear narrative suggests.

Riots in the early 19th century are markedly different to the riots taking place a hundred years later. Although they all contain the basic elements of collective violence against people and/or property, the practice as a whole shifted. As Charles Tilly suggests, the traditional 18th century repertoire of protest embedded “political actors, identities, and interactions in daily local routines” (Tilly 2010, p. 161). But, eventually, riots came unmoored from this social foundation. This did not mean that they
were completely free standing (even today riots still reflect some elements of daily, local routines). But, the practice as whole took on a new form under new social and political conditions. Riots went from being autonomous and personalised, to subordinate and tokenistic. Taking each of those binaries in turn, I want to show that: (i) riots lost their autonomy as a discrete element within the repertoire of contention and became accompaniments to other tactics, and (ii) rioters moved away from targeting specific individuals with whom they had particular personal relationships and instead targeted people tokenistically.

There are three particular changes which exemplify this wider shift. First, the repertoire of economic violence narrowed over the 19th century, becoming subordinated to the logic of the strike. Second, rioters’ relationship with marching was inverted. Instead of rioters marching across large distances spreading unrest, riots became subordinated to the ‘orderly processions’ of respectable social movements and only broke out when those processions were blocked or frustrated by the police. This also reveals that, for most of the 19th century, it proved extremely difficult to keep ‘orderly’ protest separate from rioting. Third, the victims of riots and the way they were targeted became less personal and less individualised. People came to be targeted as tokens, as representatives of some wider type: rioters attacked people as scabs, as fascists or as Irish Catholics. Taken together, these three changes show the practice of rioting coming away from its local political and social base.

This history of rioting as a living, evolving practice also has wider implications for how we interpret the wider history of protest. The orthodox interpretation of the period is as a move between discrete stages: from local, direct action to the modern social movement which emerges by about 1830. But rioting in fact evolved in different ways across various historical stages and played a central role in city life right the way through to the end of the 19th century. It therefore bridged the gap between the modern and premodern repertoire, while its gradual evolution makes it very difficult to categorise as a part of either period. In fact, the history of the changing practice of rioting undermines this whole periodisation. Moving away from it forces us to focus on the histories
of particular forms of protest, like rioting, charting their contingent, convoluted and individual
development. This marks a departure from Tilly’s immensely influential account of the evolution of
protest and focusses on a different aspect of the ‘repertoire’ metaphor: instead of searching for
discrete periods, we should try to trace the lineages of particular routines or practices across time
and space (Biggs 2013).

The subordination of economic rioting

In the early part of the 19th century, the great waves of economic and industrial violence saw a
fusion of elements from different repertoires. Some of these anticipated behaviours that would
dominate industrial protest over the 20th century: strikes, the intimidation of strikebreakers, parades
and demonstrations. Others were very much of the moment: the new machines which were targeted
by the Luddites in 1812, were still a target 30 years later when a gang of youths tried to destroy a
power-loom workshop in Manchester Piccadilly. Another set of actions looked back to 18th century
traditions: shops were visited and bread demanded, while rioters visited houses in well-off areas
begging for relief. However, as the century wore on, this rich mixture of tactics was lost and the
range of behaviours narrowed. Many traditional elements disappeared and the range of acceptable
targets for violence shrunk. Attacks on employers and their homes seem to vanish completely while
violence becomes concentrated on enforcing the rules of the strike and intimidating strike breakers.
By the 1920s, economic riots had lost their autonomous position within the repertoire of contention,
instead they became subordinated to the logic of the strike. This was not simply about the
eradication of food riots and their replacement by strikes. Historically strikes and food riots were
intertwined and overlapping; people lived as both consumers and as workers, and economic
struggles covered both spheres. The range of tactics used by workers in industrial conflict included
strikes, direct attacks on employers or their homes, the destruction of machinery or raw materials
alongside price fixing, seizing grain and raiding markets (Hobsbawm 1952). However, over the
19th century, this range of violent actions was gradually narrowed around the single point of the
strike.
Manchester has a particularly rich history of economic rioting which reveals the full diversity of routines involved in the early 1800s. In June 1808 the House of Commons rejected a bill guaranteeing minimum wages to weavers. In response around 6000 weavers assembled in a field near Newton Lane in an immediate strike for higher pay. This was clearly a response to national issues and was framed as such (the campaign for minimum wages was originally justified as a response to the suffering caused by the Napoleonic Wars - HO 42/95 f.375). It also featured a recurrent pattern of workers assembling in peaceful and orderly crowds. These displays of worthiness, unity and numbers form a key part of the new social movement repertoire which first emerged in this period (Tilly 2008). However, against these modern features, delegates were also sent to local magistrates, there was a campaign of machine-breaking, many of the town’s manufacturers were burnt in effigy and rioters threatened to pull down the houses of strikebreakers.

The riots of March and April 1812 were in many ways closer to the 18th century form that to anything more modern. The unrest began during a Royalist meeting in the Manchester Exchange, which was disrupted by a mob who broke into the Exchange and tried to pull it down. The crowd smashed windows, tore up maps and piled up the furniture into the streets before setting it alight. This then spread into a strike, leading to machine-breaking (focussed on power-looms, a technology which came under renewed attack in 1826) and an attack on the factory of Wrone and Duncroft (who had been ‘weaving by steam’!). There were then food riots as women at Shudehill Market tried to force merchants to lower their prices. A cart taking meal to Oldham was stopped in Miles Platting and attacked while crowds flocked to Rochdale from Oldham and Heywood trying to fix the price of provisions.

There were similar scenes in May 1829 when rioters started a system of ‘sturdy begging’ (Cowdroy’s Manchester Gazette, 9/5/1829). Shops were visited across Manchester and Salford and the crowd cheered as money and provisions were distributed amongst them. Unlike earlier riots, in 1829 hand-looms bore the brunt of their frustration instead of power-looms. There are accounts of
systematic destruction of a factory on Pollard Street with one man on each side cutting the warp with a knife, another cutting the heads of the looms and another using a sledgehammer to break the wheels. More than a hundred looms were destroyed in this factory alone (The Times, 6/5/1829, p. 3).

This mixture of features was also notable in the strikes of 1818. Here an initial wave of unrest in July was exceptionally disciplined and peaceful within Manchester itself (there are reports of arson being used in Bolton and a factory which was employing female labourers was torn down in Stockport). Even *The Times* described it as in “steady adherence to the rules of combination” (21/6/1818, p. 3). However, by September strikers are seen booing and shaming local notables and employers, attacking factories and even the home of an employer in Ancoats. By 1820, hundreds of workers were meeting for drilling and training in Tandle Hill near Royton, Manchester. The 1840s saw a similarly rich mixture of tactics. In January 1840 there was a fairly traditional food riot as the crowd marched from Ancoats down London Road, Market Street, Deansgate and up Kings Street demanding bread and carrying red herrings, potatoes and lumps of bread on poles, chanting ‘Frostshanna be hanged’ and beating on pots and pans. But, only six years later, during the building operatives strike, crowds of rioters assembled outside the main railway stations trying to obstruct and intimidate arriving strike-breakers.

Early economic unrest in Glasgow was similarly varied. Attempts to set the price of goods are reported in October 1800 and again in September 1817; while, in 1812 and 1823, striking weavers broke into the homes of strikebreakers, destroying their pieces and even attempting to assassinate the manager of a power-loom factory in Hutchesontown. One of the largest riots of this early period takes place on August 1st and 2nd 1816 when ‘some gibing expression’ used by a relief officer at a Calton soup kitchen leads to a riot. The crowd then threw stones and attempted to rescue prisoners before attacking a steam loom factory on Tureen Street. Just like in Manchester, these events combine traditional routines, direct, personalised attacks and machine-breaking with disciplined strikes and intimidation.
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 food riots of 1855 and 1867 followed tradition in that rioters set prices and begged for relief at the houses of the middle class. 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, 24/2/1855). But, these food riots also saw wanton violence, looting, destruction of property and demands for money which distinguish them from the restrained and disciplined affairs characteristically associated with the small towns of the 18th century (Bohstedt 1983).

However, by the final decades of the 19th century this rich mixture of tactics had largely disappeared, as violence became subordinated to the logic of the strike. Rioting sailors in Liverpool in 1889 carefully directed their violence at fellow trade unionists who were breaking the strike, allowing Spanish sailors to pass by unmolested and searching English sailors for their union cards. The anti-police violence and nihilistic looting that took place during Liverpool’s 1911 transport strike was similarly devoid of traditional elements. Although the fighting was fierce, there were no attempts to set prices or make direct, personal attacks on employers and local elites. A similar picture emerges across all three cities: when you compare industrial and economic riots at the start of the 19th and 20th centuries, you can see a significant narrowing of the range of violent actions as the riot becomes an institutionalised and subordinated part of the strike.

The sailors, dockers and transport workers strikes in Glasgow in 1911 and 1912 are paradigmatic examples of this new form of 20th century economic rioting. Violence was almost exclusively concentrated on enforcing the strike. 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 the strike-breakers access to the subway stations. In an echo of earlier rioters pulling shuttles from
looms and plugs from boilers, rioters also removed the handles used by motor-men to operate the trams. But they didn’t bring back any of the traditional elements of 18th century food rioting or the rituals and vicious, personal violence which characterised many mid-century industrial disputes (e.g. Price 1975, Behagg 1982, King 1985). There are superficial similarities here, food rioters famously stopped ships from unloading in a bid to prevent the export of food. But those actions followed a very different logic to these attempts to enforce the strike by preventing work. In August 1911, the *Daily Record* (14/8/1911) reported that the police were not the real object of attack and that there were mostly good relations between them and the crowd. Rioter’s focus was on potential strikebreakers. Indeed, in February 1912, the trigger for violence was a rumour that non-union men were being smuggled onto the boats at Plantation Quay. Even during the violence of the 1926 General Strike, riots remained largely subordinate to the logic of the strike.

Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the 19th century was a gradual period in which the working class (and their employers) came to learn the ‘rules of the game’ governing industrial disputes (1964). This recognition of the particular form and logic of a strike led to its formalisation, and so, the pattern of interactions between workers, employers and other authorities became fixed in a fairly constrained form. There were some continuities, for example, in 20th century Manchester, strikers still routinely attacked scabs and the police. However, there were no attacks on their places of work, no destruction of machines or attempts to directly attack and intimidate the employers. Similarly, in Liverpool, after the brickmakers and dock labourers’ strikes of 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 1912 riots in Pendlebury, Salford, make an even more direct reference to the ‘rules of the game’. 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. In essence, strikers turned to violence to enforce the rules of the strike. As I have shown, this was nothing new, but what was new was that the repertoire as a whole had narrowed around this point.
One way of quantifying this change is to look at the decline in two specific routines: begging and factory visiting. The tradition of begging is different to modern looting. The more traditional form draws explicitly on the 17th and 18th century idea of levying relief where rioters visited the houses of the wealthy asking for donations or accosted gentlemen in the street with the same demands (Bushaway 1982). Of course rioters’ demands have always been backed up by threats and force (indeed, in 1829, the *Manchester Mercury* [19/5/1829] made much of the fact that people were being charged for theft of things that had been handed to them, but under intimidation). But, 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 being seen shutting their shutters or refusing to hand out loaves. In Liverpool in 1867 rioters even left a shop promising to return later when its master came back. However, over the course of the 19th century this traditional framework began to break down. We see this first in Manchester where, in April 1826, some rioters refused the offer of bread, demanding money instead. During the 1855 food riot in Liverpool, handing out bread only occasionally pacifies 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 pawn shops. 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 which lent begging a quasi-normative status were eroded, it slowly vanished, disappearing completely after the 1870s (see Table 8 for a statistical test of this trend).

The second routine we can measure is ‘visiting factories’ as a way of spreading a strike. This consists of rioters marching from factory to factory demanding that the workers turn out. If the workers (or the employer) refuses to allow this, the rioters then attack the factory, normally beginning by stoning the windows. This was an intrinsically violent and autonomous tradition of protest that was applied to factories across Lancashire, to docks and colliers in and around Liverpool and Glasgow, and even, in 1848, to a workhouse on Tibb Street, Manchester. From 1800
to 1840, 13% of all riots saw factory visits of some kind. However, as industrial protests became more and more institutionalised within organised trade unions, this routine again slowly disappeared (see Table 8). Indeed one of the few times it occurs after the mid-century was as part of a challenge to one of these large, institutionalised, bureaucratic trade unions. In 1912 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). Although this routine was always subordinated to the logic of the strike, its disappearance marked the narrowing of the repertoire of economic violence around enforcing an already existing strike.

Table 8: The likelihood of a given riot involving begging or factory visits

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<td>Factory visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>-1.37 **</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>157</td>
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<td>Predicted probabilities by year</td>
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<td>1800 = 0.20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1939 = 0.004</td>
<td>1939 = 0.01</td>
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Notes: Logit regressions with coefficients reported as log odds. Both models have an ICC not significantly different to 0 so were left pooled. Begging was defined as the performance of asking for and receiving relief. Factory visits were defined as rioters marching from factory to factory demanding that the workers turn out.

The final wave of economic rioting in my sample comes from the unemployed movement of the 1930s. In the main, earlier riots had been seen as attached to particular trades, even when the actual rioters were ‘out of work’ weavers or spinners. There are some exceptions to this, such as the 1848 riot in Glasgow or the 1863 unrest associated with the ‘Unemployed Operatives of Stalybridge’.

But, it was only during the interwar period that the ‘unemployed’ emerged as a category and social actor in their own right. Throughout the 1930s demonstrations organised by the National
Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) repeatedly ended in violence. Time after time marchers attacked the police and, most famously, an NUWM march in Glasgow in 1931 ended in two nights of fighting, looting and mass meetings. This violence was obviously not subordinate to the logic of the strike. These were unemployed workers who had no tools to down. Instead the centrepiece of their repertoire was the march: both the short parades which are so typical of modern social movements, and longer ‘hunger marches’ which consciously echoed the tradition of petitioning the king and earlier waves of protests like the Blanketeers. There was also remarkable tactical experimentation as rioters in Manchester twice tried to introduce Gandhi’s tactic of sitting peacefully in front of the police (in both cases, October 7th and November 10th 1931, they abandoned it when the police refused to respond). However, when violence did emerge it remained a subordinate element within this new repertoire. Rioters mainly attacked the police and seem to do so largely out of frustration when the police obstructed their marches. Violence therefore worked to reinforce a separate tactic. And, despite the failed attempt to borrow a tactic from the Indian independence movement, the range of violent actions remained far narrower than a hundred years before.

Marching and movement in riots

The use of marching by the NUWM revived a much older tradition of movement within riots. 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). But they were also vitally important to the street theatre that defined urban politics (Rogers 1989, 1998, Shoemaker 2004). They were also sites of struggle between competing definitions of ‘the people’ and what were considered acceptable ways of life. During these struggles the cultural vocabulary of different types of procession were appropriated and reinterpreted for new ends. Most dramatically, the trial after Peterloo turned on two rival interpretations of the processions leading up to the massacre. The
prosecution focussed on the militaristic appearance of the marchers and argued that their very orderliness was a sign of treasonous, revolutionary plots. However, the defence presented the marches as a common folk tradition, a “quaint and romantically fantastic spectacle” whose orderliness was a sign of respectability (Poole 2006, p. 119). This argument by the defence was a central element of the emerging social movement repertoire, where “demonstrations were preceded and followed by processions” as a “show of respectability” (Navickas 2015, p. 284 and 282; Tilly 2004, 2010). However, for much of its early history these ‘orderly demonstrations’ were haunted by violence and rioting. In the end, it proved far harder to separate the two than the Chartist leader, William Lovett, hoped when he ordered his followers to “seek to effect our object in peace, with no other force than that of argument or persuasion” and chastised the “violence and folly of the hot-brained few” (1920, p. 193 and 68).

Marching also played a more specific role within riots. Adrian Randall (2006) has argued that one of the defining features of food riots was the fact that rioters marched over prodigious distances. Guided by local knowledge and confident of a shared ideology (the moral economy), they marched over parish boundaries, controlling whole areas for days or weeks. He argues that rioters’ willingness to move undermines John Bohstedt’s (1983) claim that rioting was a ‘local’ phenomena, structured by local political conditions. In response, Bohstedt (2010) claimed that while the food riots of 1766 did see some marching crowds (particularly in Gloucestershire), they were not typical of 18th century riots in general or even of the 1766 wave. However, I think that Bohstedt might have dismissed this argument too quickly. Particularly in the early 1800s, there are many examples of urban rioters moving across large distances, spreading unrest from town to town. But, it is true that, by the end of the 19th century, the nature of this connection between riots and marching had changed. Rioters no longer used marches instrumentally, as ways to spread the riot from place to place. Instead riots became subordinated to the new tactic of orderly processions and emerged when marches were blocked by the police or frustrated by the authorities.
In the first decades of the 19th century rioters regularly marched across great distances spreading unrest and disorder. This was often part of the routine of factory visiting I described above. During the 1842 General Strike workers formed ‘flying pickets’ and marched across the Manchester region, turning out workers as they went (Navickas 2016, p. 290-291). But, marching also featured in more radical and revolutionary protests. For example, in Glasgow, the uprising of 1820 saw groups of radicals marching from town to town, trying to gather support for their faltering insurgency. In Manchester, during strikes waves of 1808 and 1812, groups of rioters marched between the city and the surrounding towns of Stockport, Blackley and Edgeley. Often rioters marched on faulty information. In July 1826 rioters marched from Ancoats 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. However, this routine of marching across large distances to spread a riot became extremely rare by the mid century. The last examples I can find occur during the anti-Catholic violence of 1868. 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 fact that this is the last example of such marching lends some support to Randall’s suggestion that marching across large distances depends on rioters assuming that people at their destination will share whatever ideology it is that they are using to justify their attacks. That may explain why the 1915 anti-German riots also saw rioting crowds march so defiantly across the city seeking out new victims.

Alongside this traditional routine, the early 1800s also see the emergence of a new form of protest: the orderly demonstration. After the horror of the Gordon Riots when rioters invaded the carriages of Lords and Ministers and attacked politicians (Haywood and Seed 2012), radicals and whigs developed a profound scepticism about the political potential of the crowd and it took 30 years for the crowd to be reintegrated into radical strategy and discourse (Rogers 1998). But, by the era of the ‘mass platform’, the crowd was reshaped into orderly parades (Tilly 2008), with banners representing clearly demarcated groups (Baer 2012) and women playing the role of the moral
guardians of class-based community standards (Rogers 1998). In Glasgow, this first emerged around the Queen Caroline Affair, a noted turning point in British class politics and protest more generally. In November 1820, the bill which King George was using to try to divorce the Queen was dropped by Parliament. When news broke, the celebrations quickly escalated with illuminations, bonfires, the rolling of tar barrels and parades across the city centre. But the crowd also smashed windows, lamps and police boxes, attacked a police office, liberated prisoners and tore up railings. There were similar scenes in April the following year on the King’s birthday. The transition to ‘orderly protest’ was clearly incomplete.

It’s important to note that orderly demonstrations could also be theatrically undermined, even if they weren’t directly attacked. The violent events in Glasgow during the King’s birthday were extensions of protests in Manchester the year before. Then, The Observer reported that they “never saw such a train of gloomy faces, as the procession altogether showed… Not a cheer was heard along the whole line from St Anns Square to Ardwick Green; not a handkerchief was waved from any window… The populace at large most disloyally remained insensible” (The Observer 29/4/1820). The refusal to take part in these events left authorities frantically looking for volunteers, drafting in soldiers to form the procession and asking employers to force their workers to attend as spectators (Poole 2006). This growing hatred of the monarchy after Peterloo and the Queen Caroline affair led the urban working class to turn away from loyalist and civic festivities in general. In Lancashire this lasted into the late 1830s when Queen Victoria’s coronation was boycotted across the region (Navickas 2015, p. 187-8).

These cultural struggles about processions were rooted in a wider conflict over public space within the city. During the 1840s, this became a key feature of the resurgent Chartist movement, as working class men and women worked to assert their presence in the city and in the body politic. In this way, fights for rights and democratic control were expressed in defiantly local conflicts over territory (Navickas 2015). These conflicts were sometimes orderly, as in the ‘march on the churches’ in 1839 or the regular processions around Stevenson Square and New Cross in 1848. But,
riots were never far away. The 1842 General Strike saw ‘plug riots’ across Lancashire (where rioters stopped factories by removing the boiler plugs from their steam engines) and groups of workers marching into Manchester from Ashton, Stalybridge, Harpurhey and Hyde. In 1848 riots broke out in March outside the Tibb Street workhouse and again, in May, after the trial of the Irish nationalist and ally of the Chartists, John Mitchel.

At around the same time, parades also emerged in the labour movement where working class men inserted themselves physical and bodily into the public realm through organised marches (Steinberg 1998). These were different to the processions favoured by the Chartists in that workers tended to parade up and down a few streets, often linking arms in formation (Navickas 2015). But again, although the orderliness of the crowds might have been novel, violence was rarely far away. In Manchester during the 1818 spinners’ strike, strikers marched in ‘regular military files’ to factories trying to induce females 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. In 1837, food rioters smeared blood on loaves of bread which they then stuck on pikes and paraded around the city. Even by the 1840s those older, carnivalesque traditions had not totally disappeared. In 1848, rioters reclaimed New Cross from the police and paraded loaves of bread around the city. Although the new social movement repertoire would come to dominate protest over the next 200 years, for the first half for 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, accompanied by banners, flags and songs were occasions for violence in 1832, 1837, 1839, 1841 and 1845. Indeed, bands often seemed to have deliberately drawn crowds into hostile areas to provoke riots. As late as 1905 a protestant crowd tried to persuade the Garston Liverpool Heroes L.O.L. band to parade an Irish area known as ‘the bogs’. 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. So, although they followed a different lineage, religious parades came under similar pressure to become ‘orderly’ and ‘respectable’. This was again a slow and difficult process, but one that eventually seems to have been successful. In Glasgow, this process took even longer. There the 12th of July Orange parades were still excuses for rioting throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

But, by the early 1900s, the role of marching within the practice of rioting was shifting. Although in certain sectarian contexts parades were still used to provoke violence, rioters no longer marched from town to town spreading the riot. Instead, riots became subordinate to the new form of orderly procession. There is an obvious contradiction between parades as displays of respectability and violent rioting. Unlike with strikes, riots were rarely used to support or enforce orderly parades. Instead, they came out of frustration when parades were obstructed. For example, in Glasgow on April 28 1920, a riot broke out after the police prevented a Sinn Fein demonstration from marching into George Square to hold a meeting. And, by the time the NUWM took to the streets in the 1930s, this transformation was complete. In Glasgow in October 1931 riots broke out when the police tried to disperse a meeting being held in Glasgow Green. 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 as the police tried to redirect the procession. By this stage, riots were comparatively rare and, when they did occur, rioters no longer moved deliberately to spread riots across large areas. Instead, riots were subordinated to the newer tradition of orderly parades and demonstrations. Social movements had largely replaced the rioting crowd.

**Changing targets of violence**

The third significant shift concerns the way that the victims of riots were targeted. In the early part of the 19th century, rioters often visited the homes of employers, magistrates and local notables, making specific demands to specific individuals. These riots of all kinds, religious, economic and
political, were embedded in personal, reciprocal and hierarchical social relations and so individuals were targeted because of their position within particular relationships. David Collings (2009) suggested that this pre-modern culture of resistance had collapsed by the early 19th century. However, if riots are a decent indicator of cultural patterns in normal times (see Randall and Charlesworth 2000), then they suggest that pre-modern patterns clung on through much of the 19th century. In fact riots involving the invasion of the elite’s private space and direct attacks on their persons were still common in the mid-1800s and only gradually disappeared. It was not until the early 1900s that rioting strikers concentrated their attacks solely on generic tokens, on ‘scabs’ or ‘the police’. However, alongside these changes, other elements remained stable. Ethnic and sectarian violence in particular, followed a fairly similar pattern throughout this 140 year period. This form of rioting had always been targeted at people because of who they were, rather than because of their place in specific relations. And, across this period, rioters continued to target ethnic and racial ‘others’ indiscriminately, in their homes, in public or in their places of worship. What happens over the 19th century is that economic and political riots adopt the same style of targeting as ethnic and sectarian violence; they target Catholics in general not particular bishops, fascists not Oswald Mosley, strikebreakers not employers.

Over the 19th century there is a clear decline in the proportion of riots involving the targeting of specific, named individuals (which is significant in a simple pooled logistic regression: Table 9) and some evidence of a smaller decline in targeting people in their homes (the trend is nonsignificant). But, as I have just suggested, these aggregates conceal a more complex pattern of continuity and discontinuity. The decline in personal attacks on political and economic elites doesn’t mean that individuals are no longer targeted. Instead it results in increasingly tokenistic riots, where people are targeted because of their identity.

During the Luddite uprisings in Manchester, rioters repeatedly targeted the homes of local elites. In Stockport in April 1812, a crowd of rioters led by two men dressed in women’s clothes and styling themselves as ‘Ludd’s wives’ tried to get into a gated house at Edgeley. Eventually they gave up and
went into Stockport visiting several houses and factories destroying all that came before them. Later that night the mob of around 3,000 returned to Edgeley and burnt the house to the ground. They then made a move for another local notable’s home, chanting ‘Now for Sykes!’, before being intercepted by the military. In July 1829, striking cotton weavers broke into the house of an employer and beat him in his bed. In October 1831 crowds of reformists criss-crossed the city attacking the houses of prominent Tories like Hugh Hornley Birley and Daniel Grant. During the Chartist unrest of May 1848, the son of the local MP was targeted. At another strike in Pendleton in 1853, the owner and several senior managers of the dyeing and finishing factory were attacked by strikers. This personal targeting of employers and elites confirmed their worst fears about the crowd and led to flurries of letters between magistrates, local police chiefs and the Home Office (e.g. HO 40/1-2, HO 44/16, HO 45/53 & HO 45/249C).

Table 9: The likelihood of a given riot targeting specific individuals or people in their homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likelihood of a given riot targeting specific individuals</th>
<th>Likelihood of a given riot targeting people in their homes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.90 **</td>
<td>-1.65 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>-0.0088 *</td>
<td>-0.0041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted probabilities by year</td>
<td>1800 = 0.29</td>
<td>1800 = 0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1939 = 0.11</td>
<td>1939 = 0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Notes: Logit regressions with coefficients reported as log odds. Both models have an ICC not significantly different to 0 so were left pooled. Any riot where reports indicated the targeting of specific individuals or groups (excluding the police) were counted as ‘targeting specific individuals’.

Significance codes: *** = 0.001, ** = 0.01, * = 0.05

Much to dismay of local elites, similar targeting of individuals occurred in Liverpool and Glasgow. In Glasgow in 1817 about a thousand men from Calton paraded through Gallowgate and the High Street on their way to house of Parish Minister demanding an extension of parochial aid. When some of their number were arrested they turned on the police and battled with them all the way to the bridewell. In 1861 in Johnstone Parish, after the election of the police commissioners, an angry
crowd of non-electors attacked the houses of the just-elected Mr Moore, the Bailie and his bakery and the home of the superintendent of police. Even as late as 1894, during a colliers’ strike in Baillieston, the manager’s home was stoned by a mob of 1500 people. Similar scenes were seen in Liverpool when Lord Sandon’s election parade of 1831 was repeatedly attacked. In 1859, a Birkenhead factory owner, Mr Laird, proposed that management of the cemetery should stay in the hands of commissioners (who were discriminating against Catholics and Dissenters). After his proposal was voted through, an angry crowd of navvies and dock labourers stormed his factory and attacked his workers.

But, this pattern of personalised targeting slowly began to disappear. Although strikebreakers continue to be victims of violence (even in their own homes in Manchester in 1904), the only attacks on managers and employers after 1850 are in Manchester in 1853 and Glasgow 1889 and 1894. As I described earlier, by the time of the 1911 Transport Strike, violence was almost entirely concentrated on the strike itself, as mobs of workers tried to prevent the delivery of goods, attacking lorries and picketing outside warehouses and the docks. During the anti-fascist violence of the 1930s attacks were similarly focussed on anonymous ‘fascists’ in the crowd as opposed to individual political leaders. The attack on the Protestant rabble-rouser John Kensit in 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 those sorts of events were. Political and economic violence after 1900 very rarely targeted specific individuals or broke through the symbolic barrier of people’s private homes.

There are several different processes which led to this reorientation of violence. The first is the growing power of trade unions and the reorganisation of violence around the strike, something I described in detail earlier. The second is that the 19th century saw an unprecedented level of residential and cultural segregation, as elites moved out of the city centres and detached themselves from the everyday life of the urban working class (Jones 1974, Harris 1984, Roger 1995, Dodgshon
and Butlin 2013, p. 429-451). This was combined with the reorientation of politics towards the national stage, all of which seem to have made rioters less likely to target particular local elites.

However, other types of riots reveal significant continuities in the practice of rioting. In particular, riots which emerged around ethnic or racial identities have always targeted people tokenistically and rioters have rarely been afraid to invade private homes and even sacred spaces. The most numerous examples of this type of riot are sectarian, anti-Irish riots. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow all have a dark history of anti-Irish violence and these riots all have very similar patterns of behaviour, even as they become rarer and rarer after World War I.

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. Early riots broke out during the 12th of July Parade in 1807 where rival parties fought with bludgeons and chalked ‘No Popery’ on the walls of houses. This was echoed in 1876 when sporadic fighting continued throughout the night and 3-4000 strong mobs of Irishmen flew green ribbons and defied the Orangers to leave their houses in Pendleton. The last riot in Manchester associated with the 12th of July came in 1888 when the Orange parade was attacked by a heavily armed Catholic mob. The series of dramatic anti-Irish riots in Stockport and Ashton in 1852, 1854 and 1868 also betray a similar pattern. Rival groups engaged in vicious tit-for-tat attacks on churches, homes, pubs and in pitched battles running over several days. The anti-Irish riots in Glasgow mostly occur after 1870, but, they also see people targeted tokenistically and in their homes, at marches or in churches. 12th of July riots begin in 1821 and continue right the way through to 1935, with a similar pattern of provocations, stonings and hand to hand fighting. The riot in 1925 reveals a typical pattern of escalation where initial violence during the parade led to houses in Cobden Street being attacked. The occupants then retaliated and injured someone leading to further conflict on Turner Street and Garnnad Road. Again, these Glaswegian riots were tokenistic and willing to cross the spatial boundaries between neighbourhoods and between the public/private realm. Unlike the anti-Irish
riots in South Wales studied by Louise Miskell (2004), people were targeted because of who they were rather than for any particular infringement or offence.

Liverpool is notorious for its history of sectarian violence and, although the scale is different to Manchester and Glasgow, the character of the violence is fairly similar. From 1819 to 1824 each year saw the 12th of July Parade end in violence and fighting in pubs. 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 1835, 1841, 1910 and 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 of the area. What is remarkable about these sectarian riots is that they are performed consistently over time and across the three cities, only rarely breaking from well-established targets.

The 1915 anti-German riots following the sinking of the Lusitania demonstrate that this kind of riot was not constrained to anti-Irish conflicts. The obvious difference is the huge scale of the unrest, with violence and looting taking place over several nights and across all areas of Liverpool and Manchester (and many other places across Britain). But, 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). And again, rioters invaded their homes and shops, tearing out furniture and piling it into bonfires on the streets. They stole pianos for impromptu concerts where they sung ‘RuleBritania’, ‘Tipperary’ and other patriotic tunes.

The only real difference was that the exceptional circumstances of World War I led to the feeling that the whole community endorsed the violence, something which was evident in much of the newspaper coverage. The Manchester Evening Chronicle’s headline on the 10th of May called the Lusitania sinking 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 trope that Ronald Paulson [2009]
describes as a ‘Whig riot’). Reporters emphasised the role played by distraught mothers and widows who led the attacks and whose femininity excused their violent and uncontrollable emotions. 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 Crawfurd 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, 13/3/1914). Although this use of femininity to excuse rioting was fairly unusual, the conduct of the rioters would have been depressingly familiar to the many Irish Catholics living in Manchester and Liverpool.

The final point of continuity is race riots. Most accounts of race rioting in Britain focus on the wave of violence in 1919 (e.g. Jenkinson 2009), but, as traumatic as those events were, they actual 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 in Liverpool in 1878. Historically, white sailors had been given preference in hiring over black sailors and they 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 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 2-3000 people fought all the way along Paradise Street to the Sailors’ Home. These events echoed the battles between American and English sailors in 1809-10 and also prefigured the attacks on black sailors in Manchester (1919 and 1921), Liverpool (1919) and Glasgow (1919). But, there were other similarities between race riots and anti-Irish rioting. In 1892 a Mosque near Brougham Terrace in Islington, Liverpool, was attacked in much the same way as the ‘ritualist’ churches. 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 (the sexual element of this attack again prefigures the fears of black, male sexuality which coloured reporting of the
1919 attacks - see Rowe 2000). In that same year, there were repeated attacks on Mormon churches across Liverpool and, in 1925, an Indian silkweaver was beaten to death in his home in Port Dundas, Glasgow. 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 much 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 1870 a crowd of 500-1000 people attacked the house of someone who was suspected of giving information about deserters to the police and, in Liverpool in 1902, an anti-war pamphleteer’s home was attacked by a pro-war mob. 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.

New riots for a new era?

There is an orthodox history of protest which begins in the 1700s with a repertoire which is largely backwards-looking, short-term and occasionally millenarian. By the time it reaches the early 1800s, this traditional repertoire of contention had been displaced by the heroic age of working class radicalism and the modern tactics of social movements and trade unions (Thompson 1963, Hobsbawm 1964, Tilly 1978, 1981, 1995, 2004). Within this narrative, riots are normally seen as a characteristic example of those earlier forms of protests, destined to disappear as we enter the modern era.

The history of urban rioting that I have presented is a challenge to this orthodox narrative. Most obviously, urban riots don’t seem to decline until the late 1800s, many decades after the supposed
triumph of social movements. However we try to explain their eventual decline, riots were a central part of urban life and of contentious politics for most of the 19th century. In places like Glasgow this is true right the way through the first few decades of the 20th century. Riots therefore bridge the gap between premodern and modern repertoires of protest. And they can’t be seen as just an inconvenient exception or awkward counter-example. The orthodox narrative relies heavily, if implicitly, on the importance of ideas of *orderly protest* and the banishing of violence from the modern period. This is especially true in Tilly’s version (2004) which conspicuously ignores the violent Swing riots of the 1830s despite a general reliance on UK data. Riots therefore challenge the implied aligning of oppositions: violence/respectability and premodern/modern. They upset the orthodox sequential teleology which sees the repertoire of protest advancing through more-or-less discrete stages on the way to modernity.

There seem to be two possible responses to this challenge. One is to simply accept it and move the date of transition back by 50 years. The other is to say these later riots really belong in the past, but have somehow been reborn as an atavism or anachronism; what Bloch (1977) calls the ‘simultaneity of the non-simultaneous’. But, neither of these responses are adequate. We can’t ignore the fact that the social movement *was* firmly established by the early 1800s. But, we also can’t ignore the fact that these later riots didn’t survive by accident. Those riots which continued into the period of organised labour, after the working class were meant to have learned the ‘rules of the game’, were not residue from a bygone era. They themselves evolved during that time, adapting to the oncoming rush of modernity by becoming subordinate and tokenistic where they had once been autonomous and personalised. This makes them difficult to situate in any neat, historical stage. Their form evolves and, although I have focussed on the differences, the continuities are also significant. They move with the times, but in a complex and unpredictable way.

Even proto-revolutionary riots seem to march in step with contemporary conditions. Rioters in Manchester and Glasgow in 1848 spoke of France, raised the tricolore, tried to raid the gasworks and liberate the bastilles. The aborted risings of 1820 followed an earlier radical tradition with raids
on gunsmiths, the manufacturing of pikes and drilling in the countryside. By the 20th century rioters were singing the ‘Red Flag’ as they fought the police in the Battle of George Square and during the 1926 General Strike. This is not just a reflection of riots connection with time but also their complex relationship with space. These riots were obviously influenced by international events and international structural processes. But this does not mean that they were part of a homogenous internationalism, existing above and beyond any particular place. Although larger structural processes clearly mattered, they had place-specific impacts (Massey 1994). For example, the American Civil War led in part to the Lancashire Cotton Famine which devastated Manchester, but had little impact in Glasgow. Similarly, World War I distorted local economies in very different ways, leading to an escalating wave of strikes in Glasgow and comparative peace in Manchester (Gallacher 1919, Foster 1990). But, riots could also be hyper-local. 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. During the Lusitania riots of 1915, rioters knew who had Germanic names and moved across the city seeking them out. The practice of rioting therefore seems to respond to both time and space. And this responsiveness makes it difficult to argue that later riots were simple anachronisms.

The nature of this challenge can best be seen in the light of Charles Tilly’s work, which is still the best account of the orthodox history. There are two separate arguments running from his earliest working papers (1978, 1981) to his last books (2004, 2008), but, unfortunately they often collapse into one another. The first is an attempt at periodisation. Tilly argues (in various different formulations) that in the early 1800s there was a shift in tactics as “parochial and patronized forms gave way to national and autonomous forms” (1981, p. 6). The second argument looks at a particular history: the development and diffusion of the modern social movement (defined as a sustained and organised campaign, with a specific set of tactics and concerted displays of worthiness, unity, numbers and determination). These are significantly different arguments: one tries to establish discrete periods of history, the other to explain the historical development of a particular practice. Although social movements are paradigmatic of the new ‘national and
autonomous’ form, they don’t exhaust the modern repertoire. Riots continue to be a vital part of urban politics into the late 19th century, while the trade union movement and strikes become probably the most important form of contention in the early 20th century (at least in terms of numbers involved) (Office for National Statistics, see also Biggs 2015).

What my history of rioting implies is that, while Tilly’s account of the birth of social movements remains a vital argument, his periodisation is on much more uncertain grounds. This echoes the point made in John Rule’s (2000) provocative essay on industrial disputes in Devon during the 1700s. He shows that workers had something resembling an advanced trade union consciousness before they claimed the ‘moral economy’ of food riots in 1756 (Bohstedt [2000] argues that nationally the ‘food riot’ was invented in 1740). By 1726 workers were already engaging in aggressive and deliberately timed strikes to advance wages in boom times. They built up strike funds, recognised their unique position within the local economy and used it to their advantage. This reverses the traditional historical narrative, suggesting that modern trade unionism actually came before traditional ‘moral economy’, at least in Devon. Like the riots I have described, Rule’s argument implies that the history of the way we protest is uneven, full of temporary reversals and unexpected contingencies.

Undermining the orthodox periodisation in this way opens up the question of why bother splitting history into periods at all? Part of it comes from a strategic impulse, knowing ‘what’s going on’ allows us to ask ‘what is to be done’ (Toscano 2016). But there are also analytic reasons. As Eric Hobsbawm said “it is both necessary and impossible to cut history into chronological slices. Necessary because… some periods at least have a certain internal coherence” (1983, p. 9). Hobsbawm himself was a master-periodiser, publishing The Age of Revolution followed by The Age of Capital, The Age of Empire, and The Age of Extremes, with each period’s internal coherence grounded in politics and economics. Historians like William Sewell (1990) and Peter Gurney (2015) have instead used ideological shifts to mark the changes between periods. But, it’s an open question
whether the last 250 years of British history (or history more generally) can be periodised according to the tactics used by would-be protesters.

In fact, although Tilly begins with individual tactics and the metaphor of the repertoire, he quickly moves beyond his catalogue of protest events to the ideological assumptions behind them. In a 1981 working paper he listed the assumptions behind the traditional, premodern repertoire as: (i) that people are grouped into corporate bodies, (ii) the law protects those bodies’ collective rights, (iii) local authorities had an obligation to follow those laws, (iv) the chosen representatives of those bodies had the right to make public demands, (v) authorities were obliged to listen to those demands, and (vi) there were no further rights of collective action outside of that framework. That list reappears, almost word for word, in his 2004 book *Social Movements*. While Tilly’s evidence base is actual protests, it can sometimes be difficult to know which is more important to his periodisation: the ideological assumptions or the tactics themselves.

I am open to the idea that the 19th and 20th century can be usefully split in to periods on the basis of changing ideologies. But, I’m sceptical about whether it makes sense to do it on the basis of changing tactics. As Alberto Toscano (2016) points out in his review of *Riot.Strike.Riot*, particular forms of protest aren’t ‘necessary or historically inevitable’ in a given period. Nor do they ‘express and explicate’ those periods. They are partially independent from wider structural forces (Mandel 1985), they have their own convoluted and idiosyncratic histories. Rather than trying to discover epochal shifts between periods, we would be better off tracing the histories of particular practices, like rioting, over the long run. Mark Traugott’s history of the barricade is a brilliant example of how that can be done. In a sensitive account of continuity and discontinuity, he argues that:

> Not only has the concept of the barricade survived intact over several centuries… [but] barricades underwent a more or less continual process of adaptation and change…. The specific shift from pragmatic tactic of insurrection to preeminent symbol of the
revolutionary tradition accounts for the persistence of the practice of barricade construction throughout the modern era (Traugott 2010, p. xi-xii)

He retains a sense of wider shifts and changing periods, while focussing on the details of one particular practice, tracing its evolution and diffusion across Europe. A similar history of riots would no doubt extend and challenge my conclusions in unexpected ways. And, cumulatively, these histories of particular practices would give us a much richer account of how the repertoire of protest changed over time, one which would force us to pay attention to its contingencies and the changing constellations of tactics used in different places at different times.

Ideally we would also want to know how people themselves relate to the history of their own practice, their various ways of being-with-the-past (Chakrabarty 2007). Between the two poles of seeing rioters either as cynical manipulators of existing symbols (Stevenson 1987) or as automatically reproducing a fixed script, there lie a whole range of different attitudes. For example, during the 2011 London Riots, people in Brixton expressed shock that the riots hadn’t started there, there was even a feeling of damaged pride given Brixton’s recent history of riots. The lack of first-person accounts of historical riots makes it very difficult to get any answers to these sort of questions and I won’t attempt to address them in detail here, but a complete history would need to find some way of addressing this.

Finally, this claim that riots are a living and evolving practice opens up the question of how rioting will change in the future. The fact that riots have been so rare in the UK over the last 70 years means that they never had the chance to rediscover the autonomous form they had in the early 1800s. Instead they have remained subordinated to other struggles and other tactics. The one major Western counterexample is the race riots of the 1960s, although even there it’s not clear that a distinct form of rioting emerged. As the number of riots across Europe and the U.S. has increased over the last five or six years, many commentators have spoken about the ‘return of the riot’ (e.g.

12 Clifford Stott reported this to me in personal correspondence.
Badiou 2012, Mayer et al 2016, Clover 2016). I’m not going to offer any bold predictions here, but, for what it’s worth, there are two points I want to make.

The first is a response to the left communist and anarchist writings which celebrate the spontaneity of riots as a contrast to the ‘organisational’ focus of traditional communist/Leninist parties. In recent work by the Invisible Committee (2009, 2015, 2017) and Joshua Clover (2016) this takes the form of a call for riots to expand and ‘absolutize’, becoming a universal, revolutionary insurrection which produces new subjects and a new society. As a piece of strategy this indulges in the kind of wishful thinking that Gramsci called “historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination” (1999, p. 487). It also doesn’t answer the question of where the unity of rioters as a collective subject comes from (Toscano 2016). The identity-based riots I described above show that a shared history of dispossession won’t necessarily unite different groups, and nor will the apparent cohesion of the anarchist’s ideal opponent (capital/state). But, my main criticism revolves around the idea of rioting as a practice. These anarchist descriptions of riots end up echoing a much earlier literary image of riots as an outpouring of pent-up emotions, a “natural… necessary and liberty-giving phenomena” (Paulson 2009, p. 570). These naturalistic metaphors make riots a spontaneous but inevitable reaction to contemporary conditions. This is an untenable position. Riots form an ongoing and evolving practice with a history of their own. They build on previous riots, on past waves of protest, on existing ideas and tactics; they are a practice supported by a complex social, political and economic infrastructure. As Marx said, the “tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (2013, p. 1). Riots might be fairly unpredictable and subject to contingent or endogenous processes, but they are not miraculous, self-organising, spontaneous eruptions. They are guided by their own traditions.

My second suggestion is that, if we want to understand new riots when they do occur, we will need to look beyond grand structural forces. We need to focus on how rioters conduct themselves, on the actual behaviours and interactions which constitute rioting. It’s tempting when looking for grand interpretive statements to start with the biggest picture possible. This is exactly the trap that I
accused Joshua Clover of falling into in Chapter 3. In fact, the connections between rioting and changing social, political and economic conditions may well be clearest at the micro-level, in the intimate details of how people riot. Setting up a framework within which we can assess these micro-level behaviours is the focus of the next two chapters.
Chapter 6

The career of a riot: triggers and causes

“When tumults are once begun no man knows where they may end…”

- Robert Walpole (1737)

Over the last two chapters I have focussed on urban rioting as a historical phenomenon. I tried to trace the changing number and character of riots from the 19th to the early 20th century and to link that evolution to broader social, economic and political trends. However, these sorts of contextual explanations can only take us so far. Whether we’re talking about strikes (Biggs 2003), riots (Myers 2010), sit-ins (Andrews and Biggs 2006) or mass mobilisations (Walder 2006, Walder and Lu 2017), we soon come up against sudden, inexplicable spikes of activity. Often, these unexpected surges are so clearly disproportionate to the changing context that they seem almost random. But, this is largely a trick of perspective. Making sense of these patterns requires that we shift our attention onto riots’ internal, endogenous dynamics. Documenting these internal processes, the ones which trigger rioting and the ones which help to sustain it, gives us a new way to understand rioting and new ways of linking individual riots back to the context which shapes them.

Changing perspective like this requires a new conceptual framework. And the one I want to propose concentrates on the processes which make up a riot’s ‘career’. This concept of a career has a long history in sociology which begins with the Chicago School. There it was used to refer to temporal processes which, although varying considerably with context, followed a broadly recognisable pattern (Abbott 1997). In some cases, these patterns are strictly sequential. For example, in Erving
Goffman’s famous study, a mental patient’s institutional career was structured by two transitions: entering and exiting hospital (Goffman 1959). Other careers are more dynamic and processual, with different phases emerging gradually out of each other in a process of continual feedback. Howard Becker took this approach to explaining how people become ‘marijuana users’ by going through three phases: learning to smoke it in a way that will produce real effects, learning to recognise the effects and connect them with drug use, and learning to enjoy those sensations (Becker 1953). In the case of riots, there seem to be two phases which, following Becker, emerge out of one another in continual feedback: (i) the trigger, and (ii) the processes which sustain the riot over time.

Analysing riots within this framework allows me to bring my empirical evidence into dialogue with existing theories. Starting from concrete historical cases I will try to draw out a flexible and pluralistic framework for the career of a riot, one which draws on and synthesises Steve Reicher’s social identity model of rioting (2004), Randall Collins’s notions of a ‘moral holiday’ and emotional energy (2008), David Waddington’s ‘flashpoint’ theory (1989) and E.P. Thompson’s ‘moral economy’ (1971). But, I also want to make three specific arguments. The first is that the event which triggers a riot is often only arbitrarily related to what the riot is about. However, as I will show in this chapter, this doesn’t mean that triggers are totally irrelevant (although sometimes they can be causally insignificant as well as arbitrary). My second argument is that a symptomatic reading of riots requires us to focus on how riots sustain themselves over time. In the next chapter I will try to show how the processes which sustain rioting can be used as clues leading back to wider structural factors. The third argument is that riots should be thought of as self-similar waves. A single riot lasting half an hour will be made up of sudden bursts of activity followed by long pauses and regroupings; individual events tied together within the ‘riot’. A series of riots over several days will also be made up of separate bursts which are linked together as part of a single phenomenon. The same is true of a wave of riots over a month or even years. This might seem obvious, but it suggests that we can use a similar set of mechanisms to explain the career of a riot across all these different scales. Switching perspective to look at the internal dynamics of riots, therefore, forces us to consider riots in a different way, to ask different questions and to draw on different concepts.

As well as a new framework, this change of perspective requires a different way of approaching my evidence. The last two chapters were thoroughly historical, in that they described the long run changes and continuities in the practice of rioting in three British cities. There, archival evidence was used in a way that would be familiar to most historians and sociologists. These next two
chapters are different in that they engage in a process of abstraction, building from my empirical cases to draw out common patterns between riots in different cities and at different times. This echoes Charles Tilly’s approach to ‘mechanisms’, which he sees as simplifications of real historical process, as more-or-less abstract, and reasonably common, causal patterns (Tilly 1984, 2001, McAdam et al 2008). The challenge, therefore, is to identify patterns and processes in particular riots and then test whether those patterns recur in the other four hundred riots in my catalogue. This is what Jeff Goodwin and Steven Pfaff (2001) call ‘variation finding’, a modest attempt to identify the range of relevant mechanisms. Because of this, the next two chapters feel more abstract because they use concrete examples to simplify, rather than just reflect, the complexities of the historical record. It also means that there are no rigorous tests of causality or attempts to generalise to the universe of all riots. Instead I focus on documenting the actual processes which characterised rioting in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, on using that empirical detail to critique existing theories of riots, suggest new perspectives and develop initial hypotheses for future research.

**Careers and triggers**

Over the next two chapters I will argue that riots can usefully be thought of as a directed process which has a career of its own. Compared to other careers, riots exhibit a significant amount of variation across several different dimensions. But, as I argued in the last chapter, they are not completely chaotic. Riots have forms, norms and traditions which lend them recognisable shapes. While in the last chapter I treated them as a living and evolving practice, an internal perspective reveals a different kind of patterning, one which is more schematic and abstract: riots as a two-phase career of (i) the trigger, and (ii) the processes which keep the riot going.

Most previous accounts of riots have focussed on that initial moment when the riot is triggered; thinking about this moment as a ‘flashpoint’ (Waddington 1989), the declaration of a ‘moral holiday’ (Collins 2008), or as the transformation from a crowd-in-itself to a crowd-for-itself (Reicher 2012). However, there has been comparatively little interest in the second phase: how a riot, once it has started, then sustains itself over time. Clark McPhail probably comes closest to this, describing an assembly phase, the riot itself and then the dispersal phase (McPhail 2014). However, he seems reluctant to explore the different mechanisms underlying these stages, preferring instead to simply catalogue the different sorts of behaviour observed in each (McPhail and Wohlstein 1983).
Otto Adang’s initiation/escalation model of riots is also deceptively similar to my approach (Adang 2011, Adang and van Ham 2015). He begins promisingly by separating mechanisms which initiate violence from those which escalate it. But, as a theory, his model never really gets off the ground. Adang distinguishes between ‘reactive’ violence (where this is a trigger) and ‘spontaneous’ violence (without a trigger), but never tells us what a trigger is or how it triggers anything. It’s also not clear why this distinction matters. There’s no indication that the actual conduct of violence in each case would be different, or that it would necessarily be conducted by different types of people or focus on different targets. The distinction ultimately seems to matter on academic terms, because it allows him to link these two forms of violence to two different psychological theories, and so bridge the gap between ‘individual’ and ‘socio-contextual’ theories (Adang and van Ham 2015). According to this schema, reactive violence is aggression-out-of-frustration, while, spontaneous violence is caused by ‘young male syndrome’ i.e. hormonal pressures on young men. Given that very few frustrated people or young men are violent, these explanations leave a lot to be desired. Moreover, it doesn’t really bring those two theories into dialogue with each other, as much as list them as alternatives within a single schema. The second phase is then escalation, which, he argues, is controlled by rioters’ perception of the risks of retaliation and the formation of group identities. As I will show in the next chapter, these are at best partial explanations. It is also subtly different to my approach because escalating a riot is not necessarily the same as sustaining it through time. The inadequacies of both stages seem to derive from the fact that Adang approaches the problem of rioting from the perspective of a crowd control manual. He never moves beyond the minute-by-minute play of events set out in his (wonderfully rich) observational data. This means he doesn’t explain how social and structural forces play out on the ground during a riot or why and in what circumstances situations turn violent. Instead, he focusses on how the police can reduce frictions and communicate the fact that they will retaliate and suggests they concentrate their energy on groups of young men.

I want to now return to my proposed framework and to the start of a riot’s career, to the event which triggers it. Triggers present a knot of intertwined theoretical problems. The first question is: what sorts of things trigger riots? When people talk about the 2011 London Riots, they often claim that the riots were triggered by the police shooting Mark Duggan, a local black man. However, Mark Duggan was shot on the 4th of August and the riots did not begin until the 6th. The actual riots grew out of a peaceful protest outside the police station where relatives and supporters had gathered to
demand information about the circumstances in which Mark Duggan had been shot. There are varying accounts of what the final spark which led to violence was, but the evidence seems to suggest that the crowd responded to an aggressive and provocative build up of police units (Stott and Reicher 2011). Which of these moments counts as the ‘trigger’? Is it Mark Duggan’s death? The protest? Or the final deployment of extra police?

We can find some guidance here in Andrew Abbott’s account of ‘turning points’ (2001, p. 240-261). Using a variety of mathematical examples, he describes a turning point as a relatively rare and sudden shift between two more-or-less stable patterns. Notably, these shifts can only be identified as proper turning points with hindsight. At the time, it’s impossible whether to know you are going through a temporary blip, or have really started on a new trajectory. In this sense a trigger is the moment at which the situation switches from whatever it was before (a march, a football match, an argument in a marketplace) to a riot. Often these triggers lie in the immediate interactions on the ground between potential rioters, the police and other groups. Various studies have shown that, when riots don’t break out in situations where you would expect them to, this is largely due to the micro-management of the situation on the ground by police or other authorities (Waddington 1989, Newburn 2016, Tiratelli 2018).

Across all the riots I have found, there is one particular type of interaction which stands out as a trigger: provocation. These provocations can take on various forms which I will describe below and are remarkably common. However, not all triggers work in this way, which pushes us onto a second question: what is the mechanism through which an event actually causes people to start rioting? There are several competing theories here which I will weigh up and test against my historical cases. Ultimately, I think we need to take a pluralist approach: different triggers work in different ways and can be best explained using different theories. These different theories, however, raise a third question: what is the causal status we are ascribing to an event when we label it as the trigger? Are triggers the ‘real cause’ of the riot? Or would the riot have happened anyway? Are triggers part of a longer chain of cause and effect? Or do they represent the start of a new chain? My approach to this final question is thoroughly empirical. Building on the specifics my cases, I will suggest that this apparently metaphysical question is actually a question of fact. Some triggers seem to conjure riots out of nothing, but, in other cases people were spoiling for a fight and would have found an opportunity one way or another. Ultimately, while I want to displace the concept of triggers from its central position in explaining riots, I am not suggesting we get rid of it altogether.
Provocation

In April 1930 a Protestant gang paraded through the mainly Catholic area of Gorbals in the south of Glasgow. They carried banners, flags and even a replica of the Scottish Cup which Rangers had just won in a replay against Partick Thistle. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this provocation did not go unanswered. As they approached Govan Street and entered into the territory of a rival Catholic gang, they were attacked by around 50 men. A huge fight broke out, filling the road and forcing passersby to seek shelter in neighbouring shops. Eventually the police managed to separate the two sides, but not before serious injury was done to several Rangers fans and four people arrested.

In Stockport in 1819 a meeting was called for the 15th of February. In those tense months building up to Peterloo, meetings were frequently rowdy, but, what triggered the first violence here was when the crowd hoisted a red Liberty cap into the air with a flag reading “Hunt and Liberty”. For the watching loyalists this was too much to bear and they rode into the crowd on horseback, capturing the cap under a shower of stones. The Riot Act was read and eventually the troops managed to disperse the meeting but further riots broke out late into the night.

In both of these cases it is a provocation that provides the trigger for violence, and this is true for most of the riots in my catalogue. These weren’t all deliberate acts, although some may have been (the Glaswegian Billy Boys must have known that their mock Scottish Cup would be insulting to local Catholics). But, in all these cases, they provoked a riot by violating a norm or offending some sensibility. This places emotions at the centre of triggers. But, I don’t want to use this as an excuse to return to images of the crazed and irrational mob. An interest in emotions should instead focus our attention onto the different ‘feeling rules’ which guide people’s reactions and the emotions they think they ought to feel in different situations (Hochschild 1979). Emotions are in this sense social expressions, as opposed to one’s personal feelings or prepersonal affects (Massumi 2002, Shouse 2005). I expect that prepersonal affects, especially biological impulses related to the release of adrenaline, are important to riots. And so too presumably are the personal feelings of fear or

13 For a good critique of this dismissive approach to ‘emotions’ in political science and sociology see Jasper (1998) and Goodwin et al (2001).
excitement that come with being in a riot. But, provocation is an interpersonal and social act and the emotions that it produces must play a central role in any account of how riots are triggered.

The idea that provocations trigger riots echoes other theories about the role that status, honour and insult play in violence. Robert Shoemaker (2001) has argued that the decline in homicide in London over the 18th century was almost entirely driven by the decline in male-on-male violence which was used to defend or enhance men’s masculine honour. In the early 18th century norms around masculinity required men to be extremely sensitive to threats to their manliness, social status or ‘military character’. They were also meant to act quickly and violently to redress any such threats. While never completely hegemonic, these ideas fostered a culture of extreme male violence which was gradually eroded over the 18th century. In a very different context, Roger Petersen (2002) suggested that resentment at ‘unfair’ changes in the relative social status of different ethnic groups can explain a huge range of ethnic violence in eastern Europe over the 20th century. Drawing on this work helps to define the idea of provocation more precisely. A riot could in principle be triggered by other mechanisms such as fear, a sudden opportunity to do something which is usually impossible, or a long standing hatred. In contrast, a provocation is something that violates a norm, either a norm governing people’s behaviour and interactions or a norm which governs the relative status of different groups. By violating that norm, provocation produces emotions with awaken particular identities or make people feel honour-bound to retaliate. These provocations can be deliberate or accidental, real or imaginary, related to the substance of the dispute or fairly arbitrary, but, provocations of one kind or another seem to lie at the start of many different kinds of riots.

The most obvious provocations are symbolic insults or challenges like those mentioned at the start of this section. These were often tied up with ethnic tensions. For example, in Glasgow on 14 August 1880 a Home Rule march was blocked by a large crowd of Orange men and women at Old Cross Steeple. Although clearly provocative, there was no immediate outbreak of violence. It was only later, when passing through Oakbank Street at the end of the march, that a riot broke out as Home Rulers started throwing stones at the Orange flags which had been hung out of nearby windows. In Liverpool in 1809 a group of American seamen celebrating Independence Day were deemed to have disrespected the British flag, so a crowd of ships carpenters attacked them, pulling down the American flag and starting a violent battle with each side trying to capture the other’s flag. In July 1834 The Times reported that “the colour of the two parties [Orangemen and Irish Catholics] being thus nailed to the mast was the signal of attack” (The Times 16/7/1834). These symbols are
often highly emotionally charged and carry rich meanings and connotations, but the symbols don’t always need to be significant. In Liverpool, on 5 August 1880, a torchlit parade, nominally in honour of the Liberal candidate Samuel Plimsoll, ended in violence when one of the torch bearers was interfered with by a member of the crowd. The marchers reacted violently to this interference with the procession, throwing burning tar at the crowd and breaking their torch poles in two to use as spears.

The parallel to symbolic provocation is the verbal insult. In Glasgow in 1816, a soup kitchen was the scene of a riot after one of the staff apparently used ‘some gibing expression’ which set the crowd to anger (Glasgow Chronicle 3/8/1816). In Salford a race riot between black and white sailors broke out in 1921 after insults were exchanged between the two groups. There were further riots in Birkenhead in April 1911 when a Chinese man changed his shirt at the window and, by doing so, was accused of insulting two white women who were walking through the street. The infamous race riots in Liverpool in 1919, which culminated in the lynching of Charles Wootton by a white crowd, were also triggered by a series of altercations and insults between white and black sailors in the pubs around the docks. Again, not all of these insults were related to the substance of the riot, whether that was racial or ethnic tension or a class-based grievance. In many cases, riots arose “from circumstances of the most trivial nature” (The Times, 24/5/1825).

A closely related provocation were the marching bands which caused continual ethnic violence in Liverpool and Glasgow throughout the 19th and early 20th century. Rival Catholic and Protestant bands would frequently parade the streets with flags and banners, playing sectarian songs and fighting with passersby. On New Years Eve in Birkenhead in 1877 a Protestant band was parading near the dock cottages. In response a Catholic band gathered up a crowd of 2000 followers and marched through the nearby streets smashing houses indiscriminately before turning on the Protestant church of St James. In August 1887, it was the Salvation Army band that was the target for violence as they paraded along Everton and West Derby roads. During a meeting organised by the Protestant campaigner George Wise on 20 July 1910 in Liverpool, an Orange band suddenly emerged from a side street. Catholics who had gathered to protest the meeting then started throwing stones at the band and fights broke out forcing the police to intervene. In Glasgow in November 1879 there were four or five separate riots caused by party bands in the course of one single night, each following a fairly similar pattern as bands performed and drew crowds, insults were exchanged and the crowd turned on the band before being dispersed by the police. From the 1870s right
through to the 1930s, these bands were a constant menace for local authorities, openly and deliberately provoking riots and serving as an ever-present reminder of ethnic tensions.

So far I have concentrated on symbolic provocations, some of which do have a meaningful connection to wider social context. However, this is not always the case. One of the single largest riot triggers is action taken by the police. In riots around all sorts of religious, political or economic issues, the trigger for violence is, time after time, police interference. In many cases this takes the form of an arrest. For example, in Glasgow in June 1845 and August 1846, riots were triggered when the police arrested people for minor disturbances, but were then attacked by large crowds looking to rescue the prisoners. In Manchester on 17 November 1830, striking weavers in Cotton Street, Ancoats, rioted when the police arrested one of them for trying to prevent workers from going into the factory. Again in August 1839 the police tried to arrest a Chartist who had been manufacturing ball cartridges in his front room. He tried to escape and a crowd quickly gathered to rescue him from the police. When an anti-Catholic lecture by the infamous Baron de Camin at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall was closed down by a loud crowd of Irish catholics on 3 April 1859, it took the sight of the police emerging from the building with someone they had arrested for a riot to start. In all of these cases it is action by the police that triggers the riot, even though the context of the riot may have been something completely different.

Police interference doesn’t always involve a formal arrest. For example, in Liverpool an election celebration in April 1868 turned into a riot, with Irish Catholics attacking the police, after they tried to prevent them from burning an effigy. The George Square riots in Glasgow in 1919 were also triggered by the police charging the crowd after they refused to allow tramcars to pass through their mass meeting. On 27 April 1920, a protest about conditions of prisoners held in Wormwood Scrubs was prevented from holding a meeting in George Square by the police. The crowd decided to parade to Glasgow Green and back, collecting more and more people as they went. When they got back to the square the police again refused them entry and drew their batons to prevent anyone from making a speech. This interference led to three hours of vicious hand to hand fighting as the crowd rushed between George Square, the Green and St Andrew Square.

Riots can also be triggered by the intervention of other authorities, most often bailiffs. In most of these cases the trigger does seem to reflect what the riot is about: a community reacting to defend itself. For example, in May 1827 there was a riot on Cropper street when bailiffs tried to empty
three rented homes which the landlord had distrained for rent. Again in November 1829 a mob of 500 Irish armed with bludgeons and pokes rescued goods from the bailiffs who were seizing them in lieu of rent. However, not all bailiff riots seem to fit this model. In February 1830 in Collyhurst a mob managed to prevent bailiffs from seizing goods from a local cotton weaver. Feeling victorious the crowd dispersed only for the bailiffs to quietly remove two cart loads of furniture. Later in the evening the tenant was moving some of the left-over furniture to a new house when a mob gathered and attacked the house itself, gathering up all the remaining furniture and setting them on fire in the middle of the house. They returned the following evening and pulled down what was left of it. In this case, what began as a community defending itself from the authorities seems to have evolved into something more nihilistic as their revenge attack against the landlord’s property got out of hand.

A related form of provocation occurs when one group invades the territory of another. Bailiffs do this in an immediate and violent way, but so too do bands, marchers and gangs. On 11 April 1886 an Orange band from Partick marched along the Clyde reaching Yorker at about 4pm. As they went through Hamilton Terrace, a very Catholic area, they were attacked by stones, bricks, paving slabs and other weapons. The riot lasted about four hours as the band battled their way to the foot of the bridge and back towards Partick. In Manchester in May 1825 a riot was caused by an Irish man who was seen walking with a Mancunian girl through an Anglican neighbourhood. In October 1884 a gang of about 60 scuttlers marched into Rusholme to provoke another group of scuttlers into a fight. A very similar incident caused a riot in Tranmere in April 1854 when a gang of 150 young men from Birkenhead marched into the town provoking one of their regular clashes. Again, in all these instances the provocation of invading the territory of a rival is felt to require a violent response which escalates into rioting.

Even in settings where tensions were already running high, provocations were often needed to kick start a riot. This is most obvious in the case of mass meetings. In Glasgow in March 1848, after speeches and resolutions, the crowd of 4-5000 unemployed men and women marched to City Hall demanding relief. Those with tickets for relief were allowed in and given soup, but to the assembled crowd this offer seemed insulting. As cries went up that they wanted more than soup, the crowd split into several groups looting shops and gunsmiths across the city while shouting ‘vive la revolution!’. During Liverpool’s General Transport Strike of 1911 the meeting on 13 August which led to the Bloody Sunday riots was rowdy and tense, but it took a fairly innocuous incident to
provoke a riot. There are two possible triggers mentioned in the newspaper reports, either the riot was triggered by a scuffle when the police tried to pull someone down from a window ledge where he was sitting, or a cart waiting to transport theatre equipment from the nearby Empire Theatre was mistaken for a ‘scab’. In November 1850 a huge riot in Birkenhead which led to a Home Office special report seems to have been triggered by a confusion over who was allowed to attend the meeting on ‘Papal Aggression’. When Catholic non-ratepayers were refused entry, a scuffle broke out with the police which quickly escalated into dramatic rioting. In all these cases, despite the high tensions, a specific incident of provocation was needed to trigger the riot.

Finally, riots can also be triggered by purely imagined provocations. George Rudé (1964) famously described crowds as fickle, quick to panic and vulnerable to rumours, and many of my cases confirm this. In Glasgow during the dockers strike of 1912 a riot broke out on Plantation Quay when a large crowd heard a rumour that non-union men were being smuggled onto the boats. In Liverpool the 12th July riots in 1835 were triggered by a rumour that the Orange lodges were planning to celebrate the Battle of Boyne. Determined to prevent the march, groups of Irish men gathered in the streets around Orange pubs, armed themselves and started indiscriminately attacking people leaving the pubs. Even more sinister rumours accompanying the Anatomy Act of 1835 suggested that hospital governors were selling on the bodies of paupers and that people were murdering others to use their bodies for dissections. This led to violent riots in Liverpool, Manchester and other towns across England. As late as September 1922, a ships carpenter was battered to death by a mob in Glasgow who thought he was kidnapping a little boy. Tragically, it was his adopted son who he was taking home by tramcar.

The fact that these provocations were entirely imagined highlights the uncertainty faced by people in crowds. In situations where it’s almost impossible for anyone in a crowd to know what is going on in other parts of it, rumours become the “characteristic mode of communication” (Turner and Killian 1957, p. 32). In these conditions, rumours can spread quickly and events take on a logic of their own. Incidental triggers can cause huge riots to break out, even if very few people are aware of what those triggers were. However, this does not mean that rioters are being mindlessly swept along by a mob mentality. Once a riot has started people do follow fairly purposeful routines, attacking the police, setting prices for grain or trying to force their way into factories. Nor does it make triggers purely subjective. Whether a provocation is rumoured to have taken place, or actually does, what matters is the way the crowd interprets it and the social emotions that it produces. What the
importance of rumours and uncertainty shows is the potential for a disconnect between the substance of the trigger and the substance of the riot.

The various kinds of provocation I have just described cover a large range of the different riots in my catalogue. I don’t mean to imply that all riots are triggered in this way, and I will go on to mention other kinds of triggers in the following sections. But, the fact that provocations are so common over such a long period of time shows how important they are. On the basis of this, it might seem surprising that I am arguing that triggers are rarely directly related to wider context. But, even provocations can often be simple accidents, contingencies or coincidences. More interestingly, in quarter of cases I couldn’t identify any trigger at all. It is difficult to know how to assess these riots without triggers. In many cases, the trigger may not have been recorded either because they were completely trivial and unconnected to the substance of the riot or it may be a genuine gap in the historical record. But, some of these cases represent the kind of continual, gradual process of escalation without a trigger, which I will return to in the next two sections.

What does a trigger do?

In many cases it is not immediately clear what a trigger is doing when it ‘starts a riot’. What is the mechanism through which a trigger leads people to start fighting, smashing windows or looting? There are three principle theories which try to analyse what a trigger is doing: Steve Reicher’s social identity model of rioting, Randall Collins’s notion of a ‘moral holiday’ and David Waddington’s ‘flashpoint’ theory. By assessing these three theories against my catalogue of riots I want to suggest that, although they all provide important insights, none of them are broad enough on their own to account for the full range of riot events.

According to the social identity model of rioting, the key moment in the development of a riot is the transformation from a crowd-in-itself (simple co-presence of people with individual identities) to a crowd-for-itself (where people adopt a properly social identity) (Drury and Reicher 2009, Reicher 2012). There are three components to this: cognitive transformation (where behaviour becomes governed by categorical identities, so that people work out group norms by looking at how others who are obviously “in-group” behave), relational transformation (personal boundaries are dissolved in favour of ‘us’ and ‘them’), and affective transformation (emotions are amplified and extended
creating a feeling of collective empowerment). One way in which these transformations come about is described in the ‘elaborated social identity model’, which expands their account to look at inter-group dynamics, particularly the way in which the police can push people into a social identity and create violence (Stott and Reicher 1998).

This works well to explain several, mainly identity-based, riots in my catalogue. For example, in June 1859 a riot broke out in Old Swan village after the police tried to evict a crowd from Edge Lane and arrest a preacher. A crowd of about 2000 “decently dressed young men, operatives many of them boys, and… a sprinkling of the fair sex” (Liverpool Courier 15/6/1859) suddenly united after the police intervention and rushed to rescue the preacher. A similar pattern helps to explain battles with the police in Glasgow on 30 August 1846, 18 November 1849, 2 April 1850, 18 July 1853 and on many other occasions. These all follow a similar pattern to one of Reicher’s original empirical examples: English football fan violence during the 1990 World Cup, where aggressive policing by the carabinieri created a self-fulfilling prophecy by uniting the crowd and pushing them into violent retaliation (Stott and Reicher 1998).

There are, however, several problems with this model. The first is methodological, how do we know what identity is being used by someone at a given moment. Often their empirical work is based on meticulous reconstruction of events on the ground, but identity is then inferred from that behaviour (e.g. Stott and Reicher 2011, Stott et al 2017). Interviews can also be used (e.g. Stott et al 2018), but they too rely on large inferential moves from text to identity. This is not a fatal critique but highlights some of the difficulties in this field. The second problem is that, although the emergence of social identity is certainly an important mechanism in the development of a riot, it is not clear that identities can do the work Reicher expects of them in all circumstances. A key premise of the theory is that “the behaviour of a given collectivity will depend upon the precise meanings associated with the said category (what masculinity means; what Britishness means)” (Stott and Reicher 1998, p. 359). So, their central argument is that behaviour in riots is governed by norms, and these norms are derived from the social identities people ascribe to themselves. However, I’m not sure what behavioural norms do in fact derive from “Britishness”. What ‘meanings’, for example, were associated with ‘black Britishness’ which guided behaviour in the 1981 Brixton Riots? Can we even talk about a common identity in the 2011 London Riots beyond that of being ‘rioters’? The reason Reicher and his colleagues are somewhat blind to this is that their view of crowd behaviour is fairly undifferentiated. They focus on explaining why violence (of any kind)
breaks out. For example they most recently argued that an anti-police identity led people to join in the riots in August 2011 (Stott et al 2017, Stott et al 2018). But, they pay less attention to the fact that different riots can be made up of very different micro-behaviours, rites, rituals and interactions, not all of which are related to identity. In fact, the key claim I made in chapter 5 is that what it means to be a ‘rioter’ and the type of behaviours associated with ‘rioting’ has changed over time. Therefore, while group formation is a vitally important mechanism, social identity will often underdetermine behaviour.

There are also several examples of triggers which don’t fit particularly well with this focus on identity. Most obviously, there are many riots which emerge in situations where people’s identities are already firmly established, but violence only breaks out after further provocation. This dynamic is clearly visible in the examples I mentioned earlier where tense mass meetings only turn violent after some specific incident, but, it can also be seen in many anti-Irish riots. For example, in August 1880 in Glasgow, a confrontation between Irish Home Rulers and Orange during a march passed off without violence, only for the symbolic provocation of Orange flags hanging out of the windows to trigger a riot later in the evening. We can find a similar example five years earlier in August 1875, where rioting began long after the march had finished when tram drivers refused to stop their cars for the returning processionists. Reicher might argue that this case is explicable in terms of the Extended Social Identity Model (Stott and Reicher 1998), where although their identity was established in advance, it only becomes a properly social identity after provocation. However, I think that this move, introducing a prior collective identity which isn’t properly ‘social’, undermines the distinction between a crowd-in-itself and crowd-for-itself; a distinction which was central to the original formulation of the model. A collective identity which is active in the crowd is clearly not ‘simple co-presence of individuals’. But, if it also doesn’t count as fully ‘social’, then it’s hard to see what would. In fact, this proliferation of different identities and levels of identification massively complicates what was an insightful model. Surely the simplest explanation of situations like this is that the trigger, rather than changing people’s sense of identity, changes the situation into a riot situation which then legitimises violence and all the actions that go along with rioting.

14 As I write this I can hear Randall Collins saying that it is significant that the crowd found it easier to attack symbolic flags than actual people (see Collins 2008). This might well be true but doesn’t unsettle my main point which is that, in situations where identities were already firmly established and highly salient, violent rioting still often requires some further trigger.
Randall Collins (2008) proposes an alternative interpretation of the moment which triggers a riot, describing it as the declaration of a ‘moral holiday’. These are moments which create a ‘free zone in time and space’, an opportunity and attraction to do things that are normally forbidden. Moral holidays need not necessarily be violent and are necessary for a much wider set of collective actions including everything from protests to huge festivals. But, the key feature is enough initial public defiance mark the situation as a ‘moral holiday’. There are many riots where this seems a sensible interpretation. For example, in March 1845, 2000 people gathered on Vauxhall Road in Liverpool to recreate the old practice of ‘lifting women’ on Easter Monday. The Liverpool Mercury describes a group of drunk lads coming out of the pubs to ‘lift’ any female passersby. When the police eventually tried to intervene they were attacked and then chased all the way to the bridewell by crowds trying to rescue the ten prisoners. Similarly in Glasgow, in June 1830, the city was convulsed for three days by continual fights between supporters of two rival prize fighters who were due to face each other. Once that level of open defiance had been established, fights kept breaking out across central Glasgow with groups of 500 people gathering to watch smaller fights between local tough men. The vast amount of damage and looting done during the Liverpool police strike of 1919 reveals a similar dynamic where the sudden invitation to disorder caused a ‘battle with anarchy’ (Liverpool Courier 3/8/1919) which ended with a gunboat being deployed on the Mersey.

However, this approach is vulnerable to several critiques. First, it is unable to explain which norms break down during a ‘moral holiday’ and which remain. As I showed in the last chapter, riots follow particular routines and form an evolving practice over time. Clearly, not all norms break down in a riot. Collins attaches quite a lot of importance to this point (Collins 2008, p. 243), but there is nothing in the idea of a ‘moral holiday’ which helps him to explain why it’s okay to break some norms in a riot but not others. The second critique is more empirical: there are many riots which seem to be triggered by extremely purposeful actions and routines. It is difficult to convincingly describe bread riots or strike riots as the breaking down of norms into an impromptu celebration. For example, in October 1800 in Glasgow a mob stopped someone who was coming into town through Gallowgate with a cart of meal. Rather than a moral holiday, the crowd followed the strict tradition of the ‘moral economy’ (Thompson 1971): they accused him of charging extravagant prices, threw his cart off the Old Bridge and marched the meal to the market to sell it at a reduced price. In Manchester, in April 1830, a group of largely Irish shirting weavers walked out of a factory.
on Mather Street en mass and proceeded along Dyche Street and Newtown in a routine of ‘factory visiting’ which succeeded in shutting down many factories in the area. In Liverpool’s general transport strike of 1911, workers targeted the opening and closing of the tramsheds in vicious and often dangerous battles with the police. All these cases show rioters following a carefully scripted routine, rather than taking advantage of a sudden moment of freedom.

If neither of these accounts can do justice to the full range of different riots I have uncovered, perhaps David Waddington’s much more abstract notion of a ‘flashpoint’ will be a better fit (Waddington 1989). He lists six necessary levels of analysis: structural, political, cultural, contextual, situational, and interactional, which try, between them, to cover all the relevant variables. So, the “‘rules’ prescribing appropriate conduct” exist on the cultural level, the importance of ‘place’ is on the situational level, while the contextual level includes people’s emotional background such as a history of police animosity. The flashpoint which triggers disorder can occur at any of these levels but can also be contained and managed on any level. So, using an insight which is reminiscent of Neil Smelser’s account of collective behaviour (1962), triggers work as concrete events which make abstract grievances real and salient. Those triggers are, in turn, given meaning and symbolic purchase by the “communicative context” which is set by the other five levels (2010, p. 353). This is a natural fit for the provocations I concentrated on at the start of this chapter, where specific incidents were interpreted and given meaning through a wider context and then triggered a riot.

However, there are several problems with this approach. The first is that it doesn’t really specify a mechanism by which the flashpoint actually causes people to start rioting. Without the aid of Smelser’s structural functionalism as an overarching theoretical framework, it is not clear how Waddington can provide mechanisms linking these various levels and he actually seems to think that to ask more of him on this point is an unreasonable expectation (see Waddington 2010). The second is that his notion of a ‘communicative context’ seems to imply that the different meanings flying around in the build up to a riot are stable, univocal and universally interpreted. A fixed communicative context leaves little room for the uncertainty and instability which characterises riots, let alone the use of contested or polysemic symbols. The third issue is that a focus on meanings obscures the bodily competences that are so important to rioting. It is not immediately obvious how to build a barricade, tear a house down or turn a wheelie bin into a burning weapon.
They are probably learnable in the midst of the riot, but require someone with that know-how to be present at least initially.

There is also a different category of trigger which it is difficult to assimilate into Waddington’s scheme and which reveals the limits of focusing solely on this initial moment of unrest. Returning to an earlier example, although bands often provoked retaliation, they also caused riots in a very different way, by giving people an opportunity and a feeling of empowerment which led them to start rioting. In Salford, during the January 1835 election, a band led a group of Brothertonite reformists and fellow Irish catholics through the town fighting with Tories, stoning the Town Hall and several pubs. A similar process can take place at events or political meetings. In Glasgow the Highland and Agricultural Society Show in August 1844 was targeted by a ‘gang of blackguards’ (Glasgow Chronicle 10/8/1844) who tore down the enclosure and fought with the police. At the Liverpool Theatre Royal in 1824 people went to the opening night of a new play to riot in defence of an actress, Miss Cramer, who had recently been fired by the manager. The June 1841 election in Liverpool was also an excuse for violence with several separate outbreaks of rioting across the town. In all these cases rioting seems routine and the specific triggers almost unimportant. They show that there isn’t always a decisive ‘break in the pattern of interaction’. In fact, the events which ‘trigger’ unrest seem to function as opportunities for rioting rather than as a specific moment or rupture.

Other riots present a similar challenge for the sorts of theories I have sketched out so far. One example comes from 1853 in Liverpool. On 10 July there was a riot in Toxteth Park after a young Irish man was accused by an Orangeman of throwing dirt on him. The boy denied it and was hit. At that point a number of women tried to intervene and larger fight broke out which in turn brought more people into the area and caused the fight to escalate. Which of these points marks the trigger? Is it the initial provocation of the Orangeman accusing someone of throwing dirt on him? The Irishman’s denial? Their fight? Or the intervention of the group of women? I’m not sure how to adjudicate between these different levels and, even if you could, that would only distract from the most important aspect of this case: the process of escalation.

In many of the riots I have examined these processes of escalation make it extremely difficult to give any straightforward answer to the question ‘what was the trigger?’

In many of the riots I have examined these processes of escalation make it extremely difficult to give any straightforward answer to the question ‘what was the trigger?’ This means that more of the burden of explanation has to be taken up by the second phase of my model of the career of a
riot: the processes which sustain rioting over time. Even combining Reicher, Collins and Waddington’s assessment of triggers with my ad hoc empirical extensions, we still need a second phase to be able to deal with the full range of riot trajectories. But any analysis of these two phases need to be integrated. In almost all of my examples there is a constant back and forth between the two phases as riots begin, escalate and restart after delays and momentary pauses. For example, in Glasgow in July 1824, a group of soldiers who had been out drinking in Gallowgate started to fight amongst themselves and eventually started attacking passersby. A crowd soon gathered to fight back and the battle escalated. Some police sergeants managed to separate the soldiers from the crowd and tried to escort them back to the barracks. However, the soldiers then turned on the police, attacked their superior officers and tried to restart the fight with the crowd. The many stops, starts and gaps even in this fairly modest riot reveal the limits of focussing exclusively on triggers.

Causality

Although much of my argument so far have been fairly negative, I don’t want to suggest that triggers don’t matter. They might be only rarely linked in a meaningful way to wider context of the riot and might be only one phase in the career of a riot, but they still play an important causal role. However, this causal status is rarely set out explicitly by historians or social scientists. This means that it’s often unclear whether the trigger is meant to be the thing which truly causes the riot, or a spark for dry tinder, or may be a ‘proximal’ cause, or something else entirely.

The most sophisticated historical discussion of these issues is George Rudé’s *The Crowd in History* (1964). He argues that “the fortuitous element [the trigger], as we have noted, played a remarkably persistent role… Yet we must be careful not to press the point too far… [there’s] nothing purely fortuitous in the events themselves” (p. 244). He repeatedly turns back to ‘underlying causes’ such as “political climate… generalised beliefs… economic crisis, poverty, degradation, bitter hatreds, and defeated hopes” (p. 244-5), nestling spontaneity in deep traditions and long structural changes. His discussion of the Paris insurrections of July and October 1789 is worth quoting at length:

[In July], a more or less peaceably disposed Sunday crowd of strollers in the Palais Royal was galvanised into revolutionary vigour by the news of Necker’s dismissal from office and the call to arms issued by the orators in the service or entourage of the Duc d’Orléans. From this followed a sequence of events that could not possible have been
planned or foreseen in detail by even the most astute, farsighted, and determined of the Court’s opponent: the parades along the boulevards… the assault on the customs posts… the search for arms… the massive demonstration outside the Hotel de Ville... the storming of the Hotel des Invalides… and finally (partly planned, though mainly the outcome of a whole series of fortuitous events) the frontal assault on the Bastille, which brought the first phase of the Revolution to a close.

In October there was a similar pattern of growth and development... Certainly, to the majority of the housewives and market women demonstrating for bread in the early morning of October 5, as to the casual observer, the opening scenes of the uprising must have seemed no more than a continuation of a whole series of similar demonstrations in September. Even the mass invasion of the Hotel de Ville was but a repetition on a larger scale of similar forms of protest in preceding weeks. Yet the diversion of the women to Versailles (partly the outcome of weeks of agitation by the “patriots” and partly the intervention of Stanislas Maillard and his volontaires de la Bastille) gave an entirely new, political, content to their demonstration. From this point… it merged with the political insurrection (p. 243-4)

Rudé’s balancing act is an brilliant piece of historical argument, but it does privilege detail over clarity and narrative over analysis. By moving briefly away from grounded historical description, I will try to clarify the different kind of causal roles that triggers can play in the hope that this casts greater light on their relationship to a riot’s wider context.

The question is how to determine whether a trigger is an essential part of a riot or merely a contingent event that happens to set off unrest. Aristotle famously distinguished between accidental and essential properties, identifying essential properties as those related to something’s telos or soul, while accidental properties were those with no necessary connection to its essence (Aristotle 1998). For example, a wooden chair is made of wood, but that property is accidental to its essence as a chair. In modern analytic philosophy this is normally explained as a proposition (e.g. that the chair is made of wood), which is neither necessarily true nor necessarily false. This mirrors Gramsci’s distinction between conjunctural and organic phenomena, between the accidental stuff of day to day politics and the deeper, long run, structural, teleological changes in society (Gramsci 1999). But, without each thing having a clear telos, or a commitment to the Marxist idea of an identifiable, teleological history, there’s no way to actually tell what counts as ‘conjunctural’ and what counts as ‘organic’. These difficulties can quickly slip into an anti-essentialist position which argues that
everything is accidental and contingent (e.g. Quine 1980), and leads to the idea that all of history is random chains of cause and effect with no overall structure at all. But, instead of accepting this skepticism, I think we can rescue something useful from the idea of contingency by shifting the discussion away from theory and back to history. In what follows I will try to set out the range of different possible approaches and show that they fall roughly into fatalistic and non-fatalistic clusters. Once that move is made, the theoretical debate can be transformed into an empirical one about causes. I will argue that different triggers in different riots play different causal roles: sometimes they start a riot out of nothing, but at other times a riot would probably have happened anyway.

A useful starting point is Fred Dretske’s distinction between triggering and structuring causes of behaviour (2004). His particular focus is on separating biological from psychological explanations, but the argument he makes can be used more broadly. For Dretske a trigger is an event that comes before, and is regularly followed by, the effect; while a structuring cause makes that effect dependent on the trigger. Structuring causes therefore shape the background conditions which make the trigger produce its effects. He gives the example of moving the mouse on a computer (trigger), which causes the cursor to move on the screen (effect), because of the hardware and programming conditions (structuring causes). This echoes an earlier distinction from biology between proximate causes (an organism’s physiological condition interacting with the environment) and ultimate causes (the evolutionary reason why an organism reacts in that way to the environment) (Mayr 1961). Although there are reasons to be suspicious of such a clean opposition (not least in biology - Thierry 2005, Laland et al 2011, Otsuka 2015), this provides an intuitive understanding of how triggers interact with underlying causes. Underlying causes (e.g. poverty) create a situation in which a particular trigger (e.g. police harassment) will cause people to start rioting. Crucially, the eventual effect is in no way pre-determined. The underlying conditions mean that, if there’s an appropriate trigger, it will bring about a certain effect. But, they don’t guarantee that there will be such a trigger (this is also Smelser’s [1962] approach to triggers).

Bosi and Davis (2017) make a similar argument, although they cast it in the language of structure and agency. Using the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Long March from Belfast to Derry in 1969 as case studies, they describe how a burst of agency and creative energy catalysed forces which were deeply embedded in social structure. The difference between what causes a particular event (agency/trigger) and what makes that event transformative (structure/underlying causes) brings this
model into more familiar political and historical territory and preserves the idea that the trigger is productive, i.e. it brings something genuinely new into being. This echoes James Mahoney’s (2000) account of path dependent explanations, which suggests that they are characterised by a sudden break which starts a new chain of deterministic cause and effect. It is also familiar from Ivan Ermakoff’s (2015, 2017) account of contingency as critical junctures, moments of genuine indeterminacy where interactions between people can subvert or upset existing chains of cause and effect.

However, there is an alternative understanding of contingency which seeks to do away with troublesome and hard to spot things like ‘bursts of agency’ and indeterminacy. Randall Collins’s (2017) critique of Ermakoff takes his original example, the night of 4 August 1789 when the French National Constituent Assembly abolished feudalism, and tries to give a deterministic account of it. He argues that those seemingly contingent, late night discussions were in fact driven by the accumulation of emotional energy by each side from earlier meetings. This ties discrete situations together and suggests that ‘emotional domination’ structures and determines the outcome of moments of apparent indeterminacy. In this version of events, triggers are not radical breaks in a chain of cause and effect, but just another step. This critique brings us much closer to a traditional distinction in public health between proximal causes (the pathogen that directly causes the disease) and distal causes (the social risk factors that shape an individual’s exposure to those pathogens). This account is not strictly deterministic, but rather fatalistic: it suggests that, regardless of the particular trigger, the outcome probably would have come about anyway.

This gives us two opposing understandings of the causal role played by triggers: in one they actively produce the riot, and in the other they are incidental to longer chains of cause and effect. Although this has the appearance of a deep metaphysical division, given the constraints on historical explanation, I think it is appropriate to move away from questions of determinism and free will and to adopt a pragmatist position. Whether a riot was brought about by the contingency of its trigger, or would have taken place one way or the other, can be treated as an empirical question. In some riots the trigger is trivial. During many 12th of July parades or at Old Firm games between

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15 I want to continue to exclude situations in which violence was not only inevitable, but planned in advance and executed according to that plan. Those events are not riots. Nevertheless, it’s worth noting that they might lead into riots if the situation escalated drawing in new participants who weren’t part of that planning process.
Rangers and Celtic, riots were almost inevitable. Any number of minor provocations could have triggered them. However, in other riots something like a burst of creative agency seems to be the only real cause. In February 1822 a row of houses on Clyde Street, Glasgow, were attacked after rumours that children were being taken into the house so that their blood could be used to make red paint. The windows were smashed, then the shutters attacked and the front door forced open; the inhabitants were beaten brutally and everything inside the house destroyed. But, the *Glasgow Herald* (18/2/1822) and *Chronicle* (19/2/1822) both reported that there had been four previous attempts by youths to raise a mob at the house over the past few weeks. Starting a riot on that particular Sunday took concerted and repeated effort. It could not have come about any other way.

**Conclusion**

Returning to the three questions that I started with, I will now attempt to give some, non-exhaustive, answers. The things that can trigger riots seem to be: provocation in all its different forms; carnivalesque moments where normal rules are suspended; routines like factory visits which in and of themselves legitimise violence; and set-piece events which provide an opportunity and target for violence. My main empirical finding is that, of these, provocation seems to be, by far, the most common trigger. The mechanisms through which a trigger actually causes a riot come in at least five flavours: the emergence of social identity; the declaration of a moral holiday; a flashpoint which changes the definition of the situation; an insult which requires redress; and particular routines which legitimise certain forms of violent interaction. These triggers can also play different causal roles: in some fatalistic circumstances the riot may well have happened anyway; in others the trigger is the real cause of the riot. But, we should note that, even in fatalistic circumstances, endogenous internal processes remain crucial. Adapting Mark Granovetter’s seminal model of rioting (1978), we can give a simple example looking only at the number of other people who need to start rioting before someone else joins them. In situations like a 12th of July march we might imagine that this number is quite low, certainly lower that in other, less tense settings. This means that it is far more likely that a riot will break out. But, as Granovetter shows, the way it breaks out will still depend on the endogenous process of escalation as different people join at different moments and in different ways.

This emphasises the importance of embedding triggers within a two-stage model of the career of a riot. The two phases of a riot, the trigger and the processes which sustain it, do not happen in
isolation. There is often a back-and-forth as the riot stops, starts, grows and declines. As I will go on to explain in the next chapter this is true at different scales, whether we are talking about the minute-by-minute choreography of a fight with the police or about a longer wave of violence over months or years. These two phases also allow us to investigate the various different ways that context comes to be embedded in the situation of the riot. This is the crucial step in understanding what a riot is about. But, the various theories I outlined above, because they focus on triggers, struggle to fully explore those links. Identity is significant, but not sufficient on its own. Neither is ‘communicative context’ or ‘moral holidays’. This chapter and the next are an attempt to synthesise these existing accounts and transplant them into a new framework. I hope that its ability to explain a huge range of different riots over one hundred and forty years and across three cities is a sign of how useful this alternative framework can be.
Chapter 7
How do riots sustain themselves?

In their moments of weakness, it is often the idea of the untamed mob that has most preoccupied elites. They worry that any sudden trigger could degenerate into violent irrationality, that ‘civilisation’ is a thin veil, which could be upset by the slightest impropriety, unleashing anarchy and chaos (see e.g. Furet 1992, Taine 2008). But in reality, sustaining unrest for any length of time seems to be extremely difficult. The vast majority of riots are over in a few minutes or hours (about three quarters of my cases). And the same seems to be true of violence in general (Collins 2008, p. 14). This makes the question of how a riot sustains itself, the second phase in its career, a serious empirical puzzle. Because some riots do go on for days and weeks, while waves of more-or-less continual rioting can last for months or even years.

What makes this puzzle theoretically significant is that riots also seem to be self-similar: their parts have similar properties to the whole (Mandelbrot 1982, Biggs 2005). A wave of riots over a week might consist of different moments of unrest on Monday, Thursday and Friday nights. But a single riot between Irish Catholics and Orangemen might also consist of one fight at 3pm, then another at a pub round the corner half an hour later. Each fight itself might consist of minutes of intensity, followed by pauses, before the fighting starts up again. At every scale, rioting is made up of sudden rushes of action, followed by pauses, regroupings and delays. As Pamela Oliver puts it, there are “smaller waves within waves, and waves within those waves” (Oliver and Myers 2003, p. 7). So, when we talk about how a riot is sustained, we are really talking about the processes that link together various smaller situations and interactions. This opens up the philosophical problem of
how to decide on the boundaries of particular case, where does a riot start and end (Ragin and Becker 1992). But self-similarity also suggests an answer: instead of trying to settle that question once-and-for-all, we might be better off playing with different scales. By leaving the boundaries of our cases elastic, we are forced to try to find theories which work over minutes, weeks and months, and so to stay true to the idea that small riots have similar properties to the larger episodes of which they form a part16

There are echoes here of Andrew Abbott’s suggestion that, instead of thinking about the boundaries between things, we should reverse our ontological assumptions and concentrate on the way that things are formed from boundaries (Abbott 2001). By focussing on elastic links at different scales, rather than on discrete things with firm boundaries, I certainly come close to Abbott’s topsy-turvy world. But, as he makes clear, his ontological inversion is empirically grounded. In his case, in an account of the development of the profession of social work in the 19th century: it began as a set of unconnected boundaries between different fields which were then yoked together to mark out a discrete profession. I also want to take a pragmatist approach and foreground my empirical description of the various processes which sustain a riot across different temporal scales. So, instead of coming up with an arbitrary rule to decide whether a given riot is an independent event, or part of a longer wave, I try to deal with both simultaneously and to move between them. This places serious limitations on the kinds of arguments my evidence can support. Most importantly it means I can’t make causal claims about the conditions in which we might expect riots to last for longer or shorter periods of time. Instead I focus on describing the different processes which seem to link events together across time. I will return to these limitations in the conclusion, where I will try to emphasise that my framework should be seen as a way of making sense of the patterns I have found in these British riots over the 19th and 20th centuries. I hope that they can also provide ideas and hypotheses for future researchers, but this is far from an exhaustive, causal framework.

16 This focus on self-similarity is typically associated with power laws, which are often used as a proximate test for the presence of endogenous processes. Power laws are of great interest because they have specific properties and seem to occur throughout the natural world (Clauset 2011). However, I won’t dwell on this connection for the simple reason that testing for a power law distribution of the number of riots per year is extremely difficult with only 140 years of data (Clauset et al 2009). For theoretical reasons (Biggs 2005, 2016), a better test would examine whether the number of participants in each riot follows a power law distribution, however, as I discussed earlier, it was impossible to come up with any reliable measures of this. Therefore I can’t rigorously test whether my 19th century riots follow a true power law distribution.
This chapter is structured as follows: I begin by examining the six longest waves of rioting in Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool, searching for clues for the processes which sustain rioting; I then try to turn those specific historical arguments into a more abstract and transferable framework using examples of individual, short term riots; I then return to the idea of self-similarity and unpack the causal status of my argument; finally, I conclude by drawing together the two phases a riot’s career and considering the advantages of taking this approach to the study of riots.

Sustaining a riot over time

Joshua Clover ends his theory of riots with the claim that riots will now continue to expand and intensify, that “riot must absolutize” (2016, p. 297). Alberto Toscano calls this an “openly catastrophic wager” (2016) and certainly we’re still waiting for history to endorse Clover’s claim. But in fact, the odds are stacked against any riot being able to sustain itself for a long period of time, let alone expand and ‘absolutize’. There are four processes working against this possibility, and, in most cases, one or other of them brings the riot to an end fairly quickly. First, a riot can be stopped by external intervention. Most commonly this involves the police or army stopping the riot by force, but it could also be brought to a stop by natural factors such as heavy storms. Second, if one side in a riot achieves total dominance, then that will normally bring a riot to an end. Once the damage is total, no more rioting is possible. This is fairly rare but in purposive riots aimed at forcing certain people out of a town or defending a strike, it is entirely possible for the riot to end in victory. Third, all riots are vulnerable to emotional burnout. After the initial explosion of energy, there will be a plateau followed by slow dissipation (Collins 2012). How quickly this happens depends on many different factors, but it represents a constant force acting against the continuation of the riot. Fourth, the group of rioters may fragment. I mean this in terms of physical co-presence and in terms of a feeling of collective identity as, if either are challenged, then that can bring a riot to an end.

The question is then, how do some riots manage to sustain themselves in the face of these threats? Simply reversing them is not in itself a sufficient explanation. Instead, I want to suggest a flexible, pluralistic framework which builds on my empirical cases and on existing theories to try to explain how some riots manage to last. I will start by examining the six longest waves of unrest in the three cities: sectarian rioting in Liverpool 1850-3, and again in 1900-11, Salvation Army riots in Liverpool 1879-87, violent strikes and riots in Manchester from 1829-30, the wave of scuttling
violence in Manchester 1889-90, and the wave of sectarian violence in Glasgow from 1878-80. These six waves provide clues for the kinds of processes which are needed to sustain a riot. Many of my arguments here will echo the earlier account of the waves of rioting in interwar Glasgow. There I traced the waves of anti-police and sectarian riots to the changing role of gangs in the city, the Old Firm rivalry between Celtic and Glasgow football clubs and the growth of anti-Catholicism in Glasgow’s local politics. Those arguments will resurface in this section and the next as I try to transform these concrete, historical claims into more abstract mechanisms.

Anti-Catholic sentiment has a long history in Britain. However, during the 18th century Protestantism became a key aspect of the new ‘British’ identity that was emerging through war with (Catholic) Spain and France (Colley 2005). But even within this wider narrative, the story of Liverpool sectarianism is notorious (Waller 1981, Neal 1988, Belchem 1992, 2007, 2009). The main reason for this was the development of a large and distinctive Irish enclave in Liverpool (Belchem 1999). Although there had been riots against Catholics as early as 1746 (Waller 1981), as Irish immigration grew throughout the early 1800s, violent confrontations became increasingly commonplace and sectarianism came to be embedded in both Liverpool’s political structures and the patterns of everyday life (Neal 1992). The massive wave of immigration during the Irish potato famine greatly exacerbated these tensions and eventually resulted in an unprecedented wave of violence from 1850 to 1853 (Neal 1988, p. 88-9). According to Frank Neal (1988) the immediate causes of this backlash were: grievances over cost of supporting the Irish poor, the high proportion of Irish in crime statistics, fear of rebellion by the Irish (this was particularly acute after 1848) and the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850. But the fact that this wave of rioting lasted for so long (compared to the much more muted reaction to similar structural changes in, say, Manchester) demands separate attention. Several factors seem to be important. First, long-standing ethnic identities were solidified by continual action (Neal 1988, p. 158-62). Thus although these identities had deep roots, they were made salient by the riots themselves. Second, the strength of these identities meant that memories of offences could be retained and nurtured (even occasionally entering into local folklore) and this fed into a system of tit-for-tat reprisals which exacerbated and extended the rioting by providing a ready source of justification. These two feedback mechanisms were sustained by two external factors. One is the presence of organisations. Most immediately, the strength and ferocity of the local Orange order was highly significant in sustaining violence (Neal 1988, p. 138). But so too was the implicit condoning of violence by the local authorities who, despite deaths during the riots, only banned Orange processions from the town centre in 1852 (Neal
The other significant factor is the rhythm of external events which provided renewed opportunities for violence and constant restatement of the salience of ethnic identities. This includes a regularised calendar of violence associated with the 12th of July and St Patrick’s Day but also the election campaign of 1852 which was fought by the Tories on a ‘No Popery’ platform (Waller 1981).

These sectarian struggles continued to simmer over much of the next 50 years and in 1900 a new wave of rioting began which lasted till at least 1911. There are many similarities between this and the unrest of 1850 to 1853. Again the violence was rooted in community identities. These had become more entrenched politically by the skilled manipulations of local Tory strategists (Waller 1981), but were also positive in that they provided workers with identity, pride and material protection (Belchem 1992). Ethnic identities were then reinforced during the riots themselves by regular violence in working class districts which also fed into increasing residential segregation (Neal 1988). And, as in 1850, violence became fixed in cycles of retribution and revenge whilst also ‘marching in step with more orderly protest, legal challenges and feelings of martyrdom’ (Bohstedt 1992). The main difference is the role played by organisations. During this period the Protestant leadership was divided and largely ineffective. However, violence was not a mechanistic effect of this disorganisation, rather, competition between rival Protestant groups led by George Wise and the Kensits resulted in each group trying to out-do the other (Neal 1988, p. 214). This process of inter-group competition leading to violence echoes Sidney Tarrow’s (1989) interpretation of the protest cycle in Italy and suggests that we should not presume a linear relationship between extent of organisation and violence. As Charles Tilly always emphasised, contention is an interactive process and the relationships between organisations are likely to be as important as their own strength.

The third example from Liverpool is the wave of Salvation Army riots during the 1880s. After the ‘invasion’ of Liverpool by Catherine and William Booth’s army of proselytising Protestants in 1879, the Salvationists’ open air meetings came under continual attack. The systematic nature of this response drew on a strong sense of ‘Irish Catholic’ identity which was at risk in ‘English exile’ and which was now under deliberate attack (Murdoch 1992). This identity and corresponding opposition to the Salvationists was perpetuated by the local Catholic Church and gave the events here a very different character to the Salvation Army riots across small town England (see Bailey 2014). But the unrest also quickly became fixed in a routine with a particular temporal rhythm: regular Salvation Army marches and meetings on a Sunday came to be associated with a routine of stone throwing.
and opposition. It was this institutionalisation which sustained Irish resistance and which, overtime, led to a transformation within the Salvation Army itself as it moved away from ‘militant, muscular Christianity’ towards social reform and charity (Murdoch 1992).

The fourth case study comes from the wave of violent strikes and riots in Manchester and surrounding towns from 1829 to 1831. Manchester and the cotton districts had been a focus point for trade union activism and radical protest since the late 18th century and, with the repeal of the Combinations Acts in 1824, there was fresh impetus for both political and economic struggle (Hall 1989, Navickas 2009, 2016). From 1829 a series of violent and viciously repressed strikes took place amongst cotton weavers and spinners. What is most surprising is not the use of violence (which remained a common feature of workplace disputes for many years e.g. Price 1975, Behagg 1982, Richter 1981), but rather that these riots continued in spite of the workers’ continual defeats at the hands of their employers. The initial strike at Hyde collapsed after 6 months, as did strikes in Manchester, Stockport, Ashton, Stalybridge and Dukinfield. Meanwhile repeated attempts to set up national unions by John Doherty (a Manchester cotton spinners’ representative) also failed. The violence that accompanied these strikes took a mixture of forms from organised terrorism (such as the bomb delivered to the Hegginbottoms and the assassination of Thomas Ashton) to spontaneous riots (such as May 1829). This could be seen as violence coming out of desperation and a position of weakness, but what is interesting is that the struggle lasted for so long. What linked it together over those months and years was a strong and coherent moral base: ideas of inherent rights and basic social justice provided the legitimacy for continued unrest (Steinberg 1999, Navickas 2015). Although some historians have emphasised the role of unions in sustaining this unrest (e.g. Kirby and Musson 1975), this ignores the political radicalism which underpinned much of the unrest and the fact that the unions were largely under-resourced and poorly organised (Cotton 1977). Marc Steinberg (1999) has also argued that this legitimising discourse in fact preceded the formation of a strong working class identity. Following E.P. Thompson (1963), he argues that class formation in fact emerged out of the class struggle. Thus, in Ashton, the strikes themselves led to alienation and hatred which fed class-identity and escalating violence throughout the long strike of 1830-1. The strikers also reinforced their legitimacy through the use of symbols such as the tricolour (which was particularly potent in the aftermath of the July Revolution) and routines of daily parades which both asserted their control of public space and their internal solidarity (Navickas 2016, p. 146-7). These represented something of a shift in the repertoire of contention, as 18th century traditions based around the carnival was transformed into a more ‘masculine’ and ‘modern’ set of routines.
These then formed the basis for a new tradition of protest which lent legitimacy and symbolic purchase to Chartist movement that emerged in the following decades (Hall 1991, Turner 2008).

The fifth case study is also from Manchester but concerns a very different type of riot: violence between gangs of youths, or scuttling, from 1889 to 1890. As Philip Gooderson (1997) has shown, scuttling has a long history in Manchester but blossomed from the 1870s up to 1900. Even within that period, it was fairly episodic and the period from 1889-90 seems to represent a peak in both my data and Gooderson’s arrest data. Although the phenomenon as a whole was rooted in a local traditions of masculinity and violence (Davies 1998), possibly exacerbated by intrusive middle class attempts to ‘improve’ the working class (Humphries 1995), it is important to see scuttling as having its own history. These escalating peaks of violence were driven by the dynamic of tit-for-tat, revenge attacks, with cycles often triggered by the use of knives or other weapons (Gooderson 1997). Because these scuttling gangs were based in strong neighbourhood identities and emphasised by a distinctive style of dress (Davies 1998), groups had strong collective memory of feuds, vendettas and prior insults which could sustain unrest over long periods of time. Indeed, this feedback mechanism was so powerful that it was only with a strong response from the police that scuttling was eventually brought under control in the 1890s (Gooderson 1997).

The final example is the wave of sectarian violence which swept through Glasgow from 1878 to 1880. Here rioting was sustained in a largely similar way to the examples from Liverpool, but the Scottish context does bring out some differences. Like the rest of Britain, Scotland has a long history of Irish immigration but received huge numbers during the potato famine (Vaughan 2013). However, sectarianism in Scotland has a markedly different trajectory compared to the rest of Britain. In Glasgow in particular, sectarianism was held back by a liberal ‘commonsense’ and strong trade unions during most of the latter part of the 19th century (Smith 1986, Foster et al 2011). And after World War I, when anti-Irish violence was dying down in most places, Glasgow saw a large increase in riots which became rooted in rival football clubs of Celtic and Rangers (Davies 2000, 2013). The earlier wave of violence we are interested in here, however, was triggered by the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland in 1878. In Glasgow, it was exacerbated by a big wave of Irish Protestant migration into Scotland from 1876-1881 (Hutchinson 1987). Although the riots were not entirely imported intra-Irish violence, these Protestant migrants swelled the ranks of the local Orange Order (McFarland 1990, Kaufman 2006) which increased Orange organisational
capacity and inflamed already existing tensions (Taylor 2014). These religious identities were then made salient by the activities of local bands who paraded through Glasgow, often deliberately invading the territory of other denominational groups and provoking violence. Thus symbols and organisational capacity helped to sustain riots even in a context in which sectarian identities may not have been as pronounced as elsewhere in Britain.

A possible framework

There are many different clues and hypotheses which emerge from these historical cases. I will try to make these explicit by linking them to the wider theoretical literature on riots and transforming them into more abstract mechanisms (McAdam et al 2008). This leaves us with three processes which seem to help sustain a riot: evoking emotional energy, constructing identity and justifying the riot. As these also seem to be involved in extremely short episodes of rioting, I am not suggesting that the presence or absence of, for example, identity can help to explain why some riots last longer than others. Instead my focus is on the processes involved, on the idea that the identity of rioters needs to be continually reproduced for a riot to last. Because of the difficulties involved in deciding whether a given riot should be counted as an independent event, or part of a longer wave, it is difficult to systematically investigate the conditions in which such processes are more or less likely to be successful. Nevertheless, by assessing them against various examples of shorter riots, I hope to demonstrate that these three processes, together with factors like routines, organisations, symbols and external rhythms, can help to explain what it takes to sustain a riot at different temporal scales.

Constructing identities

The examples of sectarian rioting in Liverpool and Glasgow all show riots which were bound up with the construction and continual reconstruction of identities. There are several different links between riots and identities which are worth setting out in detail. Most intuitively, riots often emerge around a pre-existing identity (such as ethnicity). For example, on Saturday 26th of August 1905 an Orange band were attacked in Garston (a village near Liverpool). In response, the following morning Irish bands arrived in the village and were soon involved in a fight with local Protestants. Although the police managed to break up the fight, the riot resumed in the evening with several fights in Saunby Street, St Mary’s Road and James Street (Liverpool Express 28/8/1905).
Here identity helped to sustain a riot over a couple of days. On the other hand, riots themselves can also reinforce long standing identities. For example, Protestant-Catholic violence in Liverpool and Glasgow seemed to reinforce the salience of that divide (Neal 1988; Davies 2000, 2013). Riots can also form around extremely thin kinds of identity (simply being a ‘rioter’). For example, in May 1920 a fairly amorphous crowd got into a fight with the police near Albert Bridge in Glasgow. Although the violence was very serious, the riot ended in a matter of hours (Glasgow Herald 31/5/1920).

It is plausible that riots forming around class, ethnic or religious identities would have the potential to last longer than those forming around more ephemeral identities. However, my cases are somewhat ambiguous on this regard: about one quarter of riots that emerged around a pre-existing identity lasted longer than a day, roughly the same as for those with no discernible identity. The difference is extremely small (one percentage point) and, unsurprisingly, it’s not statistically significant. On the other hand, there are very few riots with no discernible identity: they form less than a fifth of my cases and nearly half of them are anti-police riots which could plausibly have been coded as representing ‘civilians’ fighting the police. Moreover, many riots which formed around a pre-existing identity are actually part of longer wave, which again reveals the difficulties in clearly conceptualising how long a riot lasts. There is also a danger of circularity here as one of the indicators that riots formed a wave is that they involved a consistent set of actors. Nevertheless, I believe we can draw a fairly robust conclusion that identity is vital to sustaining a riot, even if we can’t say much about the different effects of different types of identity.

Justifying the riot

The second process is justifying the riot, a key factor in the industrial unrest in Manchester and Ashton. The importance of this factor was brought into sharp focus by E.P. Thompson’s classic essay on the ‘moral economy’ (1971). There he argues that it is “possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion… [specifically] the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community” (p. 78). John Bohstedt (1992) has challenged the centrality of this ‘moral economy’ to rioters’ sense of legitimacy, arguing instead that most food rioters justified their actions by reference to desperate need. Indeed, in reports of the trials after the 1826 food riot in Manchester, it is ‘need’ that seems to be paramount in the rioters’ minds. Cowdroy’s Manchester
Gazette (29/4/1826) reports a defendant arguing: “What must I do? I can not get work. My wife and children are famishing before my eyes; and if I don't beg we must lay ourselves down and die”. Robert Storch (1976, 1982) places similar emphasis on justification, arguing that anti-police violence was rooted in an ideology which saw the police as an affront English liberties. Even in the late 19th century there is still evidence of a ‘hidden transcript’ (Scott 1990) which provided similar grounds for anti-police riots (Churchill 2014).

These historical examples generally draw justification from perceived threats (a vital and often ignored factor in social movement studies more generally: McAdam 1999, Tilly and Goldstone 2001). But, rioters can also draw justification for their actions from perceived opportunities. For example, Jacqueline Jenkinson (2009) has argued that the wave of anti-black rioting which swept across Britain in 1919 was in part caused by the success of earlier riots during World War I and in its immediate aftermath. Moreover, in its coverage of the riots in Glasgow after the King was forced to drop his Bill to divorce Queen Caroline, the Glasgow Chronicle reported that “the mobs that assembled to do honour to Royal family are always the most destructive because they assume everything will be excused” (Glasgow Chronicle 16/11/1820; there is great irony in this anti-Loyalist Royalism). Similarly in 1857, the Glasgow Herald said: “We have had old wives in men's clothes amongst us who excuse the riot of a Queen's birth night on the score that some degree of license is permissible on such occasions. Can anything palliate the cruel and cowardly attacks which have been for some years perpetrated on unoffending and quiet people who have happened to be on the streets on these Royal birth nights?” (Glasgow Herald 13/5/1857).

As I showed earlier with the example of scuttling violence in Manchester, a sense of legitimacy can also develop during the riot itself. This feedback mechanism, which you might call ‘unfinished business’, includes the variety of ways in which initial riots call forth future violence. In the short run, this often involves some kind of offence caused by the police. For example, in November 1846, railway navigators working on the line near to Heywood were drinking in a pub after work when a fight broke out between the English and Irish workers. The police intervened and the workers quickly forgot their private quarrel and commenced a general attack on the police. But it can also evolve into longer forms of tit-for-tat aggression, particularly when the identities of the relevant groups is strong enough for there to be a memory of the offence. So, for example, in Manchester in 1830 there was a skirmish between a group of Irish Ribandmen and some Orangemen which the
police quickly suppressed. The following night the Ribandmen came back to finish their dispute and in the ensuing fight one young man was shot dead.

Whatever the particular value or norm that rioters use to legitimise their actions, it seems that they do generally have some sense of legitimacy when they act and that the strength of this feeling helps to sustain the riot. This links to an argument I made earlier, in chapters 4 and 5. If legitimacy is a necessary part of a riot, then as the overall legitimacy of rioting declined throughout the 19th and early 20th century, you would expect rioters to find it harder to sustain a riot. It’s difficult to test that directly because of the challenges involved in drawing the boundaries around an individual riot and how to deal with wave of riots. The impression given by my catalogue is that individual riots in Manchester, and possibly Liverpool, do become shorter as time goes on, but that Glasgow follows a different pattern as riots become more common, and fairly long lasting, in the interwar years. Setting this out systematically would be a valuable test of how important justification really is to rioting.

*Evoking emotional energy*

Most of the riots in my catalogue also seem to involve emotional energy and a sense that the normal rules are off. Although I think that the intuitive sense of general stimulation and excitement is fairly easy to grasp, many scholars seem to find ‘emotional energy’ frustratingly vague as an analytical concept (e.g. Felson 2009). Unfortunately, my sources don’t allow me to give a thick description of the feeling of being in a riot (for that see Buford 1992), so instead I will have to refine the concept with reference to existing work. The general contours of emotional energy are (i) greater sensitivity to stimulation (Collins 2008), (ii) relationships, connections and identities taking on new significances (Bourdieu 1990, chapter 5), and (iii) a sense that the future is open in ways it wasn’t before (Zolberg 1972). But it’s also worth dwelling on the different causes of emotional energy. The most famous account of this comes from Emile Durkheim’s discussion of collective effervescence where an increase in the number and frequency of social interactions produces profound psychological effects (Durkheim 2001). Randall Collins reads this in biological terms, referring to the way we are genetically hardwired to become entrained in mutual interaction with those around us, thus placing emotional energy on the prepersonal level of affect (Collins 2008). On the other hand, for Sidney Tarrow these ‘moments of madness’ are produced by the proliferation of new tactics and new struggles (Tarrow 1993). James C. Scott describes a similar effect caused instead by
the release of pent-up emotions when a ‘hidden transcript’ is publicly unveiled (Scott 1990). Both of these could be seen as personal, subjective feelings, but I think the authors intend them to be interpreted as shared, social expressions of emotions. A full account of emotional energy therefore needs to pay attention to the intertwining of all these different levels, from the prepersonal to the social. But emphasising the importance of emotional energy doesn’t mean that I am suggesting that people become irrational, crazed and de-individualised as soon as they are surrounded by a crowd. Sometimes this emotional energy results in feelings of carnivalesque festivity and celebration, but at other times it can form into a mood of almost somber seriousness. Nor is there anything irrational about forming new and different bonds in new and unusual circumstances (for more extended critiques see McPhail 1991 and Goffman 1971). Rather than imply a wholesale, qualitative transformation in people’s mental state, I want to make a much more modest claim which emphasises the stimulation and excitement which seems to characterise and sustain so many riots.

Some of the clearest examples of this are the carnivalesque scenes which accompanied the anti-German riots in May 1915 following the sinking of the ocean liner Lusitania by German submarines. The riots began and were at their most intense in Liverpool where on Breck Road a piano was dragged out of a looted house and used in an impromptu concert where patriotic songs like ‘Tipperary’ were played by the excited crowd. There were similar scenes in Manchester where toy trumpets were blasted and a piano was dragged out of a pork butchers on Stretford Road for the crowd to perform ‘Home Sweet Home’ before ritualistically smashing the piano to pieces. There was a similar sense of festival when a riot broke out in Glasgow’s Duke Street Reformatory for young boys in January 1882. There the unrest began after prayers with the inmates pulling off their boots and hurling them around. These were matched by bizarre scenes in September 1896 when, after the election of the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University, a huge torchlit procession went down to the Skating Palace (a music hall in Sauchiehall Street). A crowd of about 2,000 students tried to get in and, when they were refused, they started attacking the building with groceries taken from a greengrocers shop nearby. There were also sticks and stones in the barrage and the manager of the Skating Palace and several waitresses were injured before the police managed to disperse the crowd, arresting eight students. This kind of raucous emotional energy seems to be common to many riots, even those in which the violence is carefully targeted and fairly restrained or deeply embedded in local traditions and relations (Storch 1982, Rogers 1998, Randall 2006).
In order for riots to persist this emotional energy needs to be continually renewed. Collins focusses on the role of looting in this process as it gives people something to do and encourages participation, thus sustaining the emotional energy of the situation and the riot itself (2008, p. 245-53). It is important to note that the fact that looting encourages participation does not explain why people are willing to engage in looting in the first place. This jump lends a functionalist flavour to his argument. Moreover, in general this explanation relies too heavily on examples of rioting drawn from recent (predominantly US) history. A more general mechanism can be deduced from my cases: riots require some kind of action to sustain the emotional energy. The importance of action to sustaining a riot is not quite a truism because, as well as rioting itself, many different kinds of action can sustain those essentially violent behaviours. Thus the hymn singing, parading revivalists (Liverpool Evening Express 29/3/1875) or the marching displays of Radical crowds (Poole 2009) helped to sustain riots by renewing the emotional energy of situation in nonviolent ways. Action elsewhere (diffusion) can also help to sustain a riot, as reports of the spreading chaos embolden and inspire the original rioters (a similar process can sustain other forms of protest such as strikes [Biggs 2003] and revolutions [Beissinger 2007]). It should be clear from these examples that this mechanism works across different scales. News of riots in Nottingham after the passing of the Destruction of Stocking Frames, etc. Act 1812 sparked riots in Manchester which lasted for most of April with regular mass meetings helping to sustain emotional energy. On a smaller scale, when bands marched through Glasgow, the riots often only lasted a few hours, but, still depended on regular action, notably singing and parading, to sustain them.

*Interconnections between those three processes*

These three processes often emerge from long standing social, economic and political factors, but they are also interrelated in complex ways. In the first instance, the emotional energy of the situation can help to form and reinforce collective identities. This idea comes from Émile Durkheim who argues that “for society to be conscious of itself and sustain its feeling of itself with the necessary degree of intensity, it must gather individuals together in sufficient concentration” (2001, p. 317). The emotional energy generated by this concentration of people and interactions is the reason that “all parties… deliberately hold meetings in which their members may renew their common faith by some collective demonstration” (p. 157). Durkheim also suggests that emotional energy leads to heightened sensitivity as people are “moved by passions so intense that they can be assuaged only by violent, extreme acts” (p. 158). It is easy to see how, in those circumstances, small
acts can be perceived as grave insults which justify violent retribution. Second, a strong identity can feed into a sense of justification. For example, when the Lusitania was sunk by German submarines unrest broke out first in Liverpool where a generic British identity was reinforced by a special Liverpudlian connection to the boat which justified (even in the eyes of much of the press) a violent response against the local German population (e.g. The Times 10/5/1915, Liverpool Courier 10/5/1915). But people’s identities also shape their perception of a situation and thus can heighten its emotional tension. So when in 1909 St Joseph’s Catholic Church in Liverpool set up a temporary altar as part of their parade, this was seen as an unacceptable provocation by local Orangemen who were primed to react to it by George Wise publishing his lobbying against the Catholic parade over the preceding days (Manchester Courier 25/6/1909, Police [Liverpool Inquiry] Act 1909). To complete the circle, feelings of justification can also reinforce a pre-existing identity, or even help create it as in Ashton in 1830. For example, the Irish-led riots of 1835 and 1837 reinforced the view amongst Orangemen that they were the victims of Catholic aggression and thus cemented their adversarial identity (Neal 1992). And legitimacy can also increase the emotional energy of a situation as it allows unrest to persist for longer thus providing more opportunity for participation by a greater number of people.

The fact that these processes are interrelated in this way suggests that none of them are reducible to any of the others: there is no dominant causal pathway from one primary element which explains the other two. This is something which crowd historians have always been better at acknowledging than crowd theorists. E.P. Thompson, for example, grounded the ‘moral economy’ in a complex culture which depended on pre-existing identities and roles but was also reinforced through the performance of certain ritual actions (Thompson 1971, 1991; see also Bushaway 1982). Reicher on the other hand asserts that identities are the central factor in explaining riots. However, there are many cases where the identity of being a ‘rioter’ is too thin to explain unrest on its own. There are also cases, like the economic unrest in Manchester described by Marc Steinberg, where identity seems to be a result of unrest, rather than a factor which helped to sustain it. Collins makes an analogous move, arguing that emotional energy should be seen as primary (2008). But again this is ultimately untenable because the emergence of emotional energy depends on people interpreting events. While the biological impulses he emphasises are no doubt important, riots also involve complex ‘secondary emotions’ such as pride which require us to interpret what is going on around us (Armon-Jones 1986, Thoits 1989, Jasper 1998). In fact, any description of events require some level of interpretation (Anscombe 1957). This means that we need to account for meanings
(Waddington 1989) and expectations (Tiratelli 2018), both which are coloured by people’s identities and external cultural factors.

My historical cases also show that many of the same processes which sustain riots in the short run also apply to events which stretch over many months and years. The one process which seems to function differently in the the long run examples is emotional energy. In many ways this shouldn’t be surprising as the intensity of emotion and heightened sensitivity felt during a riot is not sustainable for longer than a few hours. However, that does not mean that emotional energy is irrelevant to the long run. Durkheim has argued that language, identity and culture can be thought of as emotional energy which is “fixed within all sorts of observed practices and traditions” (2001 p. 159), a kind of ‘dead emotional energy’ to misuse Marx. This echoes what I found in the examples presented above, where the emotional energy involved in riots helped to solidify identities, create symbols and mould memories. Recognising that emotional energy can be transformed into longer lasting cultural forms inverts my earlier argument that the emergence of emotional energy depends on people interpreting events according to pre-existing cultural schemes. This does not mean that emotional energy can be made, at last, into our master variable. Identities, cultural frames and meaning are also shaped by long term material and discursive factors which it would be a difficult to assimilate to the emotional high of a riot. Instead, we should concentrate on the interpenetration of different temporalities within the dynamic and endogenous processes which sustain riots over hours, days, months and years.

*Routines, organisations, symbols and external rhythms*

These three processes seem to lie at the heart of what is needed to sustain a riot. However, they also seem to feed off four sets of resources. The first of these is the presence of established routines. Routines can be important because they show people how to riot and so facilitate participation. They help to reinforce a sense of legitimacy as people believe they are acting from tradition and also to reinforce a sense of identity as they allow people to place themselves in a lineage of rioters. For example, during the course of the late 18th and early 19th century the routine of ‘factory visiting’ emerged in Manchester. I described this in more detail in chapter 5, but, it essentially involved people marching from factory to factory trying to spread the strike and interactions followed a more-or-less scripted pattern with the crowd marching up in procession, demanding the workers turn out, if the owner refused and the doors were locked workers would attempt to smash
the windows and force their way inside, in response the employer would often arm his workers and order them to defend the factory. Crowds often used to move through Manchester visiting numerous factories across the town, thus using the routine to sustain unrest over a matter of hours (see, for example, the riots in August 1842). This routine became so familiar that in March 1848 protesters visited a workhouse and demanded that those inside turned out, something which made little sense given that workhouses were a place of last resort. In Glasgow in 1878 riots broke out on Glasgow Green on April 13th when an copy of the Pope’s declaration establishing a Catholic Hierarchy in Scotland was burned leading to riots. The North British Daily Mail reported that the next day riots began again and, “following the principle so clearly laid down by Mr Godfrey the previous day, the company at once set themselves the task of obtaining what projectiles they could, and after being supplied they rushed eagerly into the fray” (North British Daily Mail 15/4/1878).

The second external factor is the presence of organisations. These seem to help to sustain riots in a variety of ways: initially through organisation and providing a concrete sense of identity (the many instances of Orange violence exemplify this), but also over the longer run through logistics and legitimation via party newspapers or handbills etc. For example, during the Transport Strike of 1911 the unions in Glasgow organised pickets outside of tram depots from the time of the first departure in the morning and it was this organised battle to stop the trains leaving the station which kept the violence going over several days. The state itself can also encourage riots as well as preventing them (Wilkinson 2009). This can include direct sponsoring of riots and violence during election campaigns, where huge bills for damages were expected and violence normalised (election expenses incurred through the damage done by Whig rioting are reported in The Times 30/1/1869; see also Lawrence 2003, 2006). But the state can also implicitly allow riots to continue even while officially condoning them. In this vein, the closeness of the Tory party and the Orange Lodges in Liverpool was often the subject of criticism. An anonymous letter from ‘A Well-conducted Protestant’ in 1851 accuses Chief Constable Dowling of being afraid that he would be dismissed by the Watch Committee if he stopped the violent Orange Parade (HO 45/3471/L-M/16). 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). This ‘political logic’ of violence has also been found in contemporary ethnic riots in northern India where the BJP sponsored or allowed violence to occur in marginal seats (Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012).
A third factor is the use of symbols. These are important features of almost any protest but within riots they seem to work in two ways: they reinforce a sense of identity and purpose, and also provide a focal point for violence (O’Gorman 2000, Poole 2006, 2009, Navickas 2010). The complex meanings associated with the Liberty Cap exemplify these two functions. After the 1790s Jacobins and radicals were totally banished from the public realm. When the relaxation of repression in the late 1810s gave people the opportunity to wear the Liberty Cap in public again, it became a key symbol of mass-platform radicalism (Belchem 1985, 1996). It also became embedded in a routine of demonstration and counter-demonstration which saw radicals and loyalists fight over hoisting and capturing each other’s banners (Epstein 1989). For example, in a famous meeting in Stockport in February 1819, the crowd hoisted a red Liberty Cap into the air, some loyalists on horseback then tried to capture it but were beaten back to great applause.

Finally, the external rhythm of events can also help to sustain a riot. This echoes my earlier discussion of the way that riots were embedded in people’s everyday use of time but is worth revisiting. External rhythms work to sustain riots in two ways: first by providing stimulus and opportunity for renewed confrontation, and second by extending the riot situation and transferring emotional energy from one time/place to another. The election campaign provides a clear example of this process. There a series of scripted events - the entry of candidates into the constituency, the canvass, the nomination, the ‘treating’ rituals, processions at the close of the polls and finally the ‘chairing’ of the victorious candidate (O’Gorman 1992) - provided a sense of continuity and repeated opportunities for unrest. This meant that violence could be sustained over several weeks (e.g. Liverpool July 1837, Manchester January 1869). But everyday external rhythms also helped to sustain riots over a few hours. In Hutcheson Town, near Glasgow, in 1823, there were vicious riots in September as part of a strike. The Glasgow Chronicle reported that there was a crowd of several thousand outside the factory in the morning, throwing stones and hissing at the new workers. The police then intervened and manage to reassert control. But, at 7pm when work stopped, the crowd reappeared and started smashing windows. The workers had to be armed with pistols to allow them to escape the building.

In the short run the availability and salience of these four factors is more-or-less fixed. And so, in some ways, my account echoes theories which try to explain the growth and decline of social movements in terms of the availability of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977, McCarthy and Edwards 2004). However, I want to depart from their structuralist perspective by emphasising the
importance of endogenous processes and dynamic growth. First, the importance of triggers and sudden ruptures belies any simple explanation in terms of external factors. Second, by demonstrating the dense web of inter-relations and feedback cycles between the processes which sustain a riot, I hope to show that they are dynamic events which can develop in unexpected ways; what happens in any given case is a highly contingent outcome of the interactions amongst rioters, by-standers and authorities. Third, my suggestion that the short run dynamics of a riot which unfolds over a matter of minutes can be explained in the same terms as a wave of rioting which builds over months and months forces us to adopt a different perspective, one that can accommodate micro-sociological insights as well as structural ones.

**Self-similarity and causality**

The problem that I began with had two sides. One was theoretical: are the processes which sustain rioting similar at different temporal scales? My simplest answer is yes, whether a riot lasts minutes, hours, weeks or years, emotional energy, identity and justification all seem to be involved. This attempt to bridge the divide between the long and short run reflects one of the central ambitions of the so-called ‘new’ sociology of violence (e.g. Jackman 2002, Wieviorka 2009, Malesevic 2010; see Shaw 2009 for insightful criticism of the whole project). These attempts at theoretical synthesis have run against the parallel trend of disciplinary fragmentation in the actual study of violence (Walby 2013). And, so far, they have been more successful at connecting disparate types of violence (for example brawls and military combat), than at linking micro and macro explanations in a convincing and theoretically coherent manner. Charles Tilly’s (2003) work on the politics of collective violence looks for mechanisms which explain variation along his two scales of salience of damage and coordination amongst actors. Essentially his focus is on explaining the escalation and de-escalation of violence as opposed to any other kind of variation (see his diagram on p. 50). By starting from that perspective he ignores the self-similarity of violence altogether and, instead of a general framework or model, he presents us with a typology of explanatory mechanisms (environmental, cognitive and relational). Randall Collins has developed a much more theoretically elaborate model of how violence escalates. However, he also seems to operate with a fairly sharp distinction between micro-situational mechanisms based around emotional energy (Collins 2013) and macro-level factors based around logistics and organisation (Collins 2012; see also Collins 2009). It is again not clear that he recognises the self-similarity of violence or, if he does, that he thinks this requires us to develop mechanisms which also work across different scales. These are
not intended to be strident criticisms of their work, both are extraordinary in their scope and insights. But they are looking at violence as a whole and so perhaps inevitably require distinctions and categorisations. Those of us looking at particular forms of violence should, however, take up this challenge to develop a single explanatory framework which works across scales.

By focussing on different scales, we end up drawing attention to the fuzzy boundaries of a riot. This complicates Randall Collins’s central claim that violence is rare (Collins 2008). Obviously most situations do not involve violence (in the sense of open physical violence). And so you might plausibly expect violence to be distributed by a power law, where most interactions contain no violence, a few contain bluster, and a very small set involve large-scale violence (Richardson 1948, Clauset et al 2007). However, given that most of the years in my study saw rioting of some kind, you could just as easily argue that public violence was fairly common. Indeed saying that most of the time there was no violence is almost trivial. Even during a riot it is unlikely that there is violence going on most of the time (McPhail and Wohlstein 1983). When Robert Roberts (1973) describes working class life in inter-war Salford as ‘violent’, he is not saying that most interactions were violent. In fact it is hard to imagine any kind of social behaviour which would not be rare when compared to “everyday life [that] unfolds in a chain of situations, minute by minute” (Collins 2008, p. 3). So, while I would probably accept Collins’s claim that violence is difficult and that most of us are bad at it, whether or not it counts as ‘rare’ depends entirely on what you are comparing it to. In fact, because we don’t seem to have an obvious point of comparison, I think the question might be more fruitfully framed as a subjective one: do people experience violence as a rare, extra-ordinary event, or is it a mundane part of their everyday lives?

This opens up a set of questions which I have only addressed in part. If rioting was embedded in the everyday (and violence part of people’s strategic repertoire), then were people surprised by it? How did people see themselves when they rioted? How did they evaluate their own participation? or that of friends and family? These are some of the issues that Erving Goffman (1959) introduced in his seminal account of the ‘moral career of a mental patient’. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork with mental health patients, he set out to describe the standard sequence of changes in the patients’ sense of self and their framework for judging themselves and others. This is split into a prepatient phase structured by a ‘betrayal funnel’ in which the patient is institutionalised and stripped of their normal rights, and an inpatient phase characterized by the mortifying experiences of the ‘total institution’ where an individual’s sense of self is erased and then rebuilt within the roles and values
of the institution. By extending the concept of a career in this way, Goffman hopes to deal with both the inward- and the outward-facing aspects of a career (see also Crossley 2006). It would obviously be desirable to do the same for rioters. But it is extremely difficult to find reliable evidence about how rioters conceive themselves. Possible sources would be police confessions, court transcripts, retrospective autobiographies, ethnographic fieldwork, interviews or inferring it from their behaviour. None of these are perfect sources and they would all need to be handled with care. However, a close examination of the moral aspects of a riot's career would be a valuable extension of the framework I’ve tried to sketch out in the last two chapters.

The second side of the puzzle was empirical: why do some riots last for only minutes, while waves of rioting drag on for years. My argument suggests that the presence or absence of the processes and factors mentioned above help to shape how long a riot lasts. However, this is difficult to test for because there is no obvious control group or clear way of measuring how long a riot lasts. Thus, my approach has been to document the actual processes which seem to link discrete events together and then see whether those recur in other cases from my catalogue of riots. This preliminary, iterative test of my argument shows that it is fairly robust and that these mechanisms are sufficiently transferable to be of general interest. A question remains, however, about the causal status of these mechanisms. I suggest that we interpret the three processes I have highlighted (constructing identity, evoking emotional energy and justifying the riot) as constitutive causes, as opposed to etiological causes (Lichbach 2008). So, instead of seeing them as external causes where ‘X creates/changes/conditions Y’, we should see them as constituting the phenomenon of interest. Without those processes there are no links between the discrete events which make up a riot and so there is no riot. In order to push this towards the more hypothetical-deductive world of etiological causation, we would need to ask under what conditions is the construction of identity, or the evocation of intense emotional energy, likely to successfully sustain riots. I have given some indications of initial hypotheses, hunches and preliminary conclusions in the descriptions of individual cases, but I am limited in how much further I can push them by the nature of my historical data.

**The career of a riot**

Over the last two chapters I have tried to set out a framework for understanding the career of a riot. I began by describing the kinds of events which trigger riots, the mechanisms through which they
work and the different causal status those events can have. I then described the various processes through which riots sustain themselves over time. It is important to remember that riots move back and forth between these two stages continually. This is implicit in Becker’s (1953) vision of ‘careers’, but is worth restating because all riots are made up of sudden rushes of action, followed by pauses before they escalate again. The concept of a career also provides its own insights into rioting. Crucially it focusses our attention on the temporal dimension and forces us to treat riots as a process, rather than a homogenous outcome to be explained by prior causes. This opens up a huge terrain of inquiry, one which is often ignored by sociologists, criminologists and those studying violent politics more broadly, namely, the actual interactions and behaviours involved in rioting.

Most importantly, this terrain helps us to develop symptomatic readings of a riot, to explore what it was about. This kind of symptomatic reading of a riot requires us to set it in its social and historical context, but it is very difficult to know what aspects of that context are relevant. As I showed in the last chapter, triggers are often only arbitrarily related to the content of the riot. The reasons people join a riot can also change as they move from being observers to participants and back again (Bagguley and Hussain 2008) and those reasons are often obscure even to the participants themselves (Akram 2014). So, when we are trying to develop a symptomatic reading of a riot, instead of asking why people joined a riot or what caused it to break out, we should be asking: “how were people rioting?” and, crucially, “what kept it going?”. This means thinking about identity, justification and where the emotional energy comes from. These processes are keyholes through which we can reconnect the micro-situational details of a riot to the relevant aspects of its wider context. For example, focussing on the question of what sustained the emotional energy of the 2011 London Riots points us in very different directions to the prevailing approach of working out whether rioters came from deprived backgrounds or not. In fact, starting from that question points us unexpectedly towards the importance of people’s relationships with the everyday spaces in which rioting took place (Tiratelli 2018).

Lurking behind this is a focus on time and how riots relate to it. This interest in temporality is one of the major legacies of the Chicago School and something which the idea of a career immediately highlights. However, as I hinted at in the last chapter, there has been far more interest in how different phenomena diffuse across space and escalate among a group of people, than in how they sustain themselves over time. Academics have tried to describe the geographical diffusion of everything from cricket (Kaufman and Patterson 2005) to IP protection (Wimmer and Feinstein
2010), nation states (Chorev 2012) and, of course, riots (e.g. Myers 2010, Baudains et al 2012, Aidt et al 2017). These are all significant pieces of research, however, I think that this focus on diffusion over space has obscured the temporal dimension and cost us dear. First, the lack of attention to time has led us to neglect the long run evolution of rioting as a practice. Second, it has distracted us from the empirical question which this chapter sets out to answer, an empirical question of real practical and political importance to those living through waves of on-going rioting.

Future research will also be needed to test whether this framework of the career of a riot, and the empirical findings that underpin it, are transferable to other sites. I have deliberately kept my argument at a fairly high level of abstraction and this means that my model works across one hundred and forty years of British history. But, this doesn’t imply that the career of riots has remained fixed. As riots came away from their social roots and became subordinate to other elements in the repertoire of contention, there seem to have been shifts in emphasis between the different elements which make up this framework. And the same is true across different types of riots. So, instead of implying an ahistorical essentialism, this framework actually spells out the concrete ways in which riots differ from one another. I also want to emphasise that my empirical findings are clearly not exhaustive of the different processes and events which matter in the career of a riot. Further study in other parts of the world and different periods of history will no doubt throw up new mechanisms which I have neglected. But, if we find ourselves moving into a new era of 21st century rioting, then having a flexible conceptual framework which allow us to find patterns in the way that riots play out on the ground will be the first step to understanding them.
Chapter 8
Riots: the past and the future

This thesis began with a dissatisfaction about the prevailing ways that sociologists and historians had dealt with riots. My alternative approach was to focus on riots’ relationship with time, both the way the practice of rioting has evolved over the long run, and the way the careers of individual riots unfold over hours, days and weeks. That approach emerged as a way of making sense of rioting in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow from 1800 to 1939. In the course of that analysis, I have also made several, more concrete, arguments, some of which rest on solid bodies of evidence while others are more speculative and provisional. I hope to have demonstrated, fairly robustly, that: (i) Despite the arguments by Joshua Clover (2016) and Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain (2008), the concept of riots as public, collective violence is still a useful starting point for sociological analysis. (ii) That, despite the assumption that riots are unexpected outbreaks of chaos, riots in this period were firmly embedded in the local use of time and space. (iii) That the decline of urban riots dates from the last quarter of the 19th century and that it was, in part, caused by the erosion of the cultural and social space which legitimised rioting. (iv) That, despite images of the ‘madding crowd’ acting beyond all rhyme and reason, rioting itself was a practice which evolved in response to changing conditions. (v) That the last two points make it difficult to sustain the orthodox periodisation of the history of protest made famous by Charles Tilly and others. (vi) That individual riots can be fruitfully analysed through the lens of a career. (vii) And, finally, that different theories of riots’ internal dynamics (in particular those of Waddington, Reicher, Collins and Thompson) can be brought together when studying real events.
I have also made a provisional case for several arguments which, although grounded in substantial evidence, need to be extended and tested more rigorously. These include the claim (viii) that riots can be triggered by many different kinds of events, and that different triggers work in different ways and have different causal statuses. (ix) That the key to sustaining a riot is continually re-creating a sense of identity, emotional energy and justification for the riot. And (x) that those same processes are involved in shaping the internal dynamics of a riot across different time scales. Finally, there are several areas which I have flagged for future research and in which I can only offer speculative suggestions. (xi) The relationship between organisation and violence is clearly complex and needs unpacking. For example, I have found situations in which centralised organisations helped sustain unrest, others where competition between organisations led to violence and more where organisations tried to restrain rioting. (xii) Different regions also seem to experience different levels and traditions of rioting. Local historians have always recognised this, but sociologists may need to resist their tendency to generalise too swiftly. (xiii) We also need to find ways of quantifying the scale of rioting, in particular more work is needed to determine how many people were involved in larger riots. (xiv) It would be interesting to systematically test what sorts of riots, in what conditions, are likely to trigger larger waves of unrest. (xv) On a related theme, we need to understand what conditions enable rioters to sustain identity, emotional energy and justification. (xvi) Finally, we need to think about how we can approach the ‘moral career’ of rioters and uncover what rioters thought about their own participation.

But, the question remains, what can this historical account of 19th and early 20th century rioting tell us about the future? How will it help us make sense of the wave of riots that some people think is about to overwhelm us? I don’t think that it can be used to produce empirical generalisations or predictions about when and where riots will break out. Problems around the lack of data and of accurate measurements of the number of participants prohibit building a quantitative model from my catalogue of riots. And, any generalisations I might want to draw would be specific to a particular period of British history, and I doubt whether they would still apply today. When new riots do break out, the framework of the career of a riot and the history of rioting as a practice might prove to be useful starting points for understanding them. But new riots may also throw up new patterns and processes which I have not come across. But, at a more general level, this historical account does set out a vision of the relationship between riots and time, a vision which will help us to understand the riots themselves and the landscape of political struggle that surrounds them.
Attempts to locate riots in time fall into roughly three camps. Riots are either located far back in prehistory, as an outbreak of primitive savagery, or they are seen as an anachronism from the premodern era, or they are seen as the forward-looking mark of modernity and a force for change. None of these visions of riots’ place in time is adequate. Instead, I suggested picturing riots as Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, swept along by the storm of progress (Benjamin 2006, p. 389-397). As the rubble-heap of the past grows, riots are driven into future while facing the past and orienting themselves by it. But this does not tell us if riots are simply detritus blown by the winds of change? Or whether they can open up the world to new futures? Whether riots can radically transform society, for better or worse? In brief, I am sceptical about riots potential to enact sudden change. Instead, I favour a view of history as a gradual unfolding, an evolution rather than a series of punctuating events. This doesn’t mean that change is impossible, but means that, instead of waiting for spontaneous revolutions, political strategy should be focussed on long term organising and the importance of linking together different waves of struggle across time and space.

It seems intuitively plausible that sudden outbreaks of collective, public violence could be a force for change in the world. And I’m prepared to accept that riots might play this role. But, I’m not convinced that many individual riots actually have illuminated a new future. In contrast to Badiou’s optimistic ‘rebirth of History’ (2012), the study of riots leads you towards pessimism. The most obvious place to look for their effects would be the record of successful riots. And while riots sometimes did achieve short term victories, these were often the culmination of other forces and processes, and any gains were normally eroded fairly quickly (the same could be said of strikes e.g. Biggs 2002). The overall tradition of rioting as part of a larger struggle may well have been fairly effective, but individual battles rarely turned the course of a war (Hobsbawm 1952, Thompson 1971). Equally, many riots don’t seem to have any instrumental goals at all. These expressive outbursts of rage or celebration were responses to changes happening elsewhere, rather than initiating something themselves. To take a more modern example, studies of the riots in England in 2011 have shown that, while they had some limited impact on public opinion (Hohl et al 2013, Reeves and de Vries 2016), even those effects were short lived (de Rooij et al 2015). Meanwhile the only policy change has been the introduction of neoliberal, property-led regeneration project for Tottenham (Dillon and Fanning 2015). Clearly, those events did not open up new futures or even transform the local areas in which they took place.
But what about recent riots in Egypt and Tunisia? These are Badiou’s prime examples of modern ‘Historical riots’, riots which mark a rupture in the established order and the possibility of real change (Badiou 2012; for accounts of the riots in Egypt see El-Ghobashy 2011 and Ketchley 2017). Unfortunately, over recent years existing power structures seem to reasserted themselves in both countries. And, while the effects of those uprisings are by no means insignificant, the changes were contained within the fairly narrow boundaries set by larger forces. It seems that this might be increasingly true of revolutions more generally. In a forthcoming book, Mark Beissinger suggests that at the global scale, although revolutions have become more frequent and more successful since 1900, they have also had less and less impact. He puts this down to increasing urbanisation, which allows large crowds to gather next to the centres of power, attain visibility and pile internal and external pressure onto the regime. This makes regime change more likely, but also means that revolutions are likely to end in a negotiated settlement where mild reforms are traded for peace on the streets (see Beissinger 2017). There may also be other factors behind these untransformative revolutions. At the very least, in order for a negotiated settlement to emerge there must be (a) a pro-reform wing within the existing ruling elite, and (b) broad consensus across elites and challengers in terms of socio-economic policy (often of the Western, liberal variety). This sketches out some of the material, political and ideological factors that might be relevant in explaining which revolutions/riots might, or might not, change the world. But, it also reinforces a general pessimism about the likelihood of sudden, dramatic change. Ultimately, even if riots aren’t simply debris buffeted by the storm of history, they are very rarely a magical rupture marking the start of a new age.

This also has implications for how we imagine the storm of history itself. There are various ways of approaching this question history’s overall shape. Penelope Corfield focusses on three interconnected processes, continuity, gradual evolution (or micro-change) and revolution (or macro-change), and tries to unite these within one single vision of ‘the shape of history’ (Corfield 2008). David Collings offers a slightly different perspective, describing the ‘premodern vision’ of history as a cycle or an eternal present, where temporary reversals were possible, but the overarching structure of society remained the same. He then contrasts this with modern historiography which based on the idea of revolution, sudden ruptures which inaugurate the start of something new (Collings 2009). This second vision echoes what William Sewell calls ‘eventful’ history (1990). Here he follows the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in seeing events as “specific and systematically explicable transformations and re-articulations” of pre-existing social and cultural structures.
(Sewell and McAdam 2001, p. 102). History is therefore driven, not by abstract structural processes, but by specific paradigmatic events. Sewell’s prime example is the French Revolution of 1789 which, he argues, completely transformed people’s sense of their own identity. It “annihilated all legally established corporations and set out to build a new state on the basis of natural rights, civil equality, individual liberty, and national sovereignty. The new social order began with what it took to be a given of nature: independent, individual persons endowed with natural rights” (Sewell 1990, p. 538). This new social order enabled new kinds of collective action based on a radically new sense of people’s place in society. 1789 was therefore a revolutionary rupture, which transformed French culture forever.

The history of the practice of rioting follows a very different pattern to this. Instead of being punctuated by paradigmatic events, it is a gradual, inconsistent and convoluted evolution. This is in some ways close to Charles Tilly’s French (and also British) social history as driven by slowly evolving forces like state-formation, the development of capitalism and the learning processes within social movements (Tilly was the main target of Sewell’s critiques). However, Sewell has argued that this vision of history is simply a matter of perspective, that the only reason events have disappeared is that we’ve zoomed out too far (McAdam and Sewell 2001). But the fact that riots look pretty similar at different scales makes this argument difficult to sustain. Even within the career of an individual riot, I have had to downplay the importance of sudden flashpoints which conjure rioting out of thin air. Riots should be the paradigm for spontaneous and momentous events, which break out nothing, tearing through the fabric of everyday life. But in fact, they’re made up of continually unfolding processes and find their place within the larger, more gradual swings of history.

The most provocative version of this vision of history comes from Alexis de Tocqueville’s account of the French Revolution. He argued that, although the revolutionaries attempted to start afresh, they only managed to take power. Instead of being a new beginning, they preserved the existing power structure and continued a long standing process of state centralisation (de Tocqueville 1856). Although I don’t want to get involved in a debate about the empirical details of the French Revolution, it’s worth noting that even Sewell has to admit that the revolution didn’t actually change everything and that older forms of collective loyalty persisted for at least another fifty years (Sewell 1990, p. 541). What matters is not which interpretation of the French Revolution is correct, but this vision of history as something which gradually unfolds over the longue durée.
If individual riots (and even today’s revolutions) leave the world largely unchanged, then we need an understanding of history which reflects this and allows us to plot a different a course. The first difficulty with this is that visions of history like de Tocqueville’s are fundamentally theories of continuity, they leave very little room for real change. One way of working through this is to draw on George Herbert Mead’s philosophy of time (Mead 1929, 2002). Mead sees time not as empty space but as a process of gradual change, of becoming. His main inspiration seems to have been Darwinian evolution, where new species evolve gradually in response to the changing environment. But crucially, while what eventually happens is conditioned by the past, it’s not completely determined by it. This allows Mead to assume that the world is fundamentally changing, that the new things which emerge are genuine novelties and not simple rearrangements of the past and that the cumulative weight of small changes results eventually adds up. Taking on board his pragmatist spirit, I think we can argue that this is a sensible assumption for sociologists, given the massive constraints on our knowledge and predictive ability. However, this simple assumption has far reaching implications for how we think about time.

Central to Mead’s theory of time is the idea that the past is being continually rewritten to accommodate novelty. He describes this with reference to what he calls ‘emergents’: things which are conditioned by the past but not wholly determined by it. Mead tries to explain this ‘conditioning without complete determination’ using two analogous examples. Under some interpretations of quantum mechanics, although we can predict extremely accurately that energy will be released in a particular form from a set of electrons, there is no reason to think any particular electron will be the one to release that energy. Similarly, Mead draws on Durkheim to suggest that, although we might expect a certain number of suicides to take place every year, who in fact ends up taking their own life is not predetermined. When confronted with these undetermined and surprising ‘emergents’, we look backwards and search for explanations, eventually rewriting the past in a way which makes sense of this new thing. For example, we find a personal, psychological story which explains why this particular person took their own life. In more general terms, he says that: “changes are going on in the universe, and... as a result of these changes the universe is becoming a different universe” (2002, p. 4). Crucially, this universe which is changing includes its own past and the causal relations between past and present. If new things are emerging, which didn’t already have determining relations with the past, then those relations must also be changing. This means that the past is continually shifting in response to novelty. In this way, the past is the “arising of relations
between an emergent and a conditioning world”, it is “what must have been [given where we are now]” (1929, p. 242 and 238). Mead is also keen to make the point that this is the only past which really exists. He has two arguments against the alternative idea of a sort of eternal scroll of past events, a ‘past independent of any present’. The first is phenomenological. Even if this independent, ‘real’ past existed, it would be entirely inaccessible to us and, therefore, it’s not clear how we could apply a human concept like ‘existence’ to something beyond human comprehension. The second is pragmatist. This independent past is never used by us when we are faced by real practical problems, and so it’s entirely irrelevant.

Novelty therefore causes us to rewrite the past. But, rewriting the past is not just an academic exercise. The past, and the causal connections we draw out of it, are the resources we draw on to overcome challenges and control the situations we find ourselves in. This is the practical heart of Mead’s philosophy, a philosophy based on action, on the ways we confront problems and pursue goals. This means that the past and the future are both hypothetical, ever-changing constructs, which we use in a practical way to deal with problems in the present. But, at a more political level, it also means that the strategies we draw up on that basis should reflect our wider vision of history as gradual, evolutionary change. If riots were the transformative events that both conservative and anarchist philosophers think they are, then our political strategy would have to reflect that fact. But in a world where riots and revolutions don’t seem to have that transformative power, we will have to base our strategies on something else.

The second difficulty with this vision of history is that, even if it allows for change, it seems to leave little room for spontaneity. But this doesn’t have to be a problem. There are two sense of spontaneity which can easily be reconciled with this vision of history, and the third, spontaneity as political strategy, is one I think we should abandon anyway. Over the last few chapters, I have shown that some riots do seem to be dependent on the spontaneity of their triggers, but, that other riots were more-or-less inevitable. I’ve also shown that the internal dynamics which help explain the escalation of riots can be described and analysed. In that sense spontaneity doesn’t need to be a residual category of things that happen magically. Rather than treat it as what is left over after other explanations have come up short, I think we can treat spontaneity as the property of contingent processes: we call processes spontaneous when they arise in surprising ways. It can therefore be reintroduced into an uneventful vision of history. But, we shouldn’t push the significance of spontaneity too far. Elias Canetti’s famous theory of spontaneous riots is based largely on three of
his own personal experiences: one a parade in August 1914 in Vienna after Germany declared war on Russia, another was a riot by workers in Frankfurt in June 1922 after the German Foreign Minister was assassinated by fascists, the last was the famous July Revolt in Vienna in 1927 after members of a right wing militia were pardoned for killing a veteran and a young boy during a Social Democratic Party parade (Canetti 1962, Borch 2012). Canetti’s poetic, mythical rendering of the importance of crowds makes spontaneity one of their defining features. Yet, although he personally experienced all three events as spontaneous, they were actually the result of long organisational struggles which Canetti played no part in.

Spontaneity can also be a deliberately constructed, defensive manoeuvre (Reddy 1977, Polletta 1998). Just as the opacity of workplace customs (Behagg 1982), the vagueness of customary rights (Thompson 1991), or the leaderlessness of modern protests (Tarrow 1989) may in fact serve a functional purpose, so too might ‘spontaneity’ have been useful for rioters (not least when questioned by criminal courts – a common source of archival material). Therefore, in order to preserve the apparent ‘spontaneity’ of riots, people had to enact a fairly standardised and traditional repertoire, drawing on very commonly-known themes and blindingly obvious symbols. This necessary recourse to the quotidian limited the potential for genuinely radical or revolutionary action even when such ideas were fairly well-known. As Marx said, even in “epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95” (2013, p. 1).

The final legacy of spontaneity is as a political strategy, one in which riots play a central role. Here there is a clear contradiction between left-communist/anarchist theories of spontaneous revolution, and the idea of history as a gradual unfolding in which riots leave only a slight imprint. But, it should also be a warning to those who advocate a kind of nonviolent revolutionary rupture, a state-first political strategy based on a quick and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth. In order to adopt a strategy of spontaneism, you need to believe that historical ruptures are possible and even likely. Even then you either have to wait for a mystical breakthrough, or you have to make performative claims which call forth a riot through the very act of declaring it. This notion of
performativity is crucial to the rhetorical strategy used by writers like the Invisible Committee and Joshua Clover, who insist on sudden riots being the key political tool. However, it also illuminates the weaknesses of that strategy. Performative claims only actually fulfil their own prophecies when they are spoken with authority. So, when a judge declares someone guilty, they have the power to make their declaration at the same time a reality. But, the Invisible Committee’s real lack of authority to declare anything (despite Glenn Beck’s allegations), reveals the need for organisation and long term struggle: the very things that these theories of spontaneity were supposed to move us away from. In fact, it moves us back to a vision of history as a gradual unfolding of different processes and struggles, one in which riots and revolutions are no longer the focus of hopes for change.

This image of riots blown backwards by the storm of history, a storm which itself unfolds in a process of gradual evolution, opens up a political terrain which is better suited to Gramsci’s war of position than anything else (Gramsci 2009). This military metaphor, based on the trench warfare of World War I, highlights the need to develop tactics which allow you to seize particular, defensible and strategic positions within the field of struggle. But it also suggests that the links between different waves of protest are as important as the events themselves. Indeed, the uprisings in Manchester in May 1812 with which I started this thesis, were part of a much wider fight. ‘Collective bargaining by riot’ was an entire repertoire of contention, a whole mode of struggle firmly rooted in the newly emerging industrial communities of Britain (Hobsbawm 1952, Charlesworth 1993, Rule 2000). Riots were therefore part of a much larger and ongoing conflict, one in which violence of all kinds played a central role. As the pithy doggerel posted on the outside of a Kentish church put it, “Before we arise / Less will safise” (quoted in Thompson 1971, p. 126).

But all these tactics, whether violent, threatening or peaceful, had deep roots in local society and that is what lay behind their successes and what linked successive phases of struggle: the Luddism of 1812 with the Reform Crisis of the 1830s and the Chartism of the 1840s.

The links between the various phases of the struggle can take many forms. As the Italian left faded through the 1970s and 1980s, it became embedded in ‘submerged networks’ which helped to sustain some of its identity and culture (Melucci 1989). The American women’s movement preserved many of its goals, debates and tactics through the mid-20th century in exclusive, centralised and committed circles of activists (Taylor 1989). The process of building these structures is part of society’s capacity to take action upon itself, what Alain Touraine called ‘historicity’ (Touraine 1977,
1985). He argued that control over this capacity is what is at stake in social movement struggles and particularly emphasised the battle to define the identities of those involved and the field of conflict itself. In the context of my vision of history, the importance of ‘historicity’ would seem to suggest that intellectuals and historians have the central role to play in rewriting the past and defining the historical experiences which shape the present. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ultimately, as Mead pointed out, practical activity is what affects the present and reshapes the past. It is our actions, the riots and campaigns of the future, that will give meaning to these past waves of struggle. Whether the Luddism of 1812, the Reform Crisis of the 1830s and the Chartism of the 1840s are ultimately seen as incremental progressions or a history of defeat depends on where we end up. As the future emerges, that past will be rewritten, switching register from tragedy to triumph and back again.
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# Appendix

## Riot catalogue and sources

All references to The Times are given as they appear in their digital catalogue. This should ensure that they are easier for a reader to find, even if it means that the titles of the article are occasionally incorrect. Full working notes including summaries of each source and coding for each riot event are available at: www.matteotiratelli.site. These online working notes may well contain spelling errors.

### Manchester catalogue

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>June 2</td>
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<td>1850</td>
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<td>July 18</td>
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