The St. Pauls' riot: an explanation of the limits of crowd action in terms of a social identity model*†

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Abstract

The paper contains a detailed study of the St. Pauls' riots of April 1980. Particular attention is paid to the limits of participation in the event and the limits of crowd action. It is argued that these limits show clear social form and cannot be explained in terms of the individualistic theories that dominate crowd psychology. Instead a model of crowd behaviour based on the social identity model is advanced to account for the observations. It is concluded that crowd behaviour is more sophisticated and creative than hitherto allowed and that the neglect of this field should be remedied.

INTRODUCTION

The fascination of crowd psychology lies in the fact that it seeks to account for behaviour that shows clear social coherence—in the sense of a large amount of people acting in the same manner—despite the lack of either pre-planning or any structured direction. The theoretical interest lies in the attempt to discover a psychological basis for this coherence. There is however a more pragmatic reason why such behaviour is of concern: it relates to the social consequence of such behaviour. Out of such concern was crowd psychology born.

The discipline emerged towards the end of last century as an establishment response to a wave of working class unrest. Faced with seemingly spontaneous protest actions involving large homogeneous masses, the establishment sought less to understand than to discredit and repress the threat. Indeed the earliest works on the crowd were written by criminologists discussing on what basis to punish crowd participants—should all be considered guilty or just a criminal core of ringleaders who incited the others? (*cf.* Tarde, 1890; Sighele, 1892). Moreover the most influential of all books on the crowd: Le Bon's *The Crowd—A Study of the Popular Mind* (1947) gained its repute not through any theoretical novelty (it is, if anything,

an object lesson in plagiarism) but rather through its conscious attempt to advise the establishment on how to contain crowds or even use them against the socialist opposition. For his efforts Le Bon gained fulsome praise from, amongst others, Mussolini and Goebbels.

Only by bearing in mind the circumstances of its birth is it possible to understand the biases that permeate theoretical explanations of crowd behaviour. Because they were not prepared to admit that crowd action may have been a response to gross social inequality and active repression, theorists were forced to ignore the social context in which such actions occurred. This had a number of consequences, both in terms of description and of theory. On the descriptive level certain characteristics of the syndicalist crowds—as they appeared to these 'gentleman' observers—were abstracted from the context of class struggle and converted into generic characteristics of the crowd: violence, irrationality, fickleness, mental inferiority. On a theoretical level there were two ways in which the social causation of crowd behaviour was denied.

The older, exemplified by Le Bon, is group mind theory. This asserts that individuals in the crowd lose their conscious personality and revert to a primitive racial unconscious which accounts for the barbarism of crowd action. Slightly more modern is the extreme individualism of Allport who asserts that the individual in the crowd is the same as the individual alone 'only more so' (*cf.* Allport, 1924, p. 295). While these two approaches are diametrically opposed to each other, the one proposing individuality is extinguished in the crowd the other that it is accentuated, they are nonetheless united in one crucial premise. Both suggest that the only mechanism capable of directing planned or rational behaviour is a sovereign individual identity.

The principal problem with such approaches is that they systematically exclude any social basis for the coherence of crowd behaviour. Not only does this imply that crowd behaviour lacks socially meaningful form but also that it is insensitive to social context. These problems become clearer when one considers the nature of the limits of crowd events.

One can consider the question of limits in the senses. Firstly the limits of participation: that is who does and who does not take part in crowd events. Secondly the limits of content: this addresses which actions do and which do not occur during a crowd event.

Concerning the question of participation the group mind theory would suggest that all members of a given race will take part. Such an approach fails before Milgram and Toch's most basic of criteria: to explain why riot police do not get drawn in by the rhetoric of a crowd demagogue (*cf.* Milgram and Toch, 1969). On the other hand, the individualistic approach predicts that participation will be tied to personality type. However, despite attempts to do so, no common trait has ever been found to distinguish membership versus non-membership of a crowd (*cf.* McPhail, 1970).

Turning to content, both approaches are even more inadequate. The group mind theory has little to say except that whatever the situation a crowd of the same race will always act in the same way and that violence and mayhem will be involved; the crowd is only powerful for destruction says Le Bon (1947). Allportian individualism can only seek to tie behaviours to personality, but this is both empirically and theoretically insufficient. Empirically, as noted above, no common trait character-

izes crowd participation, but even if it did it is unclear how personality factors could determine the precise behaviours of any crowd event.

Despite the antiquity of these theories their influence on later work has perpetuated exactly the same problems as those outlined above. (It should be noted that the focus of concern here is specifically on the psychology of crowd action. General models of social movements are of interest only insofar as they relate specifically to this question.) The group mind tradition is most directly represented in de-individuation theory which is a translation of the Le Bonian notion of 'submergence'. The idea is that individuals in unstructured groups cease self-evaluation. This causes a weakening of conventional controls resulting in behaviour which is generally uncontrolled and destructive (Festinger, Pepitone and Newcomb, 1952; Zimbardo, 1969). There is a double problem with this approach. First, the de-individuation literature ignores the context of behaviour and fails to distinguish between anonymity in a group and anonymity when isolated. There is evidence that individuals who are de-individuated in groups do not always behave anti-socially, but rather show increased adherence to group norms (Reicher, 1982a; White, 1977). Secondly, crowd members appear as anonymous only with respect to outsiders and are nearly always known to some other crowd members (McPhail, 1971).

There are two principal ways in which the individualistic tradition is represented in modern crowd-related research. The first is 'social-facilitation' theory which proposes that presence of an audience accentuates the distinctiveness of individual behaviour patterns. While there is much controversy over the theoretical basis of this relationship (*cf.* Geen and Gange, 1977; Sanders, 1981) there is consensus as to the effects. Thus the model is insensitive both to the nature of the audience and to the context in which the subject is acting. While it may propose that behaviours will be more extreme it cannot account for the content of social behaviours.

The second major individualistic approach is that of game theorists such as Olson (1965), taken up by sociologists such as Oberschall (1973) and developed into a psychological rational calculus by Berk (1972, 1974). The idea is that individuals act as a joint function of 'payoff' and 'probability of support'. In the crowd the values of the second term are altered leading to more extreme behaviours. However, the model specifies neither what behaviours will be displayed nor how 'payoff' or 'probability of support' are to be assessed. Since understanding those behaviours which will elicit a high probability of support addresses the central questions of the basis for contagion or social influence in the crowd this approach begs the practical questions of crowd psychology. In other words it acts less as a specification of the mechanisms underlying crowd behaviour than as a meta-theoretical justification of crowd action as individual rational choice.

In recent years, however, two novel approaches to the crowd have been advanced. The first is emergent norm theory (Turner and Killian, 1972). This proposes that crowd behaviour is governed by social norms. These norms emerge during an initial period of 'milling' when the actions of visually prominent individuals ('keynoting activities') come to be seen as characteristic of the crowd as a whole. Thus it is implied that the homogeneity of crowds—in an initial period at least—is an illusion. Yet even an avowed supporter of the position admits that the rapidity with which norms arise does not square with this picture of extended interaction as a pre-requisite for norm formation (Wright, 1978). There is, however, a more basic

problem with emergent norm theory. In explaining the genesis of emergent norms, Turner and Killian relate them simply to the activities of keynoters. As such their position resolves itself into elitist version of Allportian individualism; instead of crowd behaviour being explained in terms of the personalities of all participants it is tied to the personality of a dominant few.

The second novel approach is that taken by Moscovici (1981). Moscovici proposes that mass behaviour is characterized by the persistence of mythologized perceptions of the past in the form of collective representations. These representations are based on 'persons and situations with which we are identified, our parents, our nation, a war or a revolution with which especially powerful emotions are associated' (1981, p. 392). While Moscovici is above all concerned with the nature of charismatic leadership (which, he argues, resides upon the ability to reconcile the dialectic between order and equality through association with idealized images of past tyrants) and less with the details of crowd behaviour, the concept of identification and its related representations as a basis for crowd action provides a powerful conceptual tool.

The concept of identification is central to the model of crowd behaviour adopted by Reicher (1982a, b, forthcoming). This model is based on the social identity approach of Tajfel and Turner (*cf.* Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1982). In essence, it is argued that a crowd is a form of social group in the sense of a set of individuals who perceive themselves as members of a common social category, or to put it another way, adopt a common *social* identification. Turner (1982) argues that social identification is a necessary and sufficient condition for a form of social influence which he calls 'Referent Informational Influence' (R.I.I.). This refers to a process whereby group members seek out the stereotypic norms which define category membership and conform their behaviour to them. It is, in effect, a process of self-stereotyping. The implications of R.I.I. provide a basis for understanding the characteristics of crowd action. In order to account for the operation of R.I.I. it is necessary to consider what characterizes the crowd as a special form of group. Three criteria must obtain for a group to be considered as a crowd. The first is that group members are face to face, the second is that the situation in which the group acts is in some way novel or ambiguous and the third is that all formal means of reaching group consensus are blocked. The significance of these conditions lies in the following dilemma: how are crowd members to conform to stereotypic norms when the fact that they are in an unprecedented situation means that there are no appropriate norms? The answer is that crowd members must elaborate an appropriate situational identity which at once provides a guide for action and conforms to their common social identification. The way in which this will be done is through what Turner (1982) calls the 'inductive aspect of categorization'. In other words, criterial norms will be inferred from the actions of others as long as (a) they are clearly seen as ingroup members, and (b) that the action is consonant with the attributes of defining their social identification. For this to occur, however, the crowd members must be face to face. It is clear, however, that a range of behaviours will satisfy these two conditions. Since there is no formal means of validating a given behavioural norm—either by means of orders in a hierarchical system or a democratic decision-making process—then crowd norms may quickly be superceded as new behaviours come to be seen as more appropriate. This would account for the rapidly changing yet homogeneous nature of crowd action (*cf.* Wright, 1978).

When considering the twin problem of the limits of crowd behaviour this model has two crucial implications. Firstly, the social influence process operating in the crowd depends on social identification. Thus the basis of behavioural homogeneity is a common social identification and, conversely, only those who have identified with the relevant category will be subject to crowd influence ('contagion'). In other words, the limits of participation will be the limits of identification.

Secondly, only those behaviours which are consonant with crowd members' social identification are liable to define behavioural norms (become 'contagious'). Therefore while crowds may show a range of behaviours, that range will be limited by those attributes which define the social category to which they belong. The socialist crowds of which Le Bon wrote may have done many things but they would never have attacked the poor, or crossed a picket line.

The aim of this paper is to use the data from one crowd episode in order to provide support for the above model. In particular the limits of the episode will be examined in order to demonstrate that it is impossible to explain the form of behaviours without recourse to the social conception of themselves and their world displayed by participants. The data cannot be considered as 'proof' of the social identity model. Apart from anything else, events such as that described make it somewhat difficult to stop participants and measure cognitive structures such as identity. However, it is intended to show that the social identity model can account for the event in a way that previous theories cannot.

THE ST. PAULS' 'RIOTS'

The events to be described occurred in Bristol on 2nd April 1980. Only a part of what happened during the so-called 'St. Pauls' riots' will be considered. In particular, only the period before the police withdrew and shops were looted and various buildings set on fire will be considered. This is not because the themes to be elaborated below do not apply—although there are differences between the two periods (*cf.* Reicher, forthcoming), but because the data is more lengthy and detailed and adds little to the basic argument.

The data itself comes from a number of sources. The official police report was obtained as well as the statement of the Chief Fire Officer. The 'St. Pauls' Riot Opinion' written by a lawyer for the Police Authority was made available to the author as well as the legal opinion for this authority and Lloyds Bank concerning insurance claims. All relevant TV and radio programmes were taped and all newspaper reports were collected. Many photographs were assembled, including photographs from public (principally newspaper files) and private sources. Twenty children (average age 11 years) were interviewed. Some 20 individuals were approached on the streets and notes were made on conversations immediately afterwards. Finally six subjects were interviewed and interviews tape-recorded. These were simply chosen as the only six people who had taken part in the relevant events and who were prepared to be recorded. Interviews were unscheduled so as to retain maximum flexibility. Where specific quotations are used identification will include source (tape, script, conversation, radio, TV, paper) colour (white, black), sex (male, female) and age.

Before continuing with an account of the events it should be emphasized that there were considerable practical difficulties in obtaining this data. In particular

black respondents were naturally suspicious of the researcher's motivations and possible uses of data. Thus, the data is open to challenge on the basis of representativeness, accuracy and so on. Such difficulties are insuperable, but it should be reiterated that, however categorical various assertions may be, the paper is not intended as absolute proof, but rather as highly suggestive, for a theoretical account of crowd behaviour.

The events

The account to be presented below was constructed out of multiple partial accounts. The procedures used were those of methodological and data triangulation (*cf.* Denzin, 1970). Thus data from different types of source and from different instances of a given type was combined. Unless stated otherwise, events are only included where two or more sources confirm each other. A special problem concerned timing and sequencing of events. Subjects tended to confuse times so as to describe events as consecutive which were in fact separated by a considerable interval. Of particular help in sorting out the sequence of events were 'objective' indices such as photographs, times of live radio bulletins and timings of official reports (police and fire service). Nevertheless, while the sequence seems fairly well established all timings given in the text should be taken as approximate.

(a) At approximately 3.30 p.m. on 2nd April 1980 two plain clothes policemen entered the Black and White cafe on Grosvenor Road. On the road outside were another 12 officers and more officers with dogs were held in reserve, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away, in Portland Square. The purpose of the raid was to execute a warrant issued to investigate allegations of illegal drinking (the B and W had lost its licence in 1979) and the sale of drugs. Shortly afterwards the 12 officers waiting outside came into the cafe. Two men, Bertram Wilkes (the owner) and Newton Leopold Brown were arrested. The police went into the cellars and began to take out the 372 crates of beer and lager found on the premises. These were stacked outside the cafe ready to be removed.

There is little consensus as to what happened during this period. The police claim they showed a warrant and all proceeded peacefully. Several witnesses in the cafe claim no warrant was shown and that the police harrassed those inside. Further rumours suggest that the two plain clothes police completed a drugs deal before calling in their colleagues (conv. BM 18) or that the police were even smoking 'ganja' in the cafe (conv. BM 20). Whether true or not, these perceptions indicate a general feeling about the illegitimacy of the police action.

Just as the police initially arrived Cabot School, behind Grosvenor Road, had broken up for Easter. As the children went home they saw the beginnings of the police action and hence the news spread very rapidly. Moreover several people who had been in the cafe during the raid were allowed to leave. They too passed on word of what was happening. Over the hour from 3.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. as the police stacked liquor outside the B and W a crowd gathered. It was a warm day and people just hung around watching.

(b) At about 4.30 p.m. the mood changed. It is impossible to point to one incident which sparked off the initial bout of violence. At least eight different accounts have been given of the initial flare-up. Indeed it is false to believe that there is a single 'real' story of what happened. For most individuals, not at the front
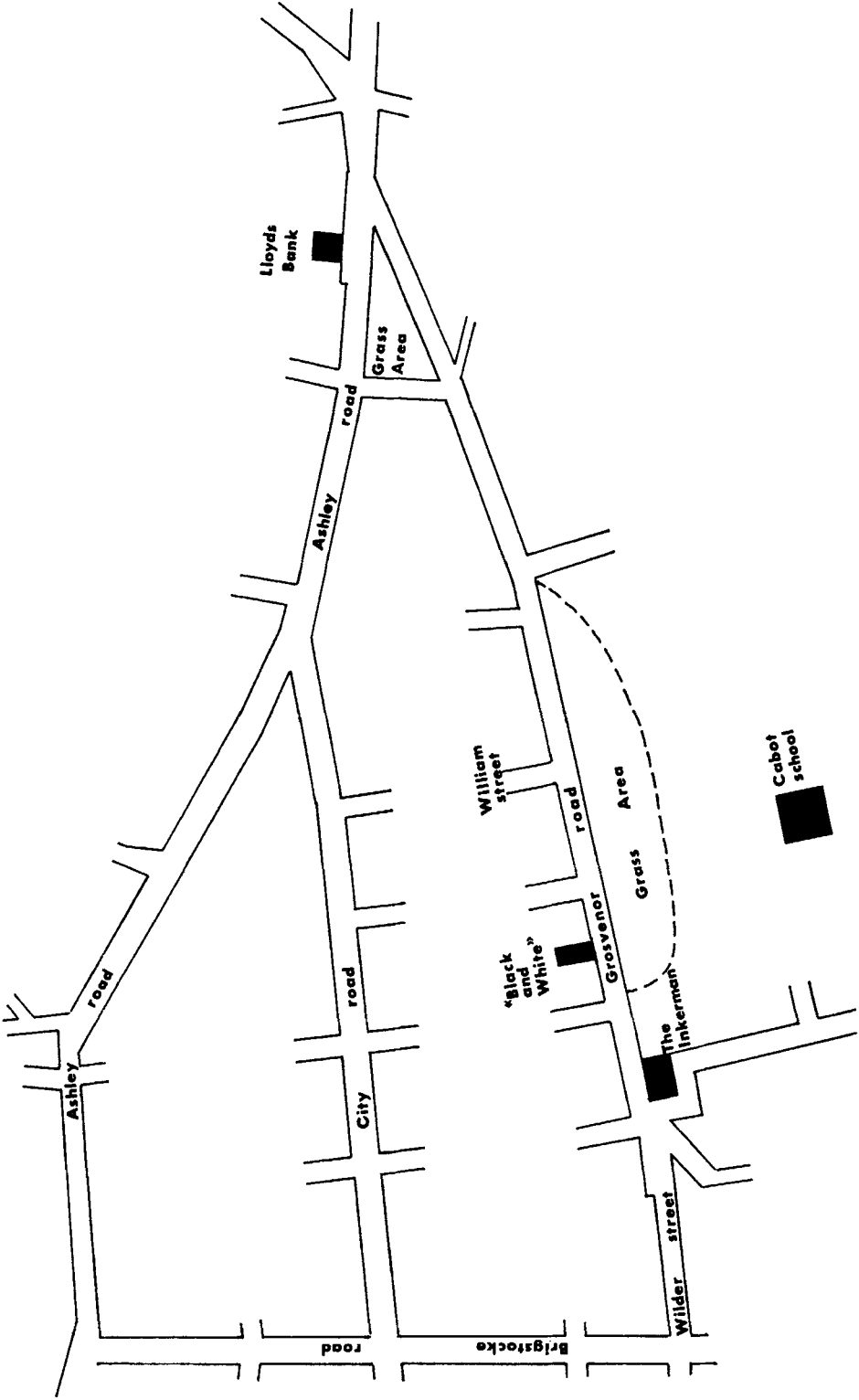
Figure 1. Map of St. Pauls

of the crowd, all they knew was that a commotion was going on. Accounts of what was happening filtered to the back and it was those rumours which provided a basis for their action. What is significant, therefore, is that all the accounts contained as a central theme, an unjustified and unprovoked police attack on the Black and White—seen by many as the focus for St. Pauls' inhabitants. Apart from one set of stories which centre on a man whose trousers were ripped by the police and whose requests for compensation were rudely rejected. (How a row over torn trousers led to . . . 'Flashpoint', *Daily Mirror*, 5.4.80). Most stories centre on three police who came out of the Black and White with drug exhibits. According to some they struck out calling the crowd 'black bastards' (conv. BM 18); according to others they had a man with them who made a break for it and dogs were set on him (radio BM?); according to one witness the police ran after a black youth and beat him up (*Guardian*, 5.4.80).

Whatever the exact cause, the three police and others in the area were pelted with bricks. The windscreen of the police car to which these three fled was smashed, as was that of a civilian who, according to one informant, 'had smiled when the police hassled us' (conv. BM 24). One police motorcyclist and a police dog-handler were hit in the face by bricks.

(c) As the police came under attack a help call went out and many police vehicles flowed into the area. By about 5 o'clock, the situation had calmed down. The police began to leave again. The last of the beer was loaded into a police van. As this van drew off the police came under attack again. The van tried to get away but was stopped outside the Inkerman Pub, overturned and the beer was stolen. Several police who had been outside the Black and White fled, however, a number were trapped inside. Two police cars parked further down Grosvenor Road, opposite William Street, came under attack and were turned over. Police officers from one turned it back over and drove off—the occupants of the other fled leaving it upside down. More help calls went out and about 30–40 police regrouped behind the Inkerman Pub.

(d) At about 5.30 p.m. the police marched up Grosvenor Road from the Inkerman in close formation, intending, according to the official report, to relieve their colleagues inside the Black and White. As they drew near to the cafe they again came under attack. This attack intensified as they reached the cafe and, according to one witness (conv. WM 30), smashed in the windows with their truncheons. Some police defended themselves with milk crates and with the help of dogs made forays into the crowd whom they managed to disperse. At about this time the police car that was left, upside down, opposite William Street, was set on fire—a group of three or four youths (including at least one white) ran up to it and threw a match in the petrol tank.

(e) At about 5.45 p.m. the situation was calm again. Some police withdrew back to the Inkerman Pub, others patrolled the grass area opposite the Black and White with dogs. Yet others stood around in groups. A fire engine came to extinguish the burning car—it was not impeded and children helped unroll the hoses. All through this period people were coming home from work and large numbers of people lined the streets to watch what was going on. Although calm, there was a feeling of tension, of 'I don't know what is going to happen next' (conv. WF 26).

(f) The police had called a removal van to tow away the burnt out car. It arrived at 6.30 p.m. and the car was hitched up to it. The police drew up in formation in

front of the van with a line of police dogs in front. As they started to move the crowd withdrew, then a stone was thrown and a hail of 30–40 stones descended on the police. They began to scatter, in some disarray, up Grosvenor Road, towards the grass area at the junction with Ashley Road, all the way coming under attack from the crowds lining the streets.

At the same time as this, the police regrouped at the other end of Grosvenor Road, by the Inkerman, then marched up the road in formation. They too came under a fierce barrage of sticks, stones and bottles. By way of side streets, they retreated into City Road where, for the first time, riot shields were issued.

(g) For the next 30 minutes, from about 6.45 p.m. to 7.15 p.m. there was a running battle between police and the crowd. It had two centres, one being the junction of City Road and Ashley Road, and the other being the junction of Grosvenor Road and Ashley Road (round the grass area). The numbers involved are unclear—estimates varying from 300 to 3000. A reasonable estimate seems to be that a total of about 60 police faced two groups of 2/300 people actively attacking them with a total of 2000 in the area (*cf.* 'St. Pauls' Riot Opinion', Malcolm Cotterill).

As the first group of police reached the grass area there was a pause. Then an old man walked up to a parked panda car and kicked in its lights. There was a loud cheer and missiles were flung at the police. These were exposed on all sides and after a while were so fiercely pressed that they were forced to fall back towards City Road. On City Road itself the police seemed to be fairly disorganized—marching up the road in a phalanx protected by shields and then falling back as they came under attack and then, again, marching forward.

During this period two noticeable events occurred involving police cars. The first incident concerned three police cars which came in from lower Ashley Road. Outside Lloyds Bank they were blocked by the crowd. The occupants got out and fled. The crowd converged on the cars, stoned them, in so doing breaking the bank windows, turned them over and later set fire to them.

The second incident involved two cars which sped into the area from the west end of Ashley Road. According to one witness (tape WM 35) they were doing 70–80 mph; according to another (tape WF 25) 50–60 mph. The first car was met by a barrage of bricks, the windscreen shattered, the driver was hit, his face was covered in blood. (He later needed nine stitches in the head.) The car swerved wildly nearly going into the crowd, then raced on and out of the area. The second car braked hard and reversed as fast as possible away from the crowd.

Despite all this, throughout this time traffic was flowing through the area, people were coming home, some were shopping, many were watching

(h) By about 7.15 p.m. all the police were deployed on City Road. They had formed a cordon at the end, but were so badly exposed that they were forced to retreat. As they retreated the crowd surged forward flinging missiles at them. Skips along the road provided ample ammunition. As the police retreated some people came out of their houses joining in the attack, others came from the side streets to stone the police from behind. Outnumbered and outflanked the police line disintegrated and they retreated in disarray some being chased up the side streets. Officially the police 'withdrew' at 7.26 p.m., by about 7.30 p.m. they were back at Trinity Road Police Station.

(i) After the police had left the crowd did not stray beyond the boundaries of St.

Pauls. Indeed as soon as the last officer had been chased beyond the junction of City Road and Brigstock Road nobody followed after them. Moreover with the police gone the crowd then moved apart to let the traffic back through and even helped direct it in order to ease congestion.

The limits of behaviour: some problems for explanation

In this section three themes will be drawn out from the data. The first will be to show that the 'riot' was marked by uniform behaviour showing distinct social limits. The second, that the event was not pre-planned and that rather the behaviour was spontaneous. The third theme concerns the way in which both participation and the content of crowd action can be related to social definitions of themselves and their social world.

(a) In his survey of the American urban riots of the 1960's, Fogelson (1971) was moved to write 'restraint and selectivity were among the most crucial features of the riots' (p. 17). The same statement holds true for the present study. Indeed, perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole episode was the backdrop of normality on which the so-called 'battle of Bristol' (*Bristol Evening Post*, 3.4.80) was played out. As police cars were burnt and officers stoned, cars flowed through the area, people walked home, families did their shopping, neighbours watched and chatted about the events.

Apart from the police, who, without exception, seem to have been targets of attack, the only other victims of intentional violence were camera operators and photographers. This seems to have been simply a function of the fact that people in the crowd were afraid of the film being used by the police (tape WM 35, conv. WM 30). Of the 60-odd police in the area 22 were injured and 27 received minor injuries. In all, 21 police vehicles were damaged, eight by fire with six completely destroyed (these figures, from the official police report, include the period up until 11.05 p.m. when the police re-entered the area, most however, occurred in the period under consideration). At the same time not a single individual was intentionally attacked on the streets nor a single private property maliciously damaged. However, it is important not to over-simplify the case. During this time ten civilians were hurt, five private vehicles were damaged and a number of windows were broken. Apart from the photographers, all the civilians seem to have been hurt either by the police or in the cross-fire between police and crowd. Similarly, some windows were broken as missiles aimed at the police or police cars missed their target. This is certainly true of the Black and White, Lloyds Bank and the Criterion Pub. The case of the damaged cars is slightly more complicated. First of all, as mentioned above, one car belonging to a man who was seen to approve of alleged police harrassment was attacked. Secondly, there was a suspicion that several cars coming into the area shortly after 7.30 p.m. were unmarked police cars which were therefore attacked (tape WM 17). This may explain why one or two private cars were stoned as they drove down City Road (one such story, reported by the driver, Kathleen Lee, is reported in several papers). However, there is also an important general point to be made. What is of interest is not so much isolated individual acts as acts which became rapidly generalized and which appear normative. Thus, if a single person throws a stone it cannot be considered as crowd behaviour unless many others join in. Indeed it is only possible to see the boundaries of crowd action

by seeing what acts are not followed or condemned. This is a point of theoretical importance. Turner (1982) argues that one of the main ways through which group members glean categorial norms is what Tajfel calls the 'inductive aspect of categorization'. This refers to norms being based on the observation of the behaviour of other members of the group—the inferred logic being that if they represent the category their behaviour will be based on categorial norms, while there may be superficial similarity, this is distinguished from Turner and Killian's (1972) 'keynoting' in three ways. Firstly, the only qualification for an individual to be seen as a source of norms is that he or she is clearly an ingroup member. Secondly, it is not a matter of norm *creation* but norm *inference* therefore the norms arise immediately—hence accounting for the rapidity with which homogeneous crowd behaviour occurs. Finally, behaviours must fall within the range permissible in terms of the attributes defining social identity. Those which do will become generalized; those which do not will not be seen as normative. Hence an examination of those acts which do and do not generalize provides a means for examining the contours of group identification. Thus it is possible to contrast the reaction to a number of acts involving different targets.

Take the following accounts of acts directed against the police or police related targets:

> (of the second flare up described in 'The events', section c). All hell was let loose, after the first brick had gone in. This policeman dodged behind this van, was getting pelted by bricks (tape WM 30).

> (As the police drew away with the first burnt out car). A few bricks went in and then people closed in the road and everyone started doing it. It just needed that initial encouragement (tape WM 17).

> (of the same incident). As soon as one brick went a sudden shower of about 30 or 40 bricks came sailing over (tape WM 30).

> (of the police cars attacked outside Lloyds Bank *cf.* 'The events', section g). A police car came through and someone started yelling 'brick it!' All hell seemed to let loose and everyone started throwing bricks (tape WM 20).

However, when other targets were attacked there was a very different response:

> 'It was definitely against the police, because nothing or nobody else got hurt, except a bus—that got one window smashed. That could have been deliberate, but I think it was probably not. Everyone went "Ugh", "idiots"' (tape WF 25).

> (In reply to a question about whether private cars got stoned.) There were a few but people that had done it were told off and forcibly stopped from doing it. One boy told the object was the police, direct your antagonism that way (tape WM 35).

Apart from clear limits in terms of targets, there were also clear geographical limits to the action. As described in 'The events', section i, once the police had been chased out of St. Pauls, they were not followed. The only area involved consisted of

City and Grosvenor Roads and the streets backing off them. As the *Sunday Times* commented (6.4.80), even later during the looting, the participants did not stray a yard beyond the boundaries of St. Pauls. Not only that, but once the police were drawn out no one else was stopped from entering the area, indeed crowd members even helped organize the traffic flow.

(b) The most obvious explanation of the clearly discernible form taken by the 'riot' and the concerted behaviour of crowd members is in terms of a pre-existing plan carried out by leaders. Indeed the 'agitator' theory of crowds is as old as crowd action itself. Such ideas were also proposed in the present case. According to one local councillor (conv. WM 55) people were phoning each other up before the trouble started and busloads came down from Coventry and Birmingham with guns. According to a senior Police Officer the participants were a mix of 'emotional psychopaths and subversive anarchists' (conv. WM 55). Furthermore, shortly after the 2nd April, a rumour was circulating in police ranks that Tariq Ali (a prominent socialist) had been present on the day of the riots—in fact Tariq Ali had been there but he arrived on the afternoon of 3rd April.

An examination of the events reveals no pre-planning or leadership. Those involved in the events stress the spontaneity of the crowd's behaviour:

> 'There was no organization or anything like that. It was just totally spontane-ous, but it was . . . I don't know, just a feeling they were invading—bringing a hundred coppers down to St. Pauls. Obviously looking for trouble' (tape WM 17).

> 'Well it just got around (referring to the police raid) then the niggling started it and we just got carried away' (conv. BM 17).

> 'It just burst into a great big riot. It burst like a small balloon first then a gigantic one' (Script BM 11).

A similar description was given of the decision not to move out of St. Pauls and to allow traffic back in.

> 'Cars coming down City Road, they were getting stuck because people were blocking the road. People just moved apart and people stood there directing the cars through. It just seemed really strange, like you'd taken over control of the streets (tape WM 25). (In answer to the question 'Did you consciously decide not to go outside the limits of St. Pauls?'). No, there was just that feeling. I think it was just an assumption by everyone in the crowd—get them (the police) out' (tape WM 17).

Of course, it is possible that all those interviewed were intent on concealing some plot, but given their openness on various other matters, that could have incrimi-nated them, this is most unlikely. Another possibility is that although people were unaware of being led there were a number of individuals inciting violence both verbally and by example. When questioned about those individuals who initiated actions (as described in 'The limits of behaviour': section a) subjects gave the

following types of response:

> 'somebody yelled police cars, pigs or something. I saw three cars come in and pull up outside the bank. Everyone charged towards them . . .

Q. 'Those guys who had yelled, were they leaders or just anyone?'

> 'Anyone. Everybody down there. I saw kids and their parents out, like a family outing' (tape WF 25).

> 'All it needed was the catalyst of one person throwing a brick and all hell let loose' (tape WM 35).

Hence, it seems that, at least in the eyes of those involved, the initiators were simply any other local participant. Of course this does still not absolutely disprove the agent provocateur thesis. Yet, even in the unlikely eventuality that such people were present, it would still be necessary to explain why some actions were generalized and some not, given that the participants were neither aware of following a pre-arranged script, nor obeying pre-determined leaders.

Despite the lack of a formal leadership, several witnesses report a 'sense of leadership':

> 'A lot of the older black Rastas had come in and they seemed to be looked up to by the youths and they, in a sense, took control to a certain extent. Not the extent of the whole operation but to the extent of looking at them as in a sense the leader' (tape WM 35).

> 'A few kids would run out to throw stones, followed by a surge. . . . It didn't seem to be planned. The leaders seemed to be the most agile and the most accurate stone throwers' (conv. WM 30).

It seems, then, that the older, more daring, black youths were looked to by other participants, but not as individuals with a directing role, rather in the sense of a respected section of the community. Moreover, their influence was clearly limited in the ways shown above.

(c) While there is no evidence to support the notion of pre-conceived planning, subjects described their actions in terms of a clear purpose.

> (Talking about the police.) 'What I think they were trying to do was draw us out into the centre. They could have completely got us but it wasn't like that. We were just getting them out of St. Pauls' (tape WM 17).

> 'I think it was quite honestly a case of us against them. Us, the oppressed section of society, if you like, against the police, against authority, basically' (tape WM 25).

In other words, participants saw themselves as ridding St. Pauls of an illegitimate and alien police presence. In raiding the Black and White cafe, which was the one meeting place for the black residents, which had not been closed down by previous

raids, the police were seen as making a fundamental attack on the right of this community to control its own existence (the concept of control is central to the response of all sections of the community. Time after time it was stressed that there is no point in spending money *on* St. Pauls unless it is spent *with* the residents). Moreover when Desmond Pierre was asked, on behalf of the St. Pauls defence committee, to tell a television audience why the committee was set up, he replied: 'We are defending ourselves on a lot of issues, but the main one is just the right to lead a free life' (*TV Eye*). To quote Roy de Freitus, one of the more widely respected figures in St. Pauls:

> 'The message I was getting last night and this morning in the area was: 'They've closed down this, they've closed down that, and if they close this particular one (the Black and White) where do we go from here?"' (*BBC Points West*, 3.4.80).

Or, in the words of two youths outside the Black and White:

> 'Man can't take oppression, man gotta fight. Them police is bastards' (conv. BM 17(a)).

> 'Man can't just sit around all day smoking ganja—we just can't take it. Police think just because you're black they can do anything' (conv. BM 17(b)).

As well as having a well-formed idea of the events as purposeful action, it is clear that crowd members participated as social actors: that is to say as members of a social category rather than as private individuals. There are three types of data that support this contention.

Firstly, subjects described their own participation and that of other crowd members in the following terms:

> 'It was everybody, the whole community' (conv. BM 25).

> 'It was St. Pauls, you know . . . this was just St Pauls. You know the place and the coppers didn't' (tape WM 17).

> 'Just everybody came out of their houses, just everybody local' (tape WF 25).

Or, more simply, from a large group outside the Black and White, the day after the riots:

> 'Everybody' (*BBC Points West*, 3.4.80).

Thus, participants viewed themselves as the St. Pauls' community, defined in opposition to the police as outsiders. This conclusion should be explained in two ways. Firstly, it is not meant to imply that all the community was involved (although participants did stress the breadth of involvement, exemplified by the probably apocryphal story of a woman who came home around 4 p.m. to find her daughter in bed after an all-night party. 'Get out of bed and go on the streets', the mother is quoted as saying, 'there's a riot going on'.) Moreover, as Ken Pryce showed in his

intensive study of St. Pauls (Pryce, 1979) it is probably false to speak of a single community in the area. Nonetheless, crowd members did see themselves as representing the entirety of St. Pauls in the sense of an independent community, fighting for its right to survive. That is to say, the notion of community was a real, albeit ideological, creation for participants. Secondly, there is the question of race. Over the days following the 2nd April, press and politicians conducted a debate over whether the events constituted a race riot or not. After the first day when numerous papers talked of black mobs and black riots, the tendency was to stress the multi-racial composition of the crowd and to down-play racial elements. Empirically, there is no doubt that both black and white were involved in stone throwing and burning police cars, and in that sense it is true that the 'riot' was multi-racial. Yet in many accounts of the riots it is specifically oppression of blacks that is seen as causing and guiding the riots. The police were seen as picking on black people, especially with reference to arrests on suspicion of possession of cannabis (smoking ganja being specifically a black cultural symbol). The Black and White itself is predominantly frequented by black people. Thus there was a certain ambiguity in the use of the concept 'community', at times it was used to denote people suffering oppression because of their blackness. This will be especially clear when the reactions of participants to the riots are examined. Several subjects refer to a new relationship with the police both as people from St. Pauls and as black people. If this is so, then it may seem difficult to reconcile the notion of a homogeneous crowd with a single social conception of themselves with the participation of whites. However, while it seems true to say that the concept of community was defined in terms of black experience this does not mean it cannot be adopted by whites either because of a direct identification with blacks or because the black experience provided a potent frame for understanding their own problems: lack of a job, poverty, problems with the police. As one witness observed of the crowd, 'politically they were all black' (conv. WF 28).

The second way of showing how participants saw themselves as a community against the police comes from examining social relations within the crowd in contrast to those between crowd and police. For the press, and many outsiders, the event was marked first and foremost by aggression and fear:

> 'I had a bit of wartime experience but then you had a foxhole or something to get into, you were inside here' (Shopowner, *BBC Radio Bristol*, 3.4.80).

> 'I am afraid I and my family are going to be killed. The youngsters, hundreds of them, are out of control. They are going wild. They are setting fire to houses and shops and damaging cars' (Publican quoted in *Guardian*, 3.4.80).

Perhaps the best illustration of the way in which outsiders viewed the event is contained in an account of the BBC radio car. It was seen reversing furiously with a look of terror on the face of the driver, alongside a large Rastafarian was running, banging on the roof. As the car passed by my informant heard what the Rastafarian was saying: 'play us a request, play us a request . . .' (conv. WM 28). Crowd members tell a very different story:

> 'It was good, very good—everyone felt great' (conv. BM 20).

'It was lovely, I felt free' (conv. BM 16).

'All the atmosphere was against the police. It wasn't like the papers say. This absolute mad mob. Everyone was together. They were looking at each other the whole time. It was black and white and all ages and that was fantastic' (tape WF 25).

'People were so warm: they said, "glad to be with you, brother", and put their arm around you' (conv. WM 35).

'It was really joyful, that's what they (the media) all leave out, the "joy"' (conv. WM 30).

The warmth of intra-crowd feeling, this contrasts strongly with outsiders' perception and with the violence of inter-group—that is, crowd–police interactions. What is more, the basis of this warmth was mutual membership of the 'community' as described above:

'It was due to police harrassment. Everyone seems to be bound together against it in some way' (tape WM 19).

'You were just grinning at everyone because everyone was from St. Pauls' (tape WM 17).

Thus, intra-group cohesion seemed to exist as a function of a common identification.

The final bit of evidence that points to a common, collective self-definition adopted by participants relates to their description of the effects of the 'riot'.

'We took on the police and beat them. They will never again treat us with contempt. . . . They will respect us now' (BM quoted in *Sun*, 5.4.80).

'We feel great, we feel confident it was a victory and we were worthy of the victory' (BM quoted in *Socialist Challenge*, 10.4.80).

'You go to school, you learn and then—nothing. The colour of your skin determines everything. We can't beat them in the court, but we defeated them on the streets' (BM quoted in *Socialist Challenge*, 10.4.80).

One witness tells how the next day there was something akin to a victory dance on the grass opposite the Black and White. He goes on: 'There were songs like *Beat down Babylon* and all this lark, they were singing. Everyone was sort of smoking, like joints and stuff, in the open air and the coppers just never coming near us'.

In the light of what has been written about reggae music as a conscious cultural form of resistance to oppression (*cf.* Johnson, 1976) it may be significant to consider the lyrics of the song specifically highlighted—*Beat down Babylon* (Babylon signifying the land of oppression and, sometimes, more specifically, the police)—a song once banned in Jamaica for its political effect.

'I an' I going' beat down Babylon,
I an' I going' beat down Babylon,
I an' I mus' whip them wicked men,

> O what a wicked situation,
> I an' I starvin' for salvation,
> This might cause a revolution,
> and a dangerous pollution . . .'

Thus it seems that participants viewed the events of the 2nd April as a collective statement and themselves as a collective mouthpiece. It is significant that two individuals, the local parish priest and a local CRE spokesperson reminded the media of Martin Luther King's assertion that riots are the voices of the unheard. The priest went on to explain:

'The community has stood up to say, very loudly, "I am" '. (Keith Kimber in *Daily Telegraph*, 5.4.80).

Towards an understanding of crowd process

A close examination of the events of 2nd April has revealed a picture of spontaneous social behaviour with the twin characteristics of uniformity across individuals and of clear social limits. It is difficult to see how classic theories of the crowd could deal with these. Group mind theory would have to explain limits in terms of a racial unconscious, though how such an 'unconscious' could determine say geographical limits to the events is unclear. Allportian individualism has a similar problem. It is hard to see individual attributes determining that people should not go beyond the junction of City and Brigstocke Roads. Nor does emergent norm theory fare much better. Firstly, the onset of certain action sequences seems to be immediate, and to preclude the process of keynoting which, for Turner and Killian (1972) is essential for the formation of group norms. Secondly, the theory cannot explain why certain actions (stoning the police) become generalized and others (stoning private cars) do not.

One of the most striking aspects of the data that was collected concerns the correspondence between the limits of behaviour and the definition of 'community' in terms of which participants described themselves. The central elements of 'community' comprised a geographical basis (St. Pauls), an opposition to the police, and a desire to be in control of their own lifestyle. It is interesting to note how these themes became accentuated in accounts of how the disturbances started. Nearly all interviewees stress the unnecessarily large police presence, talking of an 'invasion' of the area. In describing police conduct in the Black and White the impression given is that the police acted like 'a cross between the Sweeney and Kojack' (tape WM 35), in refusing to show warrants and brutalizing the clientele. The notion of control comes through with reference to the importance of ganja (cannabis). Ganja is at once an important symbol of an independent culture and of conflict between the police and locals. Crowd members' perception of the hypocrisy of the police in suppressing that independent culture is brought out in a number of accusations: that the police regularly sell ganja in St. Pauls; that the plain clothes police made a

deal in the Black and White on the 2nd April; that police were smoking ganja inside the Black and White. For present purposes the importance of all these assertions lies not in their truth or otherwise, but rather in what they reveal about the meaning of the concept of community to participants. The attributes of this concept are clearly reflected in the crowd's behaviour. The geographical basis is translated into the decision of crowd members not to move beyond St. Pauls. The opposition to the police is seen in the selection of police officers and vehicles as the sole targets of collective violence. The notion of control is reflected in the way in which participants took over the area once the police had left, directing traffic through and before they left advising traffic not to go down certain roads and checking obvious strangers in the area.

Not only is there a match between the social self-definition used by participants and their actions but also actions unrelated to this definition were those that were not generalized. Thus acts, such as attacking cars or buses, which do not represent specific outgroups for the 'community', here stopped rather than spread.

These relationships, then, require an explanation. One obvious possibility is that the various descriptions of self and purpose were a *post hoc* construction used to explain and justify the 'riot'. There are, however, a number of weaknesses to this explanation. Firstly, there is evidence that a concept of community comprising the elements outlined above existed in St. Pauls *prior* to 2nd April, 1980 (*cf.* Pryce, 1979). Secondly, while it is almost impossible to assess a cognitive construct like identity during a crowd episode, the evidence of ingroup cohesion, as a function of perceived mutual 'community' membership, seems strong enough to suggest that crowd members were reacting to each other on the basis of social rather than individual factors.

The other possibility is that the participants' social self-definition plays some part in directing their behaviour. This is the conclusion canvassed by Reddy in the study of riots over a 100 year period in Rouen. As he puts it, 'The targets of these crowds thus glitter in the eye of history as signs of the labourer's conception of the nature of society' (Reddy, 1977, p. 84).

Putting together these various considerations it is possible to outline a number of criteria which any adequate account of crowd behaviour must fulfill. First of all this account must explain the genesis of spontaneous behaviour, secondly it must explain the uniformity of behaviour across crowd members and thirdly it must explain the way in which a social ideology can affect the limits of crowd behaviour. If it is to meet this last criterion, the theoretical approach must accept how social factors may mould crowd actions, and therefore, must examine the social context in which these actions occur.

These are precisely the aims of the social identity model of the crowd developed by Reicher (1982a, forthcoming). Its aim is to show how a social ideology can be internalized as a cognitive construct—a social identification—and can guide collective behaviour. Applied to the present case, the social identity of 'St. Pauls' community member' adopted by crowd members provides the criteria for legitimate action. In the entirely unprecedented and rapidly evolving events, participants would seek appropriate responses by reference to these criteria—that is they would be asking what do we, as the St. Pauls community do now? Possible answers are provided in the actions of others seen clearly as ingroup members and thus certain classes of person seen to exemplify the social category, such as older black youths

are looked to. However, actions can only be seen to translate social identity into specific situational norms if they are congruent with that identity. Hence, the limits of crowd behaviour.

While the data provided cannot be used to prove this model nonetheless, in a negative sense, while it excludes previous account it does not exclude the social identification approach and, in a positive sense, it explains the various characteristics of the data and relationships between those characteristics.

If the model is accepted it has two implications which are of considerable importance for an assessment of the significance of crowd behaviour. Firstly, not only is crowd behaviour moulded by social identity but conversely, crowd behaviour may mould social identity. This is clear in the new found feelings of pride expressed by many resulting from the 'riot', feelings which echo the black man who said after the Watts riot of August 1965: 'for the first time in Watts, people feel a real pride in being black. I remember when I first went to Whittier I worried that if I didn't make it there, if I was rejected, I wouldn't have a place to go back to. Now I can say: "I'm from Watts"' (Milgram and Toch, 1969, p. 516). Hence, crowd behaviour may play a crucial role in developing the nature of social ideologies. The second implication is closely related to this. Not only on the right, but also on the left, there is an assumption that crowd episodes are inferior in some way. Thus the *Morning Star* referred to St. Pauls as a 'primitive uprising' and *Socialist Worker* called for a 'paper campaign'. However, the present perspective stresses how sophisticated crowd actions are in the sense of being an accurate expression of an ideological understanding of the social world.

Since Herodotus commented that 'there is nothing less understanding and more proud than the blind mass' (quoted in Giner, 1976, p. 4) the crowd has been viewed as, at best, an incoherent and hostile outburst. A close examination of the facts reveals a very different picture. Far from being a negative aberration provides one of the few contexts in which people act, not in terms of their isolated concerns, but as pure social subjects—from a wider perspective one might even say as historical subjects. Moreover, crowd action does not simply reproduce static social identities but represents a creative interpretation of these identities in a novel situation. As such, the crowd plays a central role in the development of social ideas. Put together, these facts suggest that the crowd has been too long neglected by social psychologists and that it should move back to the rightful place of prominence it occupied a century ago.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article constitue une analyse des émeutes qui se déroulèrent à Bristol en avril 1980 et connues sous le nom d'émeutes de 'St. Paul'.

Une explication des événements en termes de théories individualistes des mouvements sociaux paraît impossible vu la stricte localisation de l'action et la nette délimitation de la participation.

Un modèle du comportement de masse basé sur l'identité sociale est donc avancé pour rendre compte des observations. Cette recherche conclut que l'action des foules est plus complexe et créative qu'on a pu le penser. Il s'agit là d'un champ de recherche qui mériterait d'être davantage investigué.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In dieser Studie wird eine eingehende Analyse der St. Pauls-Unruhen, die sich April 1980 in Bristol abspielten, vorgestellt. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird der Begrenzung der Teilnahme an den Unruhen und der örtlichen Begrenzung der Massenaktion gezollt. Es wird gezeigt, dass diese Begrenzungen klare soziale Formen annehmen und nicht erklärt werden können mit Hilfe der individualistischen Theorien, welche die Massenpsychologie noch immer dominieren. Demgegenüber wird als Erklärung der Beobachtungen ein Massenverhaltensmodell vorgeschlagen, das aufbaut auf dem Modell der sozialen Identiät. Es wird geschlossen, dass Massenverhalten komplexer und kreativer ist als bisher angenommen und dass dem Gebiet des Massenverhaltens mehr Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt werden sollte.