Article

Emergent policing practices: Operation Shop a Looter and urban space securitisation in the aftermath of the Manchester 2011 riots

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Abstract

This paper looks at the emergent policing practices deployed in the immediate aftermath of the recent UK riots in Manchester in August 2011. The paper critically discusses the police's own use of social media for identification and apprehension of suspects, and in proactive policing. It problematises the increased police reliance on a set of technologies, databases and networked analytics—from CCTV and forensic DNA technologies to Automatic Number Plate Recognition systems used to deploy real time urban exclusion zones. The paper highlights some of the key complexities and ambiguities generated by the integration of such technologies and practices, and reflects on the resulting embedding of specific constructions of suspicion and riskiness in the investigation and prevention of crime and disorder.

Introduction

In August 2011 London experienced a sustained wave of social unrest and disorder, which rapidly spread to other British cities across the country, including the city of Manchester. The disturbances, which lasted four days in London and less elsewhere, were immediately dubbed by media and politicians as *riots*. This paper aims to critically discuss the emergent policing practices put in place in the immediate aftermath of the riots in Manchester, investigate their implications and problematise the construction of riskiness that they enacted.

While much of the media and political debate around the riots and their novelty focused on the alleged role of social media in enabling rioters to organise and strike, disappear and re-assemble elsewhere, this paper advances an agnostic—if at times sceptical—position in relation to the importance of these new media in ‘making the riots happen’. Politicians and police attempted (and ultimately failed) to shut down or gain immediate access to rioters’ use of social media. This paper intentionally focuses on the extensive use that the police themselves made of a variety of social media in the immediate aftermath of the riots, mainly through operation ‘Shop a Looter’. Using social media and drawing on a set of technologies, networked analytics and datasets, already at the police’s disposal—from Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems to DNA databases—new policing practices were pursued in both investigative and proactive policing, such as the extensive and diffuse involvement of members of the public in surveillance and shared policing and the creation of a city-centre-wide real-time exclusion zone, filtering out those perceived as risky, and pursuing securitisation of urban space through mobility control.

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The paper argues that these emergent policing practices embedded a problematic construction of riskiness and dangerousness, and suggests that they may have been pursued also for image management. The paper reflects on the possibility that these practices, considered by some stakeholders to be unique and exceptional, might become routine in the investigation and prevention of crime and disorder.

Reading the unrest within the framework of Cohen's moral panic theory (2002), this paper also draws attention to the media, the public and institutional discourses that were circulating, and their dominant framings of events (Entman 1993, 2007; Kitzinger 2007). As well as acknowledging the pivotal role played by the media in projecting a hyper-real and multi-directional spectacle of events, the paper focuses on the institutional response and discourses advanced by a variety of stakeholders—which were reported and amplified in the media¹ but also elicited directly through semi-structured interviews.² It also draws on an ethnography³ of the securitisation of city centre space during the Shop a Looter police operation and the ensuing 'I love MCR' marketing campaign launched by the Tourist Board marketing unit.⁴

2. The 2011 riots: novelty and continuity

The first analyses of the symbolic locations (Jefferson 2012) in which the initial disturbances were occurring, and of the immediate precipitant behind the disorders, appeared to reveal familiar patterns to previous UK riots of the last few decades. These include the London riots in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s,⁵ the Toxteth 1981 riots in Liverpool, and the race riots in Bradford in 1995 and 2001. In 2011 the areas initially affected were in fact amongst London's less affluent and more marginalised boroughs, areas marred by high unemployment rates and high levels of crime, characterised by deprivation and high numbers of disenfranchised residents. They were also areas of high ethnic mix and neighbourhoods where police and residents had a history of attrition, particularly over prevailing patrolling and stop-and-search practices.

The precipitant also appeared familiar. During a police operation⁶ targeting gun crime a Black youth suspected of being in possession of an illegal gun was shot dead in Tottenham. A few days later a protest

¹ A frame analysis, supported by Atlas.ti software and computational linguistics software WordSmith was conducted as part of wider research into urban space securitisation (see footnote 4). For this analysis coverage was collected from *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, as well as from *The Daily Mail*, *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Sun*, over a period of one month (August 2011). As well as this national coverage, coverage from the *Manchester Evening News* (MEN) was also collected over a period of three months (overlapping with the riots, from August to October 2011). MEN was selected as the regional newspaper of Manchester, and the second regional newspaper nationally, outside London, in terms of its circulation.

² 39 participants were accessed through interviews and focus groups as city centre stakeholders in 2012. These were institutional figures, such as councillors, representatives of the tourist board, the city centre management company, the city centre marketing company, or the police force, as well as business representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, property developers, local entrepreneurs, representatives of NGOs and the cultural sector, and a variety of city centre workers and residents.

³ This also followed other events in the city centre, from carnivals to party conferences.

⁴ Frame analysis, interviews and ethnography were conducted as part of wider research on 'Urban futures: How issues of security and aspirations of cosmopolitanism reconfigure the city centre', funded by the Pathways to Cosmopolitanism Programme, a collaboration between the University of Manchester and the National University of Singapore. Further details are available on:

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/sociology/postgraduate/current/pieri/>

⁵ These include for instance the Notting Hill race riots of 1958, the Red Lion Square disorders of 1974 and Lewisham riots of 1977, the Brixton riots of 1981 and 1985, the Broadwater Farm riots of 1985 and the Brixton riots of 1995.

⁶ Operation Trident, <http://www.stoptheguns.org/> [last accessed 4th Oct 2013]

march leading to the local police station took place, after which tensions escalated into violence and the disturbances began.

Over the next few days, the unrest took various forms—from open confrontations with the police, to instances of looting of shops and damage to various premises and the burning of a few cars, and in a handful of cases even involved violence towards other members of the public. The disturbances also spread geographically to more affluent areas of London, as well as—though to a lesser degree and for shorter periods of time—to various cities across the country. In Manchester the unrest took place only on what would later be known as the last day of the riots, 9th August 2011. It occurred in its affluent city centre from the early evening of that day to the very early hours of the following day.⁷

Beyond the first impressionistic analysis, the demographics of those involved in the disturbances began to appear much more varied, covering a spectrum of age groups and ethnicities, and involving the social worker or nurse as well as the unemployed.

As in the case of previous riots, grass-root clean up operations rapidly sprang into action as the disturbances ceased, and harsh sentences followed, displaying a vindictiveness in the institutional response that was perhaps extraordinary (Jefferson 2011). However, in many ways, while the events that took place remain complex (Morrell et al. 2011; Lewis et al. 2011), varied across the country, and the reasons behind them are not fully explained or explainable, these disturbances were arguably not significantly dissimilar⁸ from other instances of urban rioting that have characterised recent British history (Jefferson 2011).

3 Explaining the riots, moral panic and the media

Interpretations of the motivations behind the events varied greatly, as the protesters, the disaffected and the opportunistic all seemed to be amongst the rioters. One of the overarching frames (Entman 1993, 2007; Kitzinger 2007), or ways of conceptualising the unfolding events in the media, was that of defining the disturbances as ‘shopping riots’. Some commentators saw the rioters as looters and disaffected consumers. As Bauman (2011) argued, disqualified and defective consumers were out in the streets to grab those goods that they had no (longer) means of purchasing. However, these explanations struggle to account for events that saw the looting of many Pound shops (where every item on sale costs just £1) and of similarly low cost shops, along with the big brand flagship stores. They appear somewhat unconvincing also in explaining why some of the premises were attacked or destroyed instead of, or after, looting. With the lack of clear political demands (beyond those initially articulated collectively around policing and around the lack of information in the march to the police station in Tottenham) other commentators have talked of a ‘zero degree protest’ and of ‘riots of boredom’ (Žižek 2011). For Žižek ‘as with the car burnings in the Paris banlieues in 2005, the UK rioters had no message to deliver’ and enacted a ‘zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing’ (ibid). Other commentators tried instead to contextualise the riots as responses to a deeper malaise, by reading them against the backdrop of the financial and banking scandals still raging in the news, or as a reaction of hopeless frustration at the imminent financial cuts to public spending.

⁷ The City of Salford too, close to the City of Manchester, experienced rioting on the same day. The unrest there took place amongst housing estates and their nearby shopping precinct in an area known as Pendleton, and has been seen by Greater Manchester Police, as Jeffery and Jackson (2012) argue, as quite distinct from the events that occurred in Manchester city centre, and as principally involving direct confrontation with the police.

⁸ This paper argues that it was the types of policing practices instantiated (in Manchester) that were novel, but that the riots themselves were similar to previous ones.

This paper suggests that the unrest could more fruitfully be theorised as a moral panic (Cohen 1972). As Cohen noted (2002: 1), this occurs when '[a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people'.

This would not negate that the unrest took place, but instead indicate that the characterisation of the level of threat posed and the reactions generated are excessive (Marsh and Melville 2011), although assessing proportionality remains problematic (Garland 2008). As Young (2009) noted, moral panics might in fact best be seen as conflicts of values and interests rather than simply as irrational and large-scale knee-jerk responses. This paper approaches moral panics in this fashion, as conflicts of interests and as acts of framing. As Entman argues, framing is 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (1993: 52). Therefore, investigating the framing(s) of the Manchester riots in the media coverage reveals not just the way in which events have been cast by certain actors, but also the possibilities and likely interventions (for instance in terms of institutional response) that such representations indirectly privilege or invite.⁹

Like many of the spectacular and hyper-real events that according to Baudrillard define our contemporary news-scape (Merrin 2005), the riots 'happened' live on and through the continuous streaming of potent images and multi-directional coverage. While other studies have focused on social media (Lewis et al. 2011), and specifically on Twitter (Procter, Vis and Voss 2013), our approach has been to follow the printed coverage of the Manchester disturbances, nationally and locally.¹⁰

The analysis conducted on the *Manchester Evening News* (MEN) reveals that its coverage strongly condemned the events as acts of 'mindless violence', looting and 'thuggery'. References to possible causes for the unrest are scarce in the *MEN*, with only a handful of articles in the immediate aftermath of the events perfunctorily asking why the riots took place. Probably due to the delayed inception, in comparison to the unrest in London, the terminology used appears largely borrowed from that describing events elsewhere. The disturbances were mainly referred to as *riots*.¹¹ Other terms employed—albeit less frequently—to describe the incidents that took place include *looting*, which was framed in the coverage as the main activity taking place during the rioting, followed by *violence*, *disturbances*, *mayhem*, *lawlessness*, *chaos* and *unrest*.¹² Those who took place in the events were principally referred to as *rioters*, although also as *looters* and *thugs*.¹³

This demonisation and vilification of the rioters supports a moral panic reading of the events and actors involved, which Cohen calls 'folk devils' (1972). Cohen notes that the most recurrent moral panics in

⁹ While early takes on moral panic theory have been critiqued for overstating the power of the media in affecting audiences, frame analysis is concerned with identifying dominant frames, but does not presuppose their uptake by specific interlocutors (Entman 1993) and studies of media coverage and political discourse often demonstrate how frames can be resisted, rejected or even re-framed by other stakeholders (as discussed in Pieri 2009). In this study, therefore, the dominant discourse and frames circulating in the coverage are triangulated against the views of stakeholders and an observation of the policing practices.

¹⁰ See footnote 1. The media analysis focused on media-generated media discourse, and not on user- or citizen-generated media discourse.

¹¹ The term is by far the most commonly used (occurring 318 times, 213 times as *riots* and 105 as *riot*).

¹² In terms of frequency, the term 'looting' occurred 132 times, followed by 'violence' appearing 59 times (in a variety of combinations including in expressions like 'criminal lawless violence'), 'disturbances' 29 times, 'mayhem' 17, 'lawlessness' 16, 'chaos' 16, 'unrest' 12. Some of these choices are more emotionally loaded than others—for instance, 'chaos' and 'mayhem' are more emotionally evocative terms than 'unrest' and 'disturbances', and as such appeared more often in condemnations of events, whereas the latter appear (albeit less frequently) in discussions over police tactics.

¹³ The term *rioters* appeared 97 times, *looters* 72 times, and *thugs* was used 36 times.

post-war Britain have been associated with various youth cultures (Cohen 2002: 1) and it has been argued (Cochrane 2007: 69) that

[a]longside race, and often in combination with it, young people have been identified as a source of urban threat at least since the sixties. The definition of young people—and particularly young men—as ‘out of control’ has fed in the imaginary of cities as dangerous places. This has been reflected in a whole series of ‘moral panics’, summed up, for example, in a [sic] Campbell’s powerful description of ‘young men on the rampage’ in her discussion in the urban disorders which seemed to spread across England on the early 1990s (Campbell 1993).

Along with the nation-wide panic over ‘feral youth’ and ‘ethnicised crime’, as we shall see, the policing in the aftermath of the Manchester riots enacted a specific construct of the risky and the dangerous, often coinciding with ‘the previously convicted or already known’.

4. Policing the Manchester riots: the Shop a Looter operation

In the immediate aftermath of the Manchester riots, the police were accused of having acted too timidly. In London the Metropolitan Police had sustained similar criticism, and while it strongly denied the accusations made by the Prime Minister and senior politicians, the altercation was extensively reported by the media (BBC 2011a).

In Manchester a local Member of Parliament criticised the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) Chief Constable and the Force more generally for not responding with immediate arrests in the face of vandalism and looting, and appearing to opt for ‘a wait and see strategy’ instead (BBC 2011b). Similar accusations were echoed by business owners whose premises were damaged or whose merchandise was looted. The Police admitted being overwhelmed by the scale and rapidity of the escalation of the unrest, particularly at a time when about 100 riot-police officers had been dispatched from Manchester to London as back up. Faced with a shortage of officers (Clifton et al. 2011), back up was sought from the North West area,¹⁴ and this might—at least partially—explain some of the cat and mouse chasing that occurred in the city centre, possibly exacerbated also by these officers’ lack of familiarity with the geography of the city centre.

The view¹⁵—now disputed (Baker 2012; Procter, Vis and Voss 2013)¹⁶—that social media, and especially Blackberry messaging technology, were catalysts for the riots (Halliday 2011), and enabled rioters to mobilise, organise and change strategy dynamically throughout the unfolding of the riots, led UK Prime Minister David Cameron to call publicly for BlackBerry maker Research in Motion to temporarily shut down their messaging service or grant the UK police live access to it (Halliday and Garside 2011). While this plea proved unsuccessful, other senior politicians, including the Home Secretary, called for meetings with social network technology providers. Generalised live access to the bulk of network communications by the police, however, remained largely technically unachievable—as well as legally problematic.

¹⁴ The officers deployed often had no training (or had not attended a training refresher) in policing public disorder, as it transpired several months later on 21 Dec 2011 in an article in *The MEN*, available on <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/untrained-police-officers-sent-out-878852> [last accessed 9th April 2013].

¹⁵ Shared by politicians, journalists and the police during the unfolding of the riots and beyond.

¹⁶ The Procter et al. analysis was conducted as part of the LSE and Guardian-led study of the 2011 UK riots (Lewis et al. 2011).

In this context the main investigative strategy adopted¹⁷ by Greater Manchester police involved deferred action and heavily relied on police use of social media. It was launched on 12th August as operation *Shop a Looter*.

The operation's public launch, by Assistant Chief Constable Shewan, in one of the main city centre shopping streets, was immediately covered by local and national media¹⁸ and uploaded on YouTube. The operation poster,¹⁹ printed in black and yellow, presented an illustration of a 'hoodie'—another emblematic and recurrent figure amongst the 'folk devils' generated through moral panics (Cohen 2002). Depicted in a hooded dark outfit, the rioter appeared in a vaguely aggressive posture, wearing a scarf over his face. The image was accompanied by the slogan: 'we need your information to make them pay for their crimes'. The operation exhorted citizens to directly take part in the apprehension of suspects in two ways: on the one hand, by sending to the police their footage and photos of the events, or sharing any other type of information they might have on anyone they knew or suspected of having taken part in the unrest; on the other hand, by looking at a collection of images of suspects assembled and released by the police and helping identify these nameless faces. Both actions of collaboration with the police could, if preferred, be conducted anonymously.

The operation was built on a nexus between well-known and theorised surveillance technologies (mainly CCTV, although the images were shared with citizens as well as amongst police officers) and new 'surveillance technologies', such as user-generated streamed footage, smart phones with cameras, and content-sharing online sites.

The former, especially CCTV-enabled surveillance, has been well theorised (Armitage 2002; Koskela 2000; Graham and Wood 2003), following its exponential growth in public and private settings, in the UK and elsewhere, and its use in securitising the built environment (Cozens, Saville and Hillier 2005; Cozens, Hillier and Prescott 2001; Cozens 2002). New ICT systems, by contrast, have been conceptualised in various ways as both enabling surveillance and allowing to counteract it (Doyle 2011; Goldsmith 2010). On the one hand, attention has been drawn to the city becoming alive with sensors (Telhan 2010)—a 'sentient city' (Crang and Graham 2007), measuring citizens' movement, vehicle traffic (checking anything from levels of congestion to individual entitlement to access certain areas subject to payment of a fee), and using a variety of indicators (of pollution, heat, activity and so on). The entanglement of these sensors with citizens' portable devices and smart phones, or their geo-positioning, has also been the subject of much scholarly debate, as has the suggestion that we are moving towards ubiquitous computing and an internet of things (Speed 2010).²⁰ In this sense smart mobile technologies and social media can be argued to provide new visibilities²¹ that may be policed (Goldsmith 2010) and surveilled.

On the other hand, social media and smart devices have also been theorised as tools for turning the focus of surveillance towards the institutions (private and public) that routinely exercise it (Goldsmith 2010), and their potential—more promising for some (Doyle 2011; Mann, Nolan and Wellman 2003), than for

¹⁷ Procter et al. (2013) have instead looked at the use that GM Police made of their Twitter account during the actual unfolding of the riots, suggesting how this may need improving in the future.

¹⁸ The YouTube video of the launch is available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Azhs2vP4Nu0> [last accessed 10th April 2013]

¹⁹ The poster can be viewed on <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gmpolice1/6035643354/in/photostream> [last accessed 10th April 2013]

²⁰ Where objects interact and respond to each other via RFID and other technologies

²¹ From the monitoring of someone's Facebook account or internet use to that of someone's spatial positioning while online or engaged in certain activities. Policing new visibilities also involves the policing of actual crimes that happen on-line, such as cybercrimes, hacking, on-line fraud, or identity theft.

others (Timan and Oudshoorn 2012)—of counteracting surveillance with sousveillance²² is still the subject of debate.

Although the Shop a Looter operation was unprecedented in Manchester and the UK in its unique level of public involvement in surveillance and the level of co-policing that it secured, it provides a sobering example of the tenuous potential for sousveillance through technologies such as smart phones, when compared to their much greater potential to be enrolled in far reaching, diffuse and more traditional types of surveillance. The operation, thus, demonstrates that social media and user-generated images captured on smart mobile cameras can complement and extend the reach of institutional or mainstream (in this case, police-led) surveillance.

From the start the operation was a multimedia and multiplatform one, deployed through high visibility strategies within the material fabric of the city centre, online through the creation of a police website, a Flickr account with a photo gallery and a Facebook account, and through more traditional communication tools, such as a dedicated call centre. Vans with large posters displaying the images of suspects (rapidly updated with new faces) were being driven across the city centre. Others were stationed in strategic points, at transport hubs or along shopping streets.²³ Large electronic displays were set up on existing and ad-hoc screens, positioned in squares, outside train stations and in a large multiplex cinema and bars complex, contributing to sustain the ‘naming and shaming’ message discussed further below.

The operation was diffused also through the local media, which arguably acted as a recruiting channel for aiding the police, inviting surveillance (Doyle 2011).²⁴ The *MEN* published its own gallery of suspects, as well as prominently carrying the police’s appeal for help:

[p]eople are urged to help the police Shop a Looter campaign by contacting the police appeal line on 0800 092 0410 or by uploading pictures and footage through the official GMP Facebook page or anonymously on www.gmp.police.uk

(*MEN* 17 Aug 2011a)

Thousands of hours of footage from CCTV (belonging to the council, shops, car parks and public services, including fire fighters), and from cameras and phones belonging to members of the public, were being collated and searched within the Manchester CCTV control room and by a dedicated team of 100 officers (Greater Manchester Police 2011).

Soon after the launch of the police operation the following electronic advert appeared:

²² Surveillance from below.

²³ An image of the van uploaded by the police on Flickr is available on <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gmpolice1/6035608874/in/photostream/> [last accessed 10 April 2013]

²⁴ Drawing on the notion of the synopticon (the surveillance of the few by the many), Doyle looks at how media and surveillance interact and argues that the ‘Media extend the reach of surveillance by enlisting the public through programmes like “America’s Most Wanted”. Surveillance cameras produce great images for broadcast television and television in turn enlists our help to identify those in the images, at the same time normalizing and legitimizing visual surveillance’ (Doyle 2011: 296). However, he also sees new media as offering avenues for resistance (ibid).

Displayed on-board city centre buses, it provided visual evidence that members of the public were responding, and further encouraged participation in the policing.

5. The shopped: vindictiveness, moralising and citizenship

As operation Shop a Looter progressed, it was indirectly sustained by moral discourses circulated by various actors and often reported in the papers.

A shift of focus—away from the spectacular and hyper-real images of the riots, and away from those circulated within the Shop a Looter operation and its posters—offers interesting, if at times unsettling, food for thought. As news of the various arrests hit the papers, stories like this became more and more frequent:

A TEENAGER shopped by his own mum for stealing chewing gum was among people from Trafford arrested in connection with the Manchester riots.

The 14-year-old, from Sale, who cannot be named for legal reasons, took a £1 packet from Sainsbury's [...]. His mum recognised him on CCTV footage and dragged him to confess.
(MEN 17 Aug 2011b: 7)

The same article also reports the reaction of the judge that sentenced the *rioter*, and was full of praise for the parents for turning their son in:

If parents took their responsibility as seriously as you do then this situation may not have ever occurred. You did exactly the right thing.

[ibid]

The article—one of many telling the story of people being sentenced for helping themselves to a bottle of water, an ice-cream cone, a pack of baby nappies—illustrates the type of comments, circulated and amplified in the local reporting, which constitute the ‘moral enterprise’ component²⁵ in a moral panic (Cohen 2002: xxvii). Comments by councillors, judges and politicians all helped mobilise moral discourses—of model citizenship, of responsible parenthood, of pride of place and of pride of being Mancunian.

Pride of being Mancunian was strongly invoked also through the grass-root street clean up, and its emotional appeals to a new ‘Blitz spirit’²⁶—although, as mentioned, emotive terms of condemnation like ‘shame’, ‘thuggery’, ‘mindless looter’ had been already filling the national and local news report since events had unfolded in London, and as they reached Manchester. As ever, it may be impossible to disentangle and locate unequivocally the origin of a moral panic. What is evident, nonetheless, is that these sentiments of open indignation and appeals to morality and *proper* citizen behaviour received even more priming through the ‘I Love MCR’ campaign, which was rapidly launched by Marketing Manchester, an agency tasked with promoting the city, nationally and internationally.²⁷

The campaign was fully supported by the Council, as well as by many small and large businesses (from cupcake shop owners to large property developers). It was extensively covered in the news, including the publication of a front page containing the *I love MCR* slogan and logo that every Mancunian was encouraged to display on a window. Before the campaign could stir irreparably into the territory and rhetoric of defining who the *true* Mancunians were,²⁸ the police started issuing the thank you message [picture above] addressed to ‘Greater Manchester’, which became the new interlocutor to both the police operation and the marketing campaign.²⁹

However, it would be wrong to assume that pride of place and related discourses could be the sole drivers behind the participation—extensive as it was—by members of the public in the police operation. If these discourses, appealing to the morality of citizenry, could be seen as positive incentives, there certainly were also negative incentives being widely advertised. The Council made official promises (threats to those they referred to) that they would be seeking immediate eviction from social housing of anyone even indirectly connected to someone involved in the riots (any benefit entitlement might also have been withdrawn or reviewed). As the Leader of Manchester City Council succinctly put it:

[w]e have the power to evict people involved in anti-social behaviour and we are ready, willing and able to use that power. Anyone involved in these disturbances—or anyone who has allowed their children to be involved—needs to understand that we don’t want you in our community.

(Leese 2011)

²⁵ In line with recent work on moral panics encouraging analysts to be attentive not only to those that are being demonised but also to *those who panic* (Young 2009), this paper also draws attention to the interests and reactions of other stakeholders, institutional actors, city makers and branders, those tasked with the policing of the city, and the citizenry that was enlisted in the policing and in the clean up marketing campaign.

²⁶ The term refers to the history of civilians’ pulling together under the adverse and tragic circumstances of the war bombing.

²⁷ Further details on <http://www.marketingmanchester.com/#who-we-are> [last accessed 10 April 2013].

²⁸ This could easily have degenerated into a dissecting of who could claim to be a true Mancunian, a particularly sensitive topic in a city of immigration, and of great ethnic and language variation, like Manchester.

²⁹ ‘Greater Manchester’ denotes interlocutors through a geographical/administrative location, whereas the previous term, Mancunian, bears connotations of original provenance and even attachment.

Under the circumstances, it is reasonable to hypothesise that some citizens' eagerness to turn in members of their own family or household may be seen as an act of self-defence, and a way of distancing themselves from criminal actions, however trivial (such as stealing a bottle of water).

While we have so far considered how individuals were picked up by operation Shop a Looter, through their enrolment, and that of others close to them, in moral discourses, or through institutional threats of retaliation, the next section critically considers who was being picked up by the police through Shop a Looter and through *proactive policing*—which aims at pre-empting or, where possible, preventing the occurrence of future crime (Stockdale, Whitehead and Gresham 1999).³⁰

6. Constructions of suspicion and riskiness in emergent investigative and proactive policing

This paper argues that a problematic construction of riskiness and suspicion was embedded in both investigative and proactive policing practices. In the aftermath of the riots these practices showed a penchant for targeting and over-policing certain groups of 'usual suspects'—those perceived as *criminal*, either due to previous convictions or simply by virtue of previous contact with the police, the judicial system or related services. The prevailing construction of riskiness and dangerousness articulated in these practices may be best illustrated, again, through recourse to the media coverage of the events, as well as through the interviews collected in which stakeholders reflect on these police practices:

A BRAZEN looter pictured with a stolen TV on his shoulder was caught after a policeman spotted the image in the M.E.N. [...] The M.E.N published the photograph as part of a 'gallery of shame' of those who brought terror to Manchester's streets. *It was seen by an off-duty police officer who instantly recognised the man.*

(MEN 13 Aug 2011c: 2, my emphasis)

The excerpt above is from the local newspaper, which, as mentioned, was running its own gallery of suspects, and raises the issue of recognition, and of how the process of identification relied heavily, as we will argue, on *picking up* individuals that were already known to the police. They were known either because their faces were immediately recognisable by officers, or because they had already been processed by the judicial system, and their details and their data were already inside various existing police databases.

A month after the riots, national newspapers were already analysing the emerging sentencing patterns and concluding that, as reported in this headline from *The Guardian*, 'three-quarters [of those] charged over riots had previous criminal convictions' (Travis and Ball 2011). It is important to bear in mind the limitations of using sentencing data in providing a full picture of those involved in the events. The data in fact refers to the percentage of those charged, and, consequently, it does not necessarily reflect the proportion or true demographics of those who may have taken part in the riots—who may not have been identified (as most arrests were conducted only after the riots). Nonetheless, this remained a key message in the media, largely reinforced by the framing of rioters as mindless thugs and criminals, and also sustained by sporadic suggestions that some gangs may have initiated the rioting in London (Harding 2012).³¹

³⁰ Stockdale et al. (1999: 5) also note that 'the terms "proactive" and "intelligence-led" [are] being used interchangeably or in combination to describe practices which frequently contrast starkly with reactive, demand-led policing. Current interpretations of proactivity are wider than they were initially. Also, the term proactive, intelligence-led policing, although superficially simple, masks considerable variability in implementation [...] the term proactive, intelligence-led policing applies both to a style of policing and to any specific, targeted action'.

³¹ This may have also contributed to the suggestion that those responsible largely had a history of criminal activity, even if further analysis of sentencing data revealed that gang members were indeed *not* amongst those arrested.

Another example of recognition is given below, and is testament to the fact that recognition was not simply through visual familiarity with someone's appearance and description, but also relied on various analytics and databases:

[a] looter who stole two scoops of ice cream has been remanded in custody until Aug 24. Anderson Fernandez, 22, of Lewisham Avenue, Manchester, disliked the coffee flavour and handed the ice cream to a woman. He was traced from the DNA he left on a cigarette butt and inside a bin at Patisserie Valerie in Manchester.

(Bunyan 2011)

The incident touches on some recurrent themes that we have already pointed out, including the relative incommensurability between discourses of mindless violence and thuggery, and the reality of the incidents reported. The article goes on to describe that the youth had entered a patisserie that had already been entered by looters a few hours beforehand, and that was open and unattended. Importantly, the incident also reveals the apparent lack of proportionality between the offence and the deployment of investigative effort and relatively costly analytics—in this case DNA extraction and analysis, and DNA matching against the existing police DNA database. What is worth highlighting, though, is that the individual in question could be identified through his DNA only because his DNA profile was already in the police DNA database. Had he not been previously stopped or arrested (police DNA extraction and databasing is conducted regardless of whether charges are pressed or dropped), such investigative efforts would have been in vain.

The same logic was enacted through proactive policing. In the days immediately following the end of the riots an operation was launched in Manchester entailing the same problematic construction of risky individuals. It was reported on 13th August 2011 that

POLICE TURN BACK 50 CARS IN OPERATION TO STOP CRIMINALS ENTERING CITY CENTRE

Police used number-plate spotting technology to turn known criminals away from Manchester in the days after the riots.

Officers stationed on key routes into the city have been instantly checking registration plates of vehicles against a string of national databases. Known criminals have been intercepted and ordered to turn around.

On Wednesday evening alone, 50 vehicles were turned away from Manchester by officers determined to keep the streets trouble-free.

Chief Constable Peter Fahy told the M.E.N: 'We were instructing anyone with a previous conviction that they had to leave the city. Quite a number of them had serious previous convictions'.

The policy will be repeated if trouble flares again.

(MEN 13 Aug 2011d: 4)

The use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology in this instance is particularly interesting in demonstrating the interlaying of the physical and virtual networks of control and surveillance, as well as in illustrating how a networked device can be used to construct a real-time exclusion zone—once connected to live databases (from motoring and car insurance databases, to police-

owned databases of convicted or suspected offenders, or of suspicious vehicles) and to a discrete and distributed set of technologies (such as ANPR fixed and mobile cameras). ANPR technologies are normally used investigatively, for instance when chasing a robber, or to stop a driver who is flagged up as not having purchased car insurance. They are also used proactively to conduct intelligence operations and track organised crime meetings or movement of selected individuals. This operation, however, put into place a real-time and large scale (city-centre wide) interdictory space (Flusty 2001), a space that filtered access, granting some citizens permission to enter, while excluding others.

Once again, this operation reproduced a view of the recent events as having been caused by individuals with previous convictions. What is more, it suggested that this group of individuals was to be regarded as extremely risky and dangerous for the city centre of Manchester—and we will unpack what that may entail for city branding and ‘city selling’ in the following section. Indeed, this operation worked on the assumption that this category of risky individuals might even be intending to start another riot.

7. Security, city branding and image management

The investigative and proactive policing practices were arguably being pursued also in answer to the need that the police and other institutional actors had to exercise image management in the face of criticism and in the aftermath of public disorder.

The role of security in place making and city branding—to enhance, maintain, or restore the reputation of a place—has been well documented (Coaffee and Rogers 2008; Coaffee, Murakami Wood and Rogers 2009). While preparedness and resilience (Coaffee and Rogers 2008) under various types of threat emerge as core concerns in contemporary western societies, the increased securitisation of urban space occurs within an entrepreneurial turn in urban politics (Harvey 1989; Ward 2003; Smith 2002), as cities increasingly see themselves as engaged in *place competition* with other locales (Kotler, Haider and Rein 1993; Hall 1997). Image management is thus pursued by cities in a bid to *sell* themselves (Kavaratzis 2004) as desirable destinations or investment locations, and engenders a revanchist response towards those seen as undermining the economic interests and reimagining of the regenerated sites (Smith 1996; Raco 2003; MacLeod 2002; Ward 1998), who are further marginalised (Wacquant 2007).

While securitisation of urban space for branding often involves hardening the built environment through security by design (Cozens, Saville and Hillier 2005; Cozens, Hillier and Prescott 2001; Cozens 2002; Flusty 2001), it also operates in less tangible ways (Graham and Wood 2003; Graham 2009), as the ANPR operation indicates.

In the aftermath of the Manchester riots considerations over how best to restore the image of Manchester city centre were paramount. Manchester’s history, from the heydays of the industrial revolution to the post-industrial decline, marked by deprivation and crime, and followed by a recent regeneration (Robson 2002; Cochrane, Peck and Tickell 2002; Peck and Ward 2002), may explain the institutional urge to restore an upbeat message about the city’s present, particularly that of its city centre.³²

The riots were perceived by institutional stakeholders and entrepreneurs as threatening the very reputation of the regenerated city centre, causing material damage to businesses, and (less quantifiable, but no less serious) damage to consumers’ and visitors’ confidence.

In this context the ANPR operation with its exclusion zone (which was proactive, and not aiming at apprehending any of the people involved in the previous riots) was considered an appropriate response:

³² Although significant areas of deprivation continue to exist outside the city centre.

I'm not saying this should be the case all the time, but I think there was probably a time and a place for this [operation] to take place... you know the city was suffering, and again I am talking professionally now, the city suffered or could have suffered ... semi-permanent, long-term damage in terms of its reputation following the riots ... and there was ehm... it was important for Manchester to respond very, very quickly to that, and we led on the 'I love MCR' campaign. We worked very closely with the police, we worked very closely with the Arndale [shopping centre], very closely with the City Council and CityCo on doing that. And we managed to kind of turn around the kind of perception of the city quite quickly. So I think in terms of the kind of the police on this kind of... supporting that, that feeling that the city is still open for business, that people don't need to worry about their own safety and security in the city, and if this was a necessary part of doing that, then I actually think that was probably worth doing. As I say I wouldn't condone this on a kind of regular basis [...] I think the time and the place, it feels to me as if it was probably right.

(Interview with MD, *Visiting Manchester*,³³ March 2012)

That doesn't surprise me, and I think it's a very sensible approach.

(Interview with Director of Marketing, *Marketing Manchester*, April 2012)

The Police too were in dire need of managing their image following accusations of timid policing, failed attempts to monitor live rioters' use of social media, the cat and mouse chasing, and the few arrests made during the riots (Shop a Looter was, as mentioned, a delayed operation, albeit in rapid response).

Discussing the ANPR operation with the Chair of the Greater Manchester Police Authority, image management considerations emerged. The operation was described as fulfilling a double objective—targeting known offenders and people with previous convictions, warning them that they were under surveillance, and demonstrating to the population of Greater Manchester that the police were acting and taking crime prevention seriously:

I approve of that. [...] I certainly think that residents would welcome that initiative, because it means that, you know, if you turn fifty known offenders back through the use of ANPR, the automatic number plate recognition, then I think that's a very positive message to them. First that we're determined to deal with you and we're watching you, but certainly that message goes out to people reading the [*Manchester Evening News*] and seeing that message, that says that police are very seriously taking car crime and robbery in the city centre.

(Interview with Chair of *GM Police Authority*, April 2012)

What was absent instead from this discussion and the media reporting of the operation was any clear reference as to the rationale for targeting and policing this group.

8. Conclusions

This paper has argued that new policing practices were used in the aftermath of the Manchester riots—city-centre wide exclusion zones achieved through merging analytics and databases, and new practices that were heavily reliant on large-scale and combined use of social media, new ways of extensively mobilising the general public to identify suspects. These practices have been claimed to have amplification effects, and to rely on problematic (and sadly familiar) constructions of riskiness.

³³ Tourist Board for Greater Manchester.

The paper acknowledged the pivotal role of the media in contributing to project a hyper-real and multi-directional spectacle of the 2011 riots that can be read within the framework of Cohen's moral panic theory.

While this does not negate that the events took place (the burning, looting, confrontations with the police in London or Pendleton, just as much as the stealing of trainers and chewing gum and ice cream cones), it signals a response to the events that is disproportionate, motivated by clashing interests and values, and leading to the demonisation of a group—the 'feral youth', 'black criminal youth', and (as we have documented in the case of Manchester) the category of 'previously convicted/processed'. It also draws attention to a series of other negative outcomes, including the circulation of moral discourses of disdain and outrage, the amplification of crime, a more conservative redrawing of societal norms and boundaries, and the wider legitimisation of punitive and revanchist measures.

This paper intentionally focuses on the use that the police made of various social media in the immediate aftermath of the riots, having failed to gain large scale live access to rioters' use of social media. Through these media the police instantiated new policing practices, as well as exercising a level of image management in the aftermath of public disorder.

Shop a Looter was the first operation in Manchester, and in Britain, relying on large-scale and generalised involvement of members of the public in social media-based mass surveillance. Instead of counteracting or subverting police surveillance, as some of the sousveillance literature might suggest, the operation demonstrated how social media and user-generated images captured on smart mobile cameras can complement and extend the reach of institutional or mainstream (in this case, police-led) surveillance.

The policing practices enacted in Manchester also demystify the claim of a paradigm shift in surveillance towards a 'virtual panopticon', seen as a new culture of generalised watching and normalisation (Gane 2011). While the alleged paradigm shift sees surveillance as a routine and trivialised practice of watching each other's internet presence or Facebook status and updates, of 'celebrity watching', of celebrating the exposure of one's everyday life (epitomised by popular reality TV programmes), the Shop a Looter operation illustrated the willingness of members of the public to be engaged in much more direct and directed surveillance. This was not as a mundane, diffuse or voyeuristic act of entertainment, but as a more conventional form of surveillance, requiring active participation and leading to identifications and police arrests.

Widespread public support was mobilised through a combination of enticement and coercion, through the circulation by various actors of discourses of model citizenry and pride of place, and threats of council house evictions and benefit withdrawal. Discourses of morality and an interpellation of fear of disorder fed symbiotically and justified recourse to wider powers of control. While the implications of adopting the lens of moral panic theory are many and far-reaching, particular attention was given to its conservative redefining of the borders of the acceptable (Cohen 2002), allowing exceptional and coercive measures to gain wider legitimisation (Hall in Marsh and Melville 2011).

Wider powers of control were also illustrated in the ANPR proactive policing operation which filtered access, creating the first large scale (city centre-wide) temporary and real-time exclusion zone in Manchester. This operation also demonstrated how securitisation of urban space increasingly operates by controlling mobility and by acting both within the physical scale of the city and other virtual and networked circuits of surveillance, through the tracking and the networking of live-feed databases.

In both reactive and proactive policing a problematic construction of riskiness and dangerousness has been uncovered. Thus, while the policing practices were in many ways innovative, they also reproduced

notorious and problematic patterns in over-policing and targeting ‘the usual suspects’—individuals already known to the police, either because their faces were recognisable or their data had already been captured by various datasets available to the police.

Like the moral panic that legitimised them, these new emergent practices therefore demand closer scrutiny and critical reflection, not least in view of their potential to induce crime amplification (Young 2009), trigger labelling, or even self-fulfilling prophecies (Garland 2008).³⁴

While the implications of over-policing a group of individuals constructed as (forever) risky or even (forever) criminal appear to be easily eclipsed by the mesmerising deployment of multi-media and multi-platform operations or the innovative application and integration of existing technologies, we should not forget that these as yet emergent and exceptional policing practices have the potential to become normalised³⁵ and widely used.

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³⁴ Without wanting to suggest a unified motivation behind the 2011 UK riots, complaints over stop and search practices and (over)-policing of certain groups were, after all, amongst the reasons behind the initial Tottenham march.

³⁵ There is a long history of exceptional measure becoming routinised in police practice, including Hillyard's (1987) account of the practices deployed in exceptional circumstances in Northern Ireland and subsequently routinely used in the policing of the UK miners strikes in the 1980s. Many colonial policing practices, including fingerprinting, have also followed the same trajectory—a phenomenon known as 'Foucault's boomerang' (Graham 2009).

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