

Connecting Social Representation, Identity and Ideology: Reflections on a London “riot”

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This paper looks back at an analysis of participant-observers' narratives of the 1995 Brixton so-called 'riot'. The theory of social representations is drawn on to make sense of networks of social representations of crowds, and to analyse the core and peripheral elements of these social representations. A re-presentation of the crowd as a collection of individuals competes with a re-presentation of the crowd as a cohesive body guided by a common history. In the examination of individual differences in the use of particular representations, both (i) re-presentation as a process in the negotiation of identity and (ii) the ideological nature of this negotiation are highlighted. I argue that the evaluation of representations and that the assessment of the role of power on their construction and maintenance are of fundamental importance.

Keywords: Social representations, Identity, Ideology, Riots, Crowds, Brixton.

This paper demonstrates that the theory of social representations can give a more thorough analysis of the politics of the everyday, particularly how events like riots are understood, than is commonly available in much of the psychological literature. The principle shortcoming of much of the literature in psychology is that it takes a partial perspective. In discussing 'the crowd' it is possible to view the crowd from the outside (as in Le Bon, 1895) and/or from within (Stott,

Hutchison, & Drury, 2001). Although work from both perspectives is informative and a rich source of social representations of crowds, on their own, neither is adequate. For a complete analysis, an integration of perspectives is necessary. The theory best equipped for such a challenging task is social representations, particularly a critical version that highlights the connections between representations and identities (Orr, 2007; Paryente, & Orr, 2003; Howarth, 2002a).

The paper provides an analysis of some revealing data collected some time ago on the representations used by members of the Brixton community in their ‘sense-making’ of the 1995 Riot. Compared to other riots in recent British history, this was really nothing more than a minor fracas between some members of the community and the police. However at the time, both in the press and in everyday conversations, it was described as a riot and very evident were contested representations of crowds that linked protest, irrationality, community identities, race and violence. For some, the event can be explained by the assumed volatile criminality within Brixton’s black population; for others, it was a response to years of police brutality and racism.

In the more recent riots and social protests in England, France, Australia, America and the Middle East, it is easy to see there are the same or similar representations at play. As we are continually reconstructing the past in terms of the present (Mead, 1934), weaving present concerns into our social history, this ongoing process of re-presentation is to be expected. What is worrying is the ways in which particular representations dominate discussions and that other representations, interpretations and voices are made marginal, as we see in the conclusion. First, I lay out the study (section 1: Research Design) and the story of the riot (section 2), then turn to representations of the crowd (section 3) and the analysis of these (section 4). Sections 5-7 develop a discussion of the findings in connection to re-presentation as identity (5), representations as action (6) and the ideological manipulation of representations (7).

Thus crowds are not my only object of study. Social re-presentation (as a process) and social representations (as entities) are simultaneously theorised and problematised.¹ In particular, through this analysis of the understanding of crowds, that, I hope, I have highlighted the *interdependence of social representations, identity and ideology*. Identity is crucial to social representation (Duveen, 2001; Orr, 2007; Howarth, 2010; Mana, Orr & Mana, 2009): without this

¹ A hyphen is used as a means of highlighting the fact that representations are constantly re-interpreted, re-thought and so re-presented (Howarth, 2004).

concept we cannot explain why particular people have different perspectives, draw on particular representations, defend them in the ways they do, and why other representations are ignored or contested. The construction, elaboration, and rejection of social representations is not, however, arbitrary (Moscovici, 1987). There are specific, negotiated limits to these processes. To understand this fully we need to put the theory of social representations into an ideological framework (Howarth, 2006; van Dyk, 1998) and apply it to complex, dynamic situations. Without such, I argue, one is left with a confusing collection of representations, no means of evaluating them, and therefore no critique.

This inter-relationship between social representation, identity and ideology is brought sharply into focus in a study of the representations of crowds (Stott & Drury, 2000). What was dubbed the ‘riot’ of 13/12/95, which occurred in Brixton, South London, has been a particularly controversial issue, bringing into question people’s identities and interests. Thus the ideological nature of the re-presenting of the event is apparent. This is even more evident when we see very similar representations of riots in the media coverage of those in 2011 in the UK (Reicher & Stott, 2011; Drury & Stott, 2013).

However, this inter-relationship exists in all representational fields: identity is always crucial for understanding how people re-present their world (Duveen and Lloyd, 1986; Orr, 2007; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson & Sammut, 2014); ideology exists as an ‘always-possible’ influence on the construction and distribution of these representations. The inter-relationship between ideology and identity is therefore circular: ideology both limits and extends the construction of identities and ideology is sustained and challenged by the negotiation of these identities. These simultaneous processes are mediated by social re-presentation.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN: TOWARDS RECIPROCITY IN PERSPECTIVES

It is through inter-action that we become aware of the “perspective of the other”, their perspective of us, and so our own perspective (Farr & Anderson, 1983). A good researcher must develop a sense of the multiplicity of perspectives that pervades any social setting (as Orr advocated in her work, for example, Orr, Assor, & Cairns, 1996). In order to realise my own perspective on the

riot therefore, I listened to, queried and, to some extent, adopted the perspectives of the others connected to the riot. That is, attempting to ‘see’ the riot through the eyes of others, from their unique positions in space/time. It is in inter-action that perspectives meet, are exchanged and so developed. Looking back on this material, with the insights from more recent studies of riots (eg Reicher & Stott, 2011), brings yet another perspective. This reading back of research data can be surprisingly insightful as interpretation is always set within a particular historical context and is always constructed through the salient questions brought to play by the researcher as well as the research context (such as this special issue).

a) The context of research

Brixton, in South London, is a richly diverse and also deeply contested area: it has a history of social protest and riots and those who live there are often represented as ‘different’, ‘other’ and ‘inferior’ (Howarth, 2002a). Media images of Brixton, for example, portray the area and those who live there as black, aggressive and criminal (Howarth, 2002b). This is only part of the story of Brixton, however. Some of those who live there, and those who are well acquainted with the area, maintain that in spite of these representations, Brixton is a vibrant community, proud of its multicultural identity and community politics. Experiences of social exclusion and racism alongside a strong community identity may help explain why Brixton has seen a number of social protests as well as full-scale riots in 1981, 1985, (1995 if the one discussed in this paper is to be seen as a riot) and 2011.

Understanding a community, particularly a contested community, necessitates immersing oneself within it, viewing it from different times and different positions (both literally and figuratively). In order to develop an understanding of my research community, therefore, in the months following the riot (December 1995 – April 1996) through the process of finding participants and collecting data I ‘*observed*’ and ‘*participated*’ in life in Brixton literally from different locations (shops, cafes, pubs, the tube station, the police station, youth centres, council offices, a lawyer’s office, homes, the streets and buses) and at different times (typical weekdays, quiet Sunday afternoons, noisy Friday nights, busy Saturday markets, eerily quiet weekday nights). These observations, however, do not constitute the data discussed in this paper

directly; they simply allowed me to make sense of Brixton first-hand and to understand the competing representations of it.

b) Collecting perspectives

The data analysed for this paper is made of 18 one-to-one interviews with people who had witnessed the riot, or had a lot of knowledge about it. These were:

- **The brother** of a man who died in police custody, who made a speech at the protest which preceded the riot.
- **A lawyer**, concerned with civil rights, made a speech at the protest, witnessed early part of riot.
- **A police officer**, on duty on the streets in Brixton that night
- **A journalist1 and partner**, witnessed the riot and took notes. Left at 10:30 after being hit by a brick.
- **A journalist2**, particularly interested in this event. Not on the scene, but has since given it much thought.
- **A youth worker**, worked for 12 years in ‘youth’ issues in Brixton.
- **Three teenage boys**, used to go to school in Brixton, witnessed the riot
- **A conservative counsellor**, a witness to the riot.
- **A store manager**, from a shop that had a lot of goods stolen. Worked in Brixton for 12 years.
- **A bartender**, normally works at The Dogstar pub, which was set on fire.
- **Three bystanders**, on the street while the riot unfolded.
- **A teacher**, and a member of the Community Police Consultative Group. Had a good knowledge of the community, and an interest in the event.
- **A restaurant manager**, premises damaged in the riot, interested in the community.

I asked all the participants: *‘What happened on 13/12/95?’*. What emerged from the interviews were many stories - rich, contradictory and passionate. In these stories individual histories linked into a social knowledge, a social memory: the experiences, frustrations, and

achievements of the past were inter-woven into concerns of, and for, the present and future. For many, speaking from diverse perspectives this past is textured with resentment, anger and sorrow. Appreciating the level of these emotions, led me away from my initial plan of recording negotiated and contested narratives as they develop in group discussion (i.e. focus groups), a method of research particularly suited to the theory of social representations (Markova, Linell & Grossen, 2007). Narrators were aware that their story was one among many, and for some, public exposure of their own was potentially dangerous: “if I said what I thought - I’d be shot!” (a store manager). For this reason, unstructured inter-viewing in settings familiar to the tellers provided a sensitive method of recording these stories without compromising the privacy of those involved.²

c) Perspectives as points in space/time

A perspective is an objective point in space/time from which events are viewed (Mead, 1927). Who narrators are, where they stand in the community, and how they were connected to the riot, locates the narratives in this objective world. Just as Farr (1984) has detailed the inter-active, and therefore inter-subjective nature of the inter-view, I suggest the crowd also be seen as an interaction of perspectives, albeit on a broader scale. This leads to an understanding of the radically social nature of the crowd and those within it. From this perspective those connected to the event must be seen as “*participant-observers*”. Consider the police, sometimes defined as ‘outsiders’ to the crowd (e.g. Reicher and Potter, 1985) or “peace-keepers” (e.g. police officer). Physically they were positioned outside the crowd, on the edges of the body of people. They attributed the behaviour of the crowd to the unique characteristics of the crowd, and not a reaction to police (re)actions. The (re)actions of the crowd must be seen in relationship to the riot police, as becomes apparent below (see also Reicher, 1987; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001). Even the counsellor, watching from a window, may influence the actions of the crowd. The knowledge that others are observing us, generally causes people to become self-conscious, alter their perspective and so their behaviour (Markova and Wilkie, 1987). Just as the self is reflexive, so too is the crowd. For this reason I suggest that it is not possible to divide my subjects into ‘participants’ or ‘observers’, instead they are simultaneously “*participant-observers*”.

² To make salient the *inter-active* nature of the inter-view I shall use Farr’s technique of inserting a hyphen (Farr, 1984).

“The voice of the ethnographer is privileged, that of the Other is muted” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). This paper is written from my perspective. Although I have tried to include as many as the voices as possible, it is only mine that is presented as a complete whole. As such it is subjective. Subjectivity, however, can only emerge from inter-subjectivity (Tolman, 1994). That is, I can only develop a perspective through the constant and creative weaving together of the perspectives of significant others. This is what follows.

2. THE STORY OF THE ‘RIOT’

In order to understand the events of 13/12/95 it is necessary to see them in their historical context. As I was interested in participant-observers’ understanding of the riot, *their* understanding of its context is crucial. I have woven these histories together, sieved out differences, retained the uncontested and so produced a complete ‘meta-narrative’ account.

a) A meta-narrative

Brixton is an area of South London with a history of riots (one in 1981, and one in 1985) a reputation of crime, drug trading, and political discontent. As the people of Brixton, in the main, do not share this representation, they are “united against the enemy” (the enemy being the reputation, a restaurant manager). Because Brixton is treated as different to the rest of London it becomes “a special community” with concerns distinct to those from the rest of the capital. Although Brixton is the fourth most deprived area in London, and unemployment, benefit claimant, crime, and truancy statistics are high, many in the community believe that much has improved and that the “problems of the 80’s” are a thing of the past.

Because the police ‘stop and search’ a disproportionate number of black people on the streets of Brixton (as the Police Commissioner admitted at a public meeting, 2/4/96), and because there has been a disproportionate number of black deaths in police custody (52 black, and 3 ‘white’ in the last decade, some being from the Brixton area, Brian Douglas Campaign) resentment towards the police is shared by many in the community. The news that there had been another black death in the early hours of 5/12/95 in police custody could only, in this context,

add to the resentment felt. Despite the statements from the police that the man involved (Wayne Douglas, a Brixton resident) had died naturally, there was widespread belief in the community, supported by one newspaper report (The Voice, 12/12/96) that Douglas died from injuries sustained from police batons.

In an attempt to draw attention their concerns members of the community, Douglas' relatives and campaign groups organised (and obtained police permission for) a protest which took place on 13/12/95 at 6:30pm, outside the police station in central Brixton. About 150 people turned up, and were monitored by 12 visible police officers. Several speeches were made, by representatives of campaign groups and Douglas's sister.

At 7:30pm the protest organisers announced that, despite police objections, the crowd would march slowly down the main road in Brixton to the Town Hall, then return. The police attempted to prevent this, but succeeded only in shadowing the crowd to The Oval. Here, the police surrounded the crowd, and so blocked their return. At this stage there was "basically a stand-off" (counsellor). The organisers tried to negotiate with the police and the crowd who appeared "quite angry" (a journalist).

At 8:30pm, after some trouble between a few individuals and the police, "there was heavy police, on horseback, and police with shields" (journalist1). The crowd had become very agitated and "the organisers lost control" (brother). According to the police officer "at this point people started getting confrontational with the police", who then "attempted to disperse the crowd by moving forward in a line" (counsellor). In an attempt to clear the road there was a police charge (journalist2).

This had the effect of driving people away from the Town Hall, down another main road. Some of the people then began to damage property, and loot shops. At 9:25pm a 7-Eleven store was set on fire. At the same time there was an air of normality, with "people standing at the bus-stop, trying to get home" (journalist1). After more shops and other premises had been damaged, at about 10:00pm a "copper got knocked off his bike and beaten up" (journalist1.) This changed the mood, "tensions were really running" (bartender). "Cars overturned, set on fire, shops been looted, petrol station smashed up" (bystander). The Community Police Consultative Group Offices and The Dogstar pub were set on fire. Trojan units (that is specialist firearms police officers) were called in and the police switch-board jammed with calls reporting crimes (police

officer). There was another baton charge as the police moved everyone back up the road to the Town Hall and up another main road. This succeeded in dispersing the crowd, and the majority left the scene.

There were 22 people arrested during the five hours of disturbances for public order offences, theft and criminal damage. Three police-officers were hurt.

3. FINDINGS: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CROWD

There are two clear, connected, representations of the crowd: first as a collection of individuals which is more rigid in structure, drawing on fewer peripheral elements and less open to inconsistency than, second, the representation of the crowd as a cohesive body, united by common history.

a) The crowd as a collection of individuals

Obviously what is central is the emphasis on individuals. Though it is possible to ‘flesh out’ the individual characteristics of the people in the crowd that may explain this similar response, this is not part of the ‘core’. There is something undefinable, something unpredictable about this collection of people. This makes the crowd very threatening. It is not the socio-historical context that can shed light on why crowds may act in certain ways: it is the nature of the individuals involved who can do this. A riot, understood through this representation, is not a response to preceding events, or any politics at stake. One could happen at any point. One observer who drew heavily on this individualising representation, for example, insisted that “It will always happen - who knows when the next one will be - maybe ten years” (store manager).

The representation of the crowd as individuals is extended and supported by additional information about the individuals. These peripheral themes, as shown on the diagram below, were ‘criminality’, ‘irrationality’, ‘black’, ‘violence’ and ‘opportunism’. Particularly salient in many accounts is the criminalisation of the crowd. The police officer, for instance, said that the most important factors behind the riot was the “existence of a criminal population”. Brixton containing many ”habitual criminals”, in his view, is “fertile for riots” (ibid). Another narrative

repeatedly cited “those in the black community that would be more, um, amenable to rioting” (journalist2). Some accounts equated criminality with irrationality, describing those in the crowd as “mindless criminals” (bystander). This is echoed in Reicher & Stott’s more recent account of the 2011 riots in England, where the riots were attributed to “criminals without conscience – feral youth, incapable of knowing right from wrong” (2011, p. 16). For some, the actions of the crowd are so random, so illogical, that they refuse to consider explanation of the event (e.g. counsellor). Many of these discussions were heavily racialised (e.g. journalist2), as we saw in the media coverage and political discussions of the 2011 riots (Reicher & Stott, 2011).

Nearly all those I spoke to recognised that some ‘opportunistic’ crime had occurred. What differed in the narratives was degree. For some, those who tended to draw on a representation of the crowd as a collective of individuals, opportunistic crime could be seen to characterise the actions of all, or mostly all. Journalist2, for example, in response to my asking him why the riot occurred when it did said that “Perhaps it was just the last available looting day before Christmas.”

What is particularly interesting about this representation of the crowd is how similar it is to the work of Le Bon. Le Bon’s presentation of the crowd is an intricate web of ‘old’ representations of the crowd (as plebeian, as insane, as criminal) and other representations (of hypnosis, primitivism, femininity and street life). The links between the representations embedded in ‘The Crowd’ (Le Bon, 1895) and the representation of the crowd as a collection of irrational and violent criminals found here are clear and remain salient in the public imagination (Reicher & Stott, 2011).

b) The crowd as a cohesive body guided by common history

Here the crowd is seen in a socio-historical context. It behaves *as a crowd* because of a shared history, a shared understanding of the present context, a shared anger or a shared rationality (Drury & Reicher, 2009). The peripheral elements support this central theme.

i) *The socio-historical context* was a feature of many narratives. In the main, it included the social deprivation of unemployment, feelings of political alienation and hostility towards the police (once again, very evident in Reicher & Stott, 2011). For example, some observers

suggested that tension and anger on the part of drug dealers in Brixton (due the police tightening up control over the area, and a “big raid” on 23/11/95) precipitated the riot (e.g. journalist2). In some cases this linked into a representation of a cohesive body of people “particularly pissed off about the police” (brother) as “many black people in Brixton will see that it is almost militarily policed” (journalist2).

ii) Many described a *collective cumulative “general unease”* (bystander) *and tension* building up in the community in response to a variety things, such as “the commissioner in effect labelling all black people as criminals”³ and “the Brian Douglas death⁴ ... coming together on one evening” (teacher). The “community response” (brother) to the death of another black person in police custody was collective anger. During the evening of 13/12/95 this frustration increased and turned against the organisers of the demonstration as they were seen to ‘cave into’ police demands to persuade the crowd to disperse (brother).

iii) Some participant-observers paint a vivid picture of this *anger exploding* as tensions become too great. The crowd, some suggested, “was stirred up by “nutters” like Rudy whatsit” (store manager) whose speech was described “very, very inflammatory” (teacher) and “volatile” (brother). This speech included the statement - “The Brixton police are killers and they will not understand what they have done until one of them has been killed” (confirmed by lawyer).

In addition to this, or instead, the actions of the police were seen to ‘spark’ the violence (journalist2). In some of the narratives, people claim that “without the police it wouldn’t have started” (bystander). One participant-observer felt that police actions (such as surrounding them in The Oval) increased levels of aggravation and fear and so caused the “anger to boil over” (brother). In the commotion of the crowd, the police “get so over-excited and picked on people” (bystander).

This representation of the police feeds into that of riots and police tactics at riots. In one narrative this aspect was magnified, almost to the exclusion of all else. This was the account given by the lawyer. He claimed that the police “provoke instances of mass disturbances, to test their crowd-control techniques and their bullet-proof vests.” He went on to explain that “the British government has something to sell. They enter into arms deals and need to prove the

³ This is a reference to a public statement that the police commissioner made which connected street crime and ‘colour’.

⁴ Brian Douglas died in police custody in 1994, unrelated to Wayne Douglas (who died in police custody in 1995).

effectiveness of their weapons to their overseas buyers, such as Iraq.” Brixton, he claimed “is a testing ground” for the police.

iv) For some the crowd is given a *magical quality*, “a wicked buzz” (bystander), or “carnival atmosphere” (bystander) that holds it together and acts like “a magnet” (police officer). “This euphoria, this general anger, this general togetherness of the crowd” (brother) is carnivalesque, exhilarating and passionate precisely because, as Reicher & Stott (2011) argue, riots are “so serious and meaningful in people’s lives” (p. 133).

v) Finally, in direct contradiction to the ‘individual’ representation, some narrators focused on the *rationality* of the crowd (Drury & Stott, 2013). The main evidence for this given was the “targeting” of properties to attack and loot, for example the C.P.C.G. offices (e.g. counsellor), the “yuppified” Dogstar (brother). For some the similarity of these actions proved that the riot was organised during or before that evening (e.g. police officer). As this is a crucial point in relation to my argument that the crowd holds and negotiates similar re-presentations, it is discussed in detail below. The main point here is that, organised or not, the similarity in actions points to the rational and logical nature of crowd behaviour (teacher). Once again the representation of crowd behavior as rational, with clear and collectively constructed targets – where illegitimate actions (such as looting a local community business) are suppressed by the crowd as a whole, is also documented in Reicher & Stott (2011).

Hence it is clear that both this representation of the crowd as a cohesive body and the ‘individual’ representation, the representation can also be seen in presented data of other studies in this field (e.g. in Reicher (1987, with Stott, 2011; Gaskell and Benewick, 1987; Drury & Stott, 2013). Although this claim needs further analysis, I believe it illustrates that these are *hegemonic* representations, shared across communities and histories.

4. ANALYSIS: NETWORKS OF RE-PRESENTATIONS

The two core representations described above should be seen as *networks of meanings*. Each thread, or peripheral element, can only be understood in relation to the web of threads as a whole. The representation of the riot as an explosion of accumulated anger is supported by the representation of Brixton as an economically and socially deprived area, for example. These

threads cannot be understood in isolation, from outside this “environment of thought” (Purkhardt, 1993).

a) Linking the core re-presentations

An understanding of the distinctiveness of the core re-presentations should not, I argue, negate the inter-dependence on which this distinctiveness rests. The two core re-presentations of the crowd do not represent a dichotomy – just as we can find connections between representations of individualism and collectivism (Sagi, Orr, Bar-On, 1999) and inclusion and exclusion (Tuval & Orr, 2009). Connections can, and are made, between the two. The re-presentation of the riot as an explosion of anger can support a re-presentation of the actions of the crowd as essentially violent (bartender).

In what appears to be a game of Chinese whispers some representations are transformed in the course of diffusion as different groups manipulate them to address their own interests. An example of this concerns the debate over whether the looters came from Brixton or not. While some asserted that the culprits *had* to be from Brixton as the stolen goods had definitely turned up in Brixton market, others asserted that they couldn't be from Brixton as the stolen goods has never been seen in the market. This simultaneously illustrates the plastic and located nature of social representation: they do have a chameleon vitality while, at the same time, can be highly reactive to the context within which they emerge.

b) Re-presentations as contradictory units

Competing elements of each core representation can be intertwined to present a coherent perspective on the crowd. It is also possible to find ‘contradictory units’ in accounts. Some critics of social representations find this problematic (e.g. Litton & Potter, 1985). If they are shared and consensual ways of making sense of the environments we find ourselves in (Jovchelovitch, 1995), then how can they contain *contradictory* elements? This is one of the most crucial, though complex, aspects of the theory. Within Cartesian logic it is not possible to grasp the simultaneously uniform and diverse nature of social representations. The theory of social

representations operates in a competing paradigm, Hegelian, with a different form of logic. Here “identity does not exclude difference and vice versa” (Tolman, 1994:136). As a consequence of representing an object as ‘A’, for example, the representation contains a notion of ‘not A’. In order to re-present the crowd as organised and accountable, some notion of disorder, of unaccountability is also necessary (see Markova, 1982). We can see this as evidence for polyphasic nature of representations (Provencher, 2011, Friling, 2012).

Within the same narratives there were clear contradictions. The bartender, for example, maintained that the “trouble” was caused by “outsiders who came to take advantage”, on the one hand, and later stated that some of the people who “trashed the Dogstar” were her brother’s friends from Brixton. On the one hand she is saying that the actions of the crowd are unrelated to the community, and so irrational and “mindless”, and on the other she paints a picture of a crowd of known people motivated and united by their understanding of their community and resentment about their position within that community. Another example of contradiction is found in the police officer’s account. Early in the interview he said that the riot had to be discussed and organised beforehand. Later he said that “this riot was spur-of-the-moment”. Below, I consider why people may hold such contradictory views.

5. DISCUSSION: ‘SOCIAL RE-PRESENTING’ AS THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY

How we ‘use’ representations, and develop or reject them depends upon our perspective (Orr, 2007; Paryente & Orr, 2003). Through efforts to make sense of the networks of representations, and to locate themselves within it, individuals construct a *social identity* (Duveen and Lloyd, 1986; Howarth, 2002b, 2010; Ben Asher, Wagner & Orr, 2006). Duveen and Lloyd (1986), drawing on both Moscovici (1984) and Piaget (1928), describe how “children are born into a particular culture and to become competent functioning members of their culture must re-construct for themselves the categories of that culture” (1986, p.221). Social representations provide the ‘*scaffolding*’ to the child’s efforts to build a perspective for themselves in the social world. As the child familiarises herself with the dominant representations around her, and comes to re-interpret, re-construct, and so re-present them, the ‘scaffolding’ is dismantled. When the child has established a position for himself in the network of meanings that constitute his culture

through processes of reciprocal relatedness and decentring, he can be said to have negotiated an identity.

An individual stands in a unique position in this network of meanings. This position is the consequence of many things - the combination of her past experiences and memories (perspective), the external constraints and limits on her 'possibility-space', her present needs and concerns (Tolman, 1994). The processes of negotiation and re-construction that established identity in the child are not limited to childhood. In our everyday interaction we need to negotiate the new, the strange, the contradictory (Jovchelovitch, 1995).

As I have asserted that those connected to the riot draw on the same core representations in their narratives, what difference does identity make in individual cases of re-presentation? I have argued that because people are differently positioned they manipulate representations in different ways in the process of anchoring them into the already-familiar and tying them into their personal interests. These variations manifest themselves in different ways in different situations with regard to different representations. There is a multitude of ways that this could occur. Here I shall expand on two examples found in the data.

a) Particular representations are accessible to all

Whether one defines oneself as observer or actor, however, there are some social representations which are accessible to all. The representation of Brixton as a deprived and oppressed community, for example, can be used both to support a 'riot as political protest' interpretation, or a riot as 'criminals out of control' interpretation. Many participant-observers (9 out of the 16 on record) cited levels of unemployment, benefit support, single-parent families, and under-education in Brixton as evidence of a disadvantaged and underprivileged community. These issues needed, in their view, to be brought to public attention. If previous peaceful attempts to do this had failed (due to lack of media interest), it was unfortunate, though necessary, that an event like 'the riot' took place to bring this representation to a wider audience. The teacher suggested that the fact that questions about police harassment were not addressed in the public police meeting of 5/12/95 may have persuaded some in the community that violence and confrontation, rather than negotiation and debate, are the only ways of getting "the police, or the authorities, to

recognise that people are *really* upset, and there is genuine grievance and that people feel strongly about it.”

These very same social problems are cited by others to support the argument that the population of Brixton is essentially criminal. For example, the police officer asserted that a) single-parent families produce “lawless children” and that b) single-parent families are “a cultural thing”. This seems to imply that some cultures inevitably produce lawless children. Criminality is thus simply a characteristic of these cultures. Social programs and benevolent concern is misplaced in a community that cannot be anything but deviant.

b) Particular representations are rejected

Because some representations conflict with particular perspectives, they are rejected by some individuals and groups. As Orr, Sagi & Bar-On (2000) found in the context of Israeli and Palestinian schools some representations challenge particular identities. In this sense, some representations are ‘unthinkable’ for some people. In order to substantiate this point I look at just two examples of re-presentation in the defence of identity.

i) The police officer had an interest in disclaiming any police responsibility for the supposed build-up of aggression and frustration before the riot. Drawing on a representation of Brixton as “fertile for riots” and its population as “largely criminal”, supports his thesis. In his view the riot (as previous riots) is an inevitable consequence of a “habitually criminal” population being incited by “irresponsible” and “inflammatory” speeches. Thus a representation that links racism in the police, disproportionate black arrests and suspicious deaths in police custody to the beliefs, the feelings and the behaviour of the crowd can easily be dismissed.

ii) Other participant-observers draw directly on this representation, asserting that the actions of those in the crowd were a response to the “aggressive” actions of the police. “Without the police”, the teenagers said, “the crowd would have gone home”. These participant-observers supported this representation with an account of a young mother being verbally and physically harassed by the police. For those in Brixton who regularly experience police harassment such ‘impressions’ of the riot fit in with and confirm their already constructed social realities.

These examples illustrate how fundamental an understanding of identity is to the process of re-presentation (Elcheroth, Doise, Reicher, 2011). I am not attempting to discover the ‘truth’, here, and claim that one representation is more accurate than another. I am attempting to illustrate that particular representations are unacceptable to particular people because of the interests they wish to sustain.

6. SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS FOUND IN THE CROWD

“No group whether a laboratory group, real-life small group or a crowd operates in a vacuum but rather within the context of wider social norms, ideologies or ‘social representations’” (Foster, 1991, p. 469). I would take this further: not only is the crowd *embedded in* social representations, but the crowd, itself, holds and *shares particular representations*. Before an individual enters an interaction they hold specific representations. In interaction they draw on these representations and, through re-presenting them alter their form in some way. Many outside Brixton will hold a representation of Brixton, drawing on its history, past riots and media representations.

a) Re-presentations are action

The police, for instance, who were brought into Brixton on 13/12/95 held particular representations formed together as they share and discuss their knowledge and understanding of society, their joint position in it, and so form a collective identity as police officers. These representations serve to orient their understanding of the context and so guide their response to it (Moscovici, 1973). Those in the crowd, in turn will react to the ‘expressions’ of the police by anchoring them in their understanding of the police and riots, that is, they will form ‘impressions’ of police actions. One participant-observer, for instance, claimed that the arrival of the riot police clarified the situation - ‘proving’ that it was a riot and that riotous behaviour was expected. In this way representations both shape action and *are action*. They are “social life in the making” (Moscovici, 1987), and infiltrate and shape the minutiae of everyday life (Jodelet, 1991). Such analyses illustrate how the theory of social representations can be pushed beyond accounts of the

representations found in discourse, to accounts of social re-presenting as action (Howarth, 2006; Billig, 1991).

In the process of shaping the context and events within which they emerge, representations *transform* themselves. I do not mean to suggest that each representation changes entirely in form, each and every time it is ‘used’ by individuals. As Duveen and Lloyd insist, social representations have a “relative resistance to individual modification” (1986, p.221). There are representations which appear to have substantial permanence, and are resistant to competing forms (these are collective or ‘hegemonic’ representations, such as individualism, Farr, 1991, or ‘race’, Howarth, 2009). One participant-observer felt that “the euphoria ... the “general togetherness of the crowd” made thinking particularly “creative” (brother). Reicher’s suggestion (1987) that riots, being relatively novel situations, provide individuals with the opportunity to creatively re-interpret their identities supports the claim that in such contexts the transformative nature of representations is particularly visible.

What is more contentious than the claim that the police hold similar representations is that *the crowd* itself shares representations and that through inter-action, consolidates and extends these representations. However, reproducing the ‘crowd as cohesive body’ representation, many expressed the view that “*a common sense*” (teacher) and “a common anger” (brother) united the crowd in experience and ideology. Participant-observers described how black people in Brixton are stopped two or three times a year by the police (brother) and how this leads to feelings of police harassment (lawyer). Additionally, it was widely believed that Wayne Douglas was killed by the police, and that the post-mortems were “cover-ups” (teacher).

The main evidence for shared representations guiding the crowd is patterns found in the looting and damage to property. The teacher, for example, felt that the fact “most people in the area who look at the places which got done (and) fairly easily and swiftly put a *rationale* on why those particular places got hit” was significant. It suggests that there is local knowledge that is shared by local people about which places ‘deserve it’ and what is appropriate protest/riot behaviour.

Because of feelings of resentment described above, the police were seen as the main target and the Community Police Consultative Group offices were set on fire. Shops and banks which represented non-community interests were “symbolic targets” (brother). Businesses that

only employ whites (assistant), that discriminate against or are “rude to um, um, to black people” (journalist2), that profit out of the community and “put nothing back in” (restaurant manager) were all targeted. These attacks, seen under the ‘cohesive body’ representation, are “politically instigated” (fast-food manager).

All participant-observers cited the attack on The Dogstar pub. For most, this proved that the social history of Brixton guided the actions of the crowd. This pub, previously The Atlantic, had been a “symbolic meeting-place for the black community” (police officer). The closure of The Atlantic (after accusations of drug trading), and its subsequent re-opening under new management, sporting a “yuppified” image and attracting middle-class customers from outside Brixton, caused a great deal of resentment in the community, as the teacher explained:-

“But then to replace (The Atlantic) with ... something which is run by outsiders, largely for people who come in from outside of Brixton, in the heart of Brixton, you know. To replace what was on a certain level a community facility? You know, people don’t like that, don’t like that at all. There’s no question (of) that, but again you wouldn’t have had to organise these people to hit The Dogstar.”

b) What guides the crowd?

As in other studies of riots (see Gaskell and Benewick, 1987; Drury & Stott, 2013), there is explicit evidence that there are clear patterns and limits to the behaviour of the crowd. “The challenge”, as Reicher recognises “is to explain how large numbers of people are able to act in ways that are socially meaningful” (1987, p. 171). There are two possible explanations:-

i) The crowd is organised. Some participant-observers insisted that it “wasn’t a spontaneous eruption” (journalist2). The view was that “it had to be on their minds. It must have been spoken about before” (police officer). Journalist2 suggested that “lots of violent criminals” may have decided “that was the one the one they were going to target”. Co-ordination was maintained during the riot it was suggested, by mobile phone.⁵ (This was also reported in many newspapers, for example, The Guardian, 14/12/95.) There were also fears that the riot of

⁵ Others claimed that “in this day of technology and the modern telephone” (brother) “the chances they weren’t being used in the middle of a riot is about nil” (teacher).

13/12/95 was the beginning of an organised, under-cover operation and in the following days “they’ll be bussing these people in from all over the country from Birmingham, Bristol, everywhere” (bystander).

ii) *The crowd is not organised.* Others rejected the possibility that the events of the evening could have been organised either before the night or on the night, contending that they knew the community well enough to have been aware of any such planning. One stated that “nobody could have anticipated anything was going to happen on that, um, evening, except probably the organisers, because they have experience in those things (who were appealing for the crowd to disperse, and later left the scene) and the police” (brother). Patterns in behaviour are instead explained by shared identifications or representations.

From these competing accounts it is difficult to come to a conclusion. However, from what I have gathered from witnesses, participants and media coverage, the actions of the crowd were highly responsive to the particular context. This suggests that organisation is unlikely. However, either in claiming it was planned, *or*, in claiming instead that common experiences and knowledge guided collective action, one is re-presenting the crowd as *rational*. It is not “mindless” nor is action random. Thus the patterns “have social meaning: they are intelligible as the application of ideological systems of understanding to particular circumstances in the real world” (Reicher, 1987).

For Reicher, it is social identity processes that underlie these ideological systems of understanding (see also Stott, Hutchison & Drury, 2002; Drury, Reicher & Stott, 2003) or representations (Elcheroth, Doise, Reicher, 2011). It is through these representations, I maintain, that a community understanding, a *social identity*, is expressed, defended and transformed. What enables the crowd to act as one, to behave in a similar manner without organisation or direction, is the fact that *through interaction* members of the crowd share, develop and so give life to particular social representations.

7. EVALUATING NARRATIVES AND THE IDEOLOGICAL USE OF REPRESENTATIONS

I argue that the events of 13/12/95 are the dynamic expressions of inter-subjectively agreed understandings held in the community. Others are likely to disagree. As I described above, people form different impressions from different perspectives. Wetherell and Potter (1992) have made a similar point. They see different discourses as the products of processes of negotiation and construction from different positions in discourse. Does this mean that there is no basis on which to judge these different accounts? Are narratives of the riot as a political response to social inequalities and narratives of the riot as ‘mindless’ mob violence simply alternative texts? Each as valuable to our understanding of the event? If the answers to these questions are ‘yes’, then perspectives on ‘the crowd’ may well collapse into a dizzy frenzy of relativism, impotent in critique.

Following Foucault (1980), I argue that while there cannot be objectively ‘true’ or ‘false’ knowledge, knowledge can be legitimate or illegitimate in shared consensual realities in terms of sustaining/maintaining present power relations. The reproduction of power relations depend, Thompson has argued, on the continuous and creative use and abuse of ‘*symbolic forms*’ that mystify, naturalise and legitimate the delimiting of access to power (1990). Social representations, I want to argue, are a particular type of symbolic form. Thompson is primarily concerned with the way symbolic forms intersect with relations of power. Relating his work to social representations takes the debate into the realm of power. Social representations “embody and define the experience of reality, determining its boundaries, its significance and its relationships” (Purkhardt, 1993). They both extend and limit possibilities. They are drawn on both to naturalise and legitimise relations of domination and to challenge and shatter the status-quo. They can be seen as contestory or ideological forms (Howarth, 2006; Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli & Howarth, 2012).

Thompson’s text provides a precise methodology for the exploration into ideological uses of social representations in particular social-historical circumstances. His ‘modes of the operation of ideology’ - delegitimisation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification, can be utilised to analyse the core representations found in this study. Although the representation of the crowd as a collection of individuals is more likely to delegitimise crowd activity and so sustain the status-quo, it is not that representations are, or are not, ideological.

Rather they can be, and are, manipulated *ideologically*.⁶ There are many examples of this in my analysis. Here are three. The police officer *legitimised* the number and force of the police on the night of 13/12/95 by repeatedly stating that this protected the interests of the public as a whole. The counsellor's narrative *fragmented* the interests of the crowd by blaming a "small minority of people looking for an excuse". The store manager's comment that "this will happen again and again" *reified*, or *eternalised* the event, and so severed the event from its historical location.

In this way we can evaluate the narratives and the use of representation within them. Thompson's methodology provides a systematic guide to how we can assess "who is saying what to whom for what purposes" (Eagleton, 1991). I have argued that different identities will orientate the individual to different re-presentations in the negotiation, justification and defence of identity. Here I am pushing this point further: social re-presentation establishes and maintains relations of domination on a societal level. Different representations speak to different interests and so silence, or at least muffle, others.

As Fairclough (1989) suggests that it is "increasingly through texts, notably by ... the media, that social control and social domination are exercised, and indeed negotiated and resisted", a study of the social representations manipulated in the media portrayal of riots would be likely to illustrate how social representations can be used ideologically. Indeed, we have seen since that the two 'core' representations (irrationality vs rationality, most basically) continue across most of the media, with different 'peripheries', different contexts (sporting or political, for instance) and different papers. Indeed in this early study, many participants recognise the power of media representations. Many asserted that negative, criminalised and racialised versions were predominant, creating images of "criminals rampaging on the streets of Brixton" (teacher). As one participant-observer explained:-

"the media ... puts the focus on - 'this was a group of people that came together purely for the intention of looting'. That was the commonplace response to the event. So what you actually do is *dismiss* the protest, and not why the demonstration was called initially. Nothing about Wayne Douglas. Simply about the end-product, which were the

⁶ The force behind ideology is its illusive nature. This means that while some individuals and groups may use representations ideologically, they may not be fully conscious of the fact.

riots - a group of loony black people who can't control themselves against the urge to *pillage and loot.*"

Discourses in the media can be ideological in their use of particular representations that establish and sustain relations of particular interests and suppress contestatory representations (Moloney, Holtz & Wagner, 2013). The media occupies an especially influential "location" for the production and dissimulation of these representations (Thompson, 1990). Similarly, different people in Brixton are able, because of greater degrees of access to these resources, to proclaim their version of events and override conflicting accounts. Take the representation of the crowd as a criminal mob. If you believe the crowd to be irrational, deviant and "on the look-out for trouble" then there is no reason to take seriously the assertions made by those in the crowd. The representation of the community as oppressed, discriminated against, and harassed by the police is invalid, or at least irrelevant. The consequence of this criminalisation of the crowd thus prevents a deeper analysis of the historical and social factors behind the event, and so bolsters the status-quo (Reicher, 2004). As he said more recently (with Stott, 2011), "each time a riot occurs, it is confidently dismissed by those in power as criminal, insane or subversive" (p. 97). This is not to say that a representation of the crowd as criminal is 'false', but I am saying that this representation is problematic in terms of disregarding other interpretations and so upholding certain interests in the subordination of others. This representation becomes oppressive as it is, in the main, held by those with greater access to the constructions of events, and greater interest in maintaining this positioning (e.g. the police officer, journalist² and store manager) and this means they easily avoid any responsibility for the causes of the such events (Reicher & Stott, 2011).

Consider the issue of whether Wayne Douglas was murdered by the police or died naturally. This is something I am in no position to resolve. However, it is hard to deny that the police and the media have more power, more influence in asserting their version. The contesting voices, easily unnoticed, must be listened to because their version is their reality. Those who claim that the police were responsible for his death, though they may be wrong, believe that they live in a society of institutionalised racism and "military policing" (journalist²) where the murder of black people goes unnoticed. What is worrying is that there are further police-related events

that easily support this interpretation, such as the shootings of Jean Charles de Menezes and Mark Duggan. Those who wish to understand these representations of the police and improve community-police relations must listen to these accounts, even if they do not like or believe them.

IN CONCLUSION

We need an inclusive psychology that can integrate these multiple perspectives, that does not privilege particular positions and identities over others, and does not silence particular representations. As social psychology has always been a psychology of the *mind* or of *behaviour* (Farr & Anderson, 1983), this integration is yet to be firmly established. A crowd psychology of the isolated mind, at its most extreme, fragments the crowd into individual minds which are severed from their social context. An example is Allport's conception of the individual in the crowd who "behaves just as he would alone only more so" (1924, p.295). A (Le Bonian) crowd psychology of behaviour operates outside the crowd, as a witness of the crowd, failing to perceive the contextual and transformatory influences on the crowd.

Neither a psychology of the mind nor a psychology of behaviour can do justice to the psychology of crowds. These approaches "are unable to account for the social form of crowd action precisely because they misconceptualise the individual/social relationship" (Reicher, 1987, p. 172). However, as I have argued above, we need to go a little further and recognise the fundamentally *inter-subjective* nature of this relationship. That is, psychology needs to become a psychology of the mind *and* of behaviour, that is, it needs to become inter-subjective (Tolman, 1994; Crossley, 1996). An adequate account of the crowd needs to be *relational* (Gergen, 2009), to work towards a reciprocity in perspectives that simultaneously examines the crowd from within (the participants' perspective) and from without (the observers' perspective). But, at the same time, this psychology must critically evaluate these identities and representations. We need to be aware of the 'real life' consequences of different perspectives.

"If psychology is to be relevant to real life, it must begin with real life" (Tolman, 1994: ix). I began this study in a community of struggle where issues of identity, ideology and protest resonated. It was through my own struggle to understand the perspectives of the others on these

issues that the argument presented in this paper emerged. In this enterprise Orr and colleagues' work has been invaluable in helping unpack the relationship between identity and representation. Theorists committed to critique and social change need, I suggest, a relational approach, built on the intricate dialectics that exist between researcher and researched, self and other, participant and observer, of individual thought processes and social reality, and, fundamentally, of ideology and protest. These dialectics are also those to Orr's work speaks and I believe she would thoroughly approve of this critical approach to social representations research. Her death is a great loss to the field and its critical development.

A personal reflection

My first impression of Emda Orr was of a great scholar with an impressive history of important research in Israel, who none-the-less, had a genuine interest in younger researchers' work, great humility and warmth. During our friendly conversation I told her of my first piece of research and my regret that I had never published it. She encouraged me to do, saying it could be a good illustration of the connections between identity and representation so evident in her own work. Since receiving the sad news of her death in 2012, I have thought back to that conversation and realised it was high time to follow her advice. Hence the data I draw on here is 'old' (collected in 1995), but both the views of my participants as well as the interpretations of these remain remarkably, and disturbingly, current. Since then, we have seen more riots in the UK, America, Australia and the Middle East and more intense, impassioned debate about the possible meanings and causes of these. It does feel that little has changed in nearly twenty years. Hence the issues I discuss remain pressing and ones that we all should remain committed to, just as Emda was.

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