# Riots in Lyon and Oldham: A comparative study

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# Abstract

In recent years both Britain and France have witnessed riots by ethnic minority youth. This thesis will conduct a comparative study into the riots which broke out in Oldham in 2001 and Lyon in 2005. This is guided by two questions: firstly, why did riots erupt in these two cities; and secondly, why was it that Lyon's riots were composed of two parties (police and ethnic youth) and Oldham's riots three parties (police, ethnic youth and right wing activists)? This thesis will argue that the role of the police is central to answering both questions. Firstly, it will argue that harassment by the police created grievances that led to rioting. Secondly, it will argue that the different composition of the riots was caused by the nature of the harassment employed by the police, which was in turn influenced by the nature of the relationship between the state and the police.

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# *Abbreviations*

**BAC** = *Brigade Anticriminalité* or Anti-Crime Brigade, an undercover unit of the French National Police

**BNP** = British National Party

**CRS** = *Compagnies Rébuplicaines de Sécurité*; the anti-riot units of the French police

**FN** = Front National

**GB** = Great Britain

**GMP** = Greater Manchester Police Force

**NF** = National Front

**NGO** = Non-governmental organisation

**RG** = *Renseignements Généraux*; the intelligence service of the French police

**UK** = United Kingdom

## *Introduction*

Over the last thirty years, riots by ethnic minority youth have become a reoccurring phenomenon in France and Britain. Recent riots in Tottenham, London and outbursts of violence elsewhere across the country, highlight the ongoing nature of the problem and make it a problem deserving of attention.

In 2005, riots erupted in nearly 300 cities all around France, where young people of North African and African descent clashed violently with authorities over three consecutive weeks. Lyon was one of the epicentres of rioting, where violence spread from the banlieues to the city centre. Four years earlier in 2001, riots erupted in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley in the space of a few weeks, where youths of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin clashed with police, as well as with white youths. In both countries, it has not been unusual to put the blame on a lack of integration on part of the youth, or on a general loss of respect, manifesting itself in debates about an oath of allegiance to Britain (in 2001) or in the threat to revoke French citizenship (Sarkozy in 2005). However, if riots are understood as an expression of grievances, they provide an important tool for understanding and analysing deeper societal problems, and allow commentators to extend their analysis beyond the rioters themselves.

This thesis seeks to add to this latter approach by conducting a comparative study into the riots in Oldham (2001) and Lyon (2005) in order to address two key questions: Firstly, why is it that riots by ethnic minority youth have erupted in both cities? And secondly, why is it that in Lyon, clashes have taken place solely between the youth and the police, whereas in Oldham clashes have also taken place with the white

community? Whereas a lot of academic analysis has been concerned with the question of why riots have erupted in France and Britain in recent years, the second question has received considerably less attention. Rather, it is predominantly treated as a side effect of the countries' two different models of integration – multiculturalism in Britain and the 'colour-blind' French Republican model – where it is argued that Britain's acknowledgement of different ethnicities increases tension between the different groups (Body-Gendrot 2008, Kepel 2010). However, as others have pointed out (for example see Murray 2006) racism is equally prevalent in France and as such this explanation does not seem sufficient.

This thesis follows a different path, arguing that the role of the police, and the relationship it has with the ethnic, as well as the white community is central to answering both questions. In turn it will be argued that the respective models of the policing in France and Britain have been of primary importance in influencing rioting behaviour in the two countries. The French police's centralised structure under the control of the Interior Minister has largely shielded it from outside criticism, whereas Britain's decentralised and more independent structure has made it more accountable to citizens (Lawday 2000), and involves independent policing initiatives in the different divisions, such as the Oldham police force.

Firstly, it will be argued that in both Oldham and Lyon, the actions of the police have contributed to the outbreak of riots. In Oldham, the police engaged in non-violent forms of harassment, focussing on 'Asian on white racism' as the main problem and ignoring concerns of the Asian community. In Lyon, the police engaged in violent forms of harassment, characterized by police brutality and excessive use of force.

These different forms of confrontation have been shaped by the relationship between the state and police in France and Britain.

Secondly, it will be argued that the different forms of policing also affected the role of the white community, in turn affecting riot behaviour by ethnic minority youth in the two cities. In Oldham, a non-violent stance by the police had the effect that racist elements in the white community were equally dissatisfied, and increasingly took matters into their own hands, exacerbating tensions between the different communities in Oldham. This is not a general feature in Britain, but is a defining feature in Oldham. In Lyon on the other hand, a tough stance by the police against ethnic minority youth assured racist groups that the police were 'doing their job', pre-empting attacks by white racist groups on the scale as has been seen in Oldham.

In other words, the question of whether French and British societies are more racist than each other is secondary to the nature of the relationship between the state and the police. The role of the French police as the "protector of the state" (Lawday 2000: 1) has shielded it from critique, allowing it to engage in violent forms of harassment; Britain's police force on the other hand is decentralised, largely independent from government and more accountable to British citizens (*ibid.*). This feature of both states not only affects the character of policing, but also affects the character of the radical right in both countries and helps explain the presence or absence of these forces during riots by ethnic minority youth. Of course there are other factors which explain riot behaviour in these two countries, but this aspect is of primary importance.

*Definitions*

An important feature of this thesis is the role of violent versus non-violent forms of harassment. Violent forms of harassment involve issue such as police brutality, excessive use of force, unreasonable stop searches and a disproportional strong focus on policing areas with large immigrant communities. Non-violent harassment on the other hand involves issues such as neglect of concerns of ethnic minorities, siding with the white community when disputes arise, or blaming immigrant communities for high levels of crime. Both are forms of harassment, but the former involves violence and a visible stance against minorities on the streets, whereas the latter does not.

Another important factor is the different systems of policing in France in Britain, and the different relationship with the state. The French police force is centralised and under the control of the Interior Minister, whereas the British police force is largely independent from government and decentralised (Lawday 2000). As has been pointed out by numerous scholars (for example see Body-Gendrot 2010, Zauberman et al 2003; Lawday 2000), this has had the effect that the French police force is not as accountable to the French citizens, it is seen as 'the protector of the state'. Rather, it has largely been shielded from critique, which differs from the British police which is more accountable to the people (Lawday 2000).

The first chapter consists of two parts; a review of the literature on the riots in Britain and France and an inquiry into the underlying nature of riots. In the second part, different understandings of riots will be discussed, including the models of riots as irrational, rational or issueless phenomenon. It will be argued that whilst riots may take many forms, they can be used as a tool to express grievances by groups. This thesis treats the riots in Oldham and Lyon as examples of rational riots expressing legitimate grievances.

The second chapter covers the riots in Oldham. What will be shown is that the police engaged in a non-violent form of harassment, focusing predominantly on 'Asian on white racism' and neglecting the concerns of the Asian community. In addition, the police was seen as being unresponsive to attacks by white racist groups on the Asian community. The dynamics in Oldham have to be seen in combination with decisions made by the local police force.

The third chapter analyses the outbreak of the riots in Lyon. Here, the conflict between police and ethnic minority youth is more straightforward – centring around the issues of discrimination, racial stereotyping and excessive use of force. The riots in Lyon have to be seen as simply being the most recent example in a long line of similar events, caused by an oppressive and static structure made up of police and authorities.

The fourth chapter will analyse these two case studies in a comparative perspective, aiming to answer the question of why in France, clashes have taken place solely between the police and the youth, whereas in Oldham ethnic youth also clashed with the white community, especially right-wing groups. What will be argued is that racist elements within Oldham were equally unsatisfied with the police and their non-violent stand against the Asian community. In France on the other hand, right-wing elements (the FN) were satisfied with the police, instead exercising pressure through the political system, predominantly on a national level. As will be shown, the different roles of the police system within France and Britain have been highly influential in shaping rioting behaviour in Lyon and Oldham.

The fifth chapter will contrast the experiences in Oldham and Lyon with events in Kreuzberg, Berlin; pointing to the validity of an approach based on dialogue with ethnic minority youth and local forms of policing.

## *Chapter One -*

## *Literature Review*

A review of existing literature shows that there have only been a few studies which have comparatively analysed the reasons underlying the French and British riots. By contrast, scholars have predominantly focused on studies of one country only. These studies include single case examinations, as well as the comparison of different cities within that one country. These studies have offered six broad reasons for the outbreak of riots: Ethnic and religious characteristics of the rioters; the structural context, including socio-economic factors; national models of integration and racism; and actions of authorities, including the police. Within this, a focus on the different dynamics underlying the riots has been largely lost.

This review will firstly address the comparative literature relating to Britain and France and will then address the literature that focuses on only one country. Whereas the latter address all causes outlined above, the comparative literature considers fewer variables.

### *The Comparative Literature*

Wacquant (2009) compares French and British ethnic minority youth riots with riots in the US in the sixties and seventies, and addresses them through a predominantly structural and socio-economic lens. For Wacquant, the French and British riots are largely based on the issue of class where they are seen as an uprising against a worsening economic situation and increasing social disparities in the two societies,

based in the context of neoliberal restructuring (Wacquant 2009: 94-98). Within this analysis the ethnic background of the rioters is lost.

Waddington and King (2009) and Waddington, King and Jobard (2007) compare the French riots of 2005 with riots that occurred in England and Wales between 1980 and 2001 in an attempt to determine whether it is possible to make general theoretical assumptions about the underlying causes of urban riots. They argue that the underlying causes of spontaneous disorder remain the same across time and from one culture to another. These are: firstly, highly segregated, run down and often stigmatised social locations, where residents were experiencing the effects of economic decline and political marginalisation; secondly, a sufficient number of young men, whose form of cultural adaptation led to public condemnation and attention of the police; thirdly, police intervention followed by periods of heightened vilification of the youth; fourthly, deteriorating police-youth relations, resulting from repressive policies; and fifthly, an emotive event which functioned as the trigger moment and which reinforced the idea of police hostility or indifference.

*Literature relating to either France or Britain*

Whereas comparative studies on the riots in France and Britain have been rare, there has been a plethora of studies addressing the causal nature of either the French or British riots.

*Ethnic and religious characteristics*

As has been outlined previously, Sarkozy and other members of the French authorities have portrayed the riots as a criminal outburst, linked to gangs and delinquency. In the academic literature, this view has found little resonance. However, a number of scholars, as well as more sensationalist journalists, have focussed on the cultural, and especially the religious background of the youth involved in the riots.

Phillips (2008: 140-141) has pointed out the issue of *self*-segregation as the underlying cause of the British riots, which in her eyes is linked to a distinct Muslim culture. By arguing that neither Hindus nor Chinese have engaged in the riots, she contends that the reason for rioting must be cultural. The same has been said about the 2005 French riots. Pipes (2005) has called them "the first instance of a semi-organised Muslim insurgency in Europe", describing them as "rioting […] to calls of Allah Akbar"; and the French philosopher Alan Finkielkraut (quoted in Schneider 2008: 137) argued that the problem with most of these youth is that they are blacks or Arabs, with a Muslim identity and engaged in a pogrom against the Republic. This approach clearly reflects the works of Lewis and Huntington and the idea of a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1993, 1996; Lewis 1964, 1990, 2004).

This approach seems to makes little sense in explaining the outbreak of the British or French riots. Apart from ongoing criticism of the concept of a clash of civilizations, studies show that in France, not all rioters could be qualified as being Muslim (Schneider 2008: 137). Further, a cultural approach is unable to explain why some areas with Muslim residents have experienced riots, but others have not. Whereas

France has the biggest Muslim population in Europe, both in terms of numbers and percentage of population, the UK has a smaller Muslim population than Germany, and a smaller proportionate Muslim population than the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland (Pew Research Centre 2011). Despite their sizable Muslim populations, none of these countries have experienced riots by ethnic minority youth on the scale as those seen in Britain and France. Secondly, a cultural approach does not explain why cities such as Marseille in France, or Rochdale in Britain did not experienced riots in 2005 and 2001 respectively, despite having similar demographic make ups to Lyon and Oldham.

The use of Islam as a causative factor airbrushes over the real causes and tends to obfuscate the issues (Patel 2007: 48), and subsequently hinders a more analytical and evidenced based line of inquiry. There is a distinct danger of assigning a religious motive and identity to a person who might essentially act upon political or other considerations. In Roy's words (2007: 31): "If the *banlieu* is primarily a problem because of Islam than there is no social problem."

*Model of Integration and racism*

In relation to France, a number of scholars have argued that the reasons for riots are rooted specifically in the French system of assimilation (Murray 2006, Haddad et al 2006, Meier et al 2009, Loch 2009). France's system of integration is unique and in direct opposition to the multicultural model, which can be found in Britain and in most other European countries (Schain 2010). Based on the idea of the 'indivisible Republic', France does not recognise ethnicity in the public sphere.

Murray (2006) has argued that the 2005 riots were a direct outcome of the failure of the French concept of assimilation and *laïcité*, a word which cannot be translated into English but roughly corresponds to the separation of church and state. According to him, the idea of the Republic as 'indivisible' nation is anachronistic and xeno-racist and reflects an apparent unwillingness to acknowledge that modern France is multicultural and multiracial (Murphy 2006: 35). As such, the French model produces feelings of rejection and exclusion among the country's ethnic minorities, which have manifested themselves in riots (*ibid.* 36). Similarly, the riots have been portrayed as "rioting for the right to difference", based on the fact that the French concept of *laïcité* does not allow the fulfilment of different values and attitudes to be held by ethnic minority groups (Meier et al 2009: 278-280).

Most accounts that use integration as an explanatory factor also refer to British and US systems of multiculturalism, which are seen as 'better' solutions than the French model of immigration. However, French scholars such as Kepel (2010) have criticised the British system of multiculturalism after both the 2001 riots, as well as the 7/7 bombings. Ramadan (2005: 32) argues that a focus on the model of immigration is misplaced, and that one model cannot be seen as better as or worse than the other. Rather, both countries have to confront the fact that racism is still prevalent within their societies, regardless of the differing models of integration, best demonstrated in diverse areas such as housing, education and the job market. Similarly, Murphy (2011), who has undertaken 12 months of ethnographic field research with youth of immigrant background in the French city of Limoges, has argued that the problem is not the idea of France as an 'indivisible' nation, but rather that the French ideal has

not been applied to ethnic minorities, based on deep seated discrimination and racism across a range of areas, such as the housing market and politics. Koff and Duprez (2006: 726) have argued exactly the same, seeing the riots not as a challenge to the French model, but rather as a denouncing of its lack of implementation in their neighbourhoods. The same has been argued in the case of Britain, where scholars have argued that the riots in 2001 represented the fight for a more equal role in society and as such a reassertion of the rioters' British citizenship (Hussain et al 2005).

*Structural and socio-economic explanations*

In the United States, riots involving African-American communities in the middle of the 20th century have led to many large scale quantitative comparative inquiries in relation to similarities in the underlying context of the areas where riots took place. For example this included the development of theories according to which riots arise out of poverty or inequality, or because of increased inter-ethnic competition (Olzak 1992, Olzak et al 1996). In the case of the British and French riots of 2001 and 2005, with a few exceptions, quantitative large-scale analyses have not been as prominent.

Lagrange (2009) undertook a statistical analysis of the underlying social and structural conditions of the different towns involved in the 2005 French riots to try to establish connections between the characteristics of a particular location and the people who inhabit them and their propensity to riot. He argues that the outbreak of riots is highly connected to medium levels of segregation, which correlates with about 70% of the areas where rioting took place. However, this approach gives relatively little insight into why the riots in France have erupted in 2005, and why they have

erupted in some places, but not in others – as his correlation of 70% shows, segregation itself is not the whole picture. Epstein (2009) also looks at underlying structural factors, arguing that attention has to be paid to the role urban renewal policies played in the areas affected by riots, as they are likely to have a negative impact on the residents of these areas.

The role of socio-economic conditions has played an important role in the literature on both Britain, as well as France. Hargreaves (2007: 1-2; 136-137) argues that the origins of the French riots lie in deep-seated socio-economic inequalities. Additionally, these are exacerbated by entrenched patterns of discrimination against immigrant minorities, especially of Arab and African origin, in areas such as the job market. Similarly, Rai (2006) has pointed to low wages and income inequality facing the Pakistani and British communities in Britain as primary cause of the riots. Kundnani (2001) has taken a broader approach and highlighted the nature and economic history of the English towns in which rioting took place in 2001. Most of the towns were centres of the old textile industry, which have undergone significant economic decline since the textile industry moved abroad; leading to greater inequalities for its Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations.

However, Ray and Smith (2004) and Mitchell (2011) have argued that whilst poverty and unemployment were evident within the areas where rioting took place in Britain and France, there were also cities which possessed commensurate socio-economic (as well as demographic) characteristics, but which were not affected by riots. An example for this is the city of Rochdale (Ray and Smith 1999), or Marseille (Mitchell 2011). As such, in line with Mill's work on comparative analysis, poor socio-

economic conditions can be qualified as a necessary, not however as a sufficient condition for the outbreak of riots by ethnic minority youth in Britain and France. A necessary condition is defined as a "circumstance in whose absence the event in question cannot occur" (Clark 2009: 18-19); however the condition can occur without the effect occurring – it is necessary, but not enough to lead to the event in question or in this case, riots.

*The role of the police*

A large body of literature has addressed the role of authorities, and specifically the role of the police, in the outbreaks of the riots in both France and Britain. This involves both case studies of particular cities, as well as the discussion of the relationship between ethnic minorities and the police on a more general level.

Mouhanna (2009), Schneider (2008) and Begag (2007) have all assigned a central role to the police in the outbreaks of the 2005 riots. Whereas Schneider focuses on the city of Paris, and Mouhanna and Begag assess the relationship between the police and ethnic minority youth on a general level, they all highlight that police brutality, racial profiling and continuous identity checks have played a key role in the outbreak of the riots – they have in essence created a feeling of second-class citizenship and a sense of 'us versus them' (Begag 2007: 7-25; Mouhanna 2009; Schneider 2008).

The role of the police has equally been highlighted in studies on the riots in Britain. Waddington (2007: 102-107) has assessed the role of the police in the Burnley riots and have argued that the police had misinterpreted the concerns of the local Asian

community. Ray and Smith (2004) and Waddington (2007: 97-101) have argued that the police failed to react to racist attacks against Asians, while heavily focussing on crimes committed by Asian youth on whites. Failure to adequately protect Asian communities led to Asian teenagers assuming the role of protectors, which led to rioting .Whereas Kalra and Rhodes (2009) see the main reasons for the riots in Oldham in local racial tensions, they agree that the police added further tension to the situation.

*Approach and contribution by this thesis*

Within the literature discussed above, relatively little attention has been paid to the different nature of the British and French riots. The 2005 French riots were characterised by clashes between authorities and young people of mainly North African and African origin, whereas the 2001 British riots started with a clash between Asian youth and a right-wing group, then turning into clashes with the police. This difference has received little attention in academic analysis. Instead, it is often seen as a by-product of the countries' differences in integration policies. Body-Gendrot (2010: 190) argues that in the case of Britain, a focus on ethnicity and identity politics (through multiculturalism) exacerbates the potentiality of conflict. In her eyes, French rioters express their anger against the symbols of the state and as such protest for more respect, equity and against discrimination, whereas in the UK they represent an emphasis on identity differences. Similarly, Kepel (2010) argues that the French system of integration has had the effect that the French riots had nothing to do with ethnicity, as compared to Britain.

These accounts however overlook that in Britain, riots have also taken place which were directed against the state and authorities without an obvious involvement of

right-wing groups or the white community. Examples for this include the riots in the 1980s in places such as Tottenham or Brixton, or the recent riots in Tottenham in August 2011. As such, an analysis of rioting behaviour in the two countries would benefit from a closer look at the interaction of the groups involved on a city level in comparative perspective. This thesis seeks to add to broader studies by undertaking a comparative study of the riots in Oldham (2001) and Lyon (2005). To gain insight into the question of why rioting behaviour in these cities has differed, it is essential to establish what has led to their outbreak in the first place. As such, this study is guided by two questions: why have riots erupted in these two places and why is it that in Lyon, clashes have taken place solely between the youth and the police, whereas in Oldham clashes have also taken place with the white community?

It will be argued that the role of the police and its relationship with the state is central to answering both questions. By focusing on the role of the police, this thesis builds upon the works of scholars such as Schneider (2008) and Waddington and King (2007). Whereas poor socio-economic settings present the necessary conditions for the riots in Lyon and Oldham, it will be argued that the role of the police is crucial in understanding their outbreak and to explain differences in rioting behaviour. As such, the role of the police presents the sufficient condition. In turn, it will be argued that the relationship between the police and the state in France and Britain has played an important role in affecting rioting behaviour in Oldham and Lyon.

Britain and France have a number of similarities, which have made them popular for comparison in the past, this includes: a similar population size; being first democracies in Europe; both have been colonial powers which led to large immigrant

communities – with France's immigrant population bring primarily of North African origin and Britain's of Asian and Afro-Caribbean; the development of quasi ghettos characterized by high unemployment and low wages, home to these immigrant communities (Rai 2006; Hargreaves 2007); as well as conflict between immigrant communities and the police. However they also differ in one important aspect, their centralised versus decentralised nature and the different relationship this creates between police and state. This factor is of primary importance in affecting differences in riot behaviour, also it is not claimed that it is the only one.

*Methodology*

This study takes the form of a comparative analysis into the question of why riots erupted in Lyon and Oldham and why the riots have shown different characteristics - with a focus on the role of the police and its relationship with the state. In order to do this, it is important to get a thorough understanding of the dynamics at play in the two cities leading up to the riots, requiring reference to a number of different sources. Firstly, this has involved a range of primary sources, such as government, police and NGO reports, newspaper articles and blogs. This also includes some quantitative data in the form of statistics on issues such as stop and search, deaths in custody and racist incidents, predominantly in the case of Oldham. Secondly, secondary sources have been consulted to make use of former studies conducted into these two localities, as well as to get a broader understanding of the role of the police in the two countries.

Whereas research into Oldham has profited from a large amount of data, the case of Lyon has proven significantly more difficult. Firstly, more in-depth research, for example into government records, was impeded by a language barrier. Whereas

limited French skills allowed making use of some newspaper articles obtained through Factiva and statistical data, they were not sufficient enough to analyse more comprehensive data and literature. This was also the case for French academic literature on Lyon, from which the thesis would have profited. Secondly, most of the existing research in English focuses on events and interactions in and around Paris, whereas Lyon has largely been neglected. Thirdly, the centralised nature of the French state and in particular the organisation of the French police force has constituted another obstacle. Whereas there is a wealth of information on the French police in general, due to its centralised nature, there is very little information focused on Lyon specifically. Rather, it is national policies, which determine actions in Lyon. As such, an examination of Lyon has required a wider examination of French policies, blurring the boundaries. However, whilst this has been a problem, it seems to be a problem faced by all academics conducting research into the issue. Research seems to be either conducted on the French police force per se, rather than into a specific city (for example see Mouhanna 2009), or when the focus is on a particular location, references are still often made to the French police in general and national policies (for example see Schneider 2008).

# *Chapter Two -*

# *Theories of Riots*

This section will provide an overview of the different theoretical approaches to understanding riots, in order to establish the approach upon which this thesis will be based. Riots belong to the broader category of contentious collective action, which encompasses a diverse range of actions, such as protests, strikes, revolutions and social movements (Tarrow 2011: 7). Whilst a great deal of collective action occurs routinely within everyday life, collective action becomes contentious when it inhibits either new or unaccepted claims, involving the confrontation of ordinary people with authorities, elites or opponents (Tarrow 2011: 7-8).

There has been much debate, however, over the existence of underlying claims in relation to riots. Whereas social movements engage in a range of diverse activities which are planned and organised, such as strikes and protests, (Tarrow 2011: 8) that clearly articulate a set of goals or objectives, the underlying motivations for riots are less clear. Instead, riots are characterized by their violent, illegitimate and spontaneous nature (Marx 1970: 24). Lacking leadership or spokespeople these movements usually fail to articulate a set of goals. In addition, riots "are bound by the socio-economic and spatial immobility of their participants in contrast to social movements, which have the ability to shift their mobilization to a broader spatial and political scale" (Simiti 2009: 2). [1] Given the ambiguity surrounding the causes of riots,

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[1] However, it should be kept in mind that although rioting behaviour and social movements differ from one another (Giugni 1998: 377), the two concepts should not be regarded as mutually exclusive (Simiti 2009: 2). Firstly, riots may at times lead to the development of social movements as has been the case in the 1984 riots in Lawrence, Massachusetts; and secondly, riots may form part of a social movement's larger cycle of protest, which can be exemplified by the Watts riots in 1965 which occurred within the context of the civil rights movement (*ibid.* 2-3).

three main explanations or models have been developed: irrational; rational; and issueless riots, with issueless riots being a modernized form of irrational riots.

*Irrational Riots*

Early theorizing on riots, and collective violence more generally, has sketched an inherently negative image of rioters and their behaviour, as can be exemplified by the works of Le Bon (1908) and Martin (1923). Riots were portrayed as the emotional outcome of "herd instincts" (Marx 1970: 21), in which the individual loses control over their own actions. In the words of Le Bon (1908: 36):

> *"He [the individual forming part of a crowd] is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will. […] Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct."*

Importantly, this means riots are seen as something unusual, unable to be analysed to the same degree as "normal" political life (Tilly 1978: 9; Smelser 1970). As such, underlying motivations for riots are seen as having no rational basis. Rather, it is argued that rioters find some sort of justification for their actions by creating a fictitious and temporary environment (Martin 1923: 194). It follows that riots are seen as the actions of "social misfits, criminals and riff raff" (Marx 1970: 21), and as inherently disruptive to an otherwise functioning society. The last part of this section will show that far from being outdated, this view continues to exist, and is especially espoused by authorities, and members of the public who view rioting groups with suspicion.

*Rational Riots*

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have started to fundamentally challenge the irrational concept of riots. Most importantly, new research into riots has stressed the idea of an underlying "generalized belief" of collective violence (Smelser 1962, 1970: 48). A generalized belief means that the rioters connect grievances with a particular institution, individual or symbol against which the violence is directed (Marx 1970: 24). Consequently, riots are no longer seen as irrational but instead can be analysed like "normal" political behaviour (Smelser 1970: 47-48). As such, riots can function as an expression of grievances and injustice, rather than simply as disrupting an otherwise well-functioning society.

The transition to viewing riots as having rational causes has two key ramifications. Firstly, members of a crowd engaged in rioting are no longer seen as disconnected individuals, who have nothing else in common except that they have lost control. As has been argued by Reicher et al (2004: 560), individuals are no longer seen as losing their identity in a crowd, but rather as embracing a social identity; entailing the question "what makes my group distinctive compared to other groups?" It follows that the level of analysis extends beyond the characteristics of the individual rioter to the interactions between different groups in society. In this context, Reicher and his colleagues have further highlighted the idea of "collective memories", pointing to inter-group histories as an important indication for contemporary tensions (*ibid.* 561; Waddington et al 2005: 497):

*[…] groups have collective memories which can sometimes go back well beyond the experience or even the lifetime of any individual member. Crowds will "remember" their supposed mistreatment at the hands of another group many years ago and they will retain a suspicion and a hostility to all members of the other group, irrespective of whether they individually have done anything to offend.*

Secondly, viewing riots as a response to a grievance shifts the focus of inquiry to the holders of power and how their actions may have created that grievance. As has been highlighted by Smelser (1970: 51), through unresponsiveness to grievances and repression, the holders of political power can be contributors to the origins of the outburst of violence. As such, the perception of riots as irrational might allow holders of power to ignore legitimate grievances and instead perpetuate the status quo. Waddington and King (2005: 499) have highlighted a similar point, arguing for the need to address the legitimacy accorded to certain group demands by key ideological institutions – as it is likely that acts such as public denunciations risks alienating an aggrieved a group even further.

*Issueless riots*

In 1978, Tilly argued that students of conflict have moved from the question of whether collective violence is a normal and rational phenomenon to how rational it is and what sort of rationality it involves (Tilly 1978: 53). However, when it comes specifically to riots the issue is not as clear, as Marx's (1970) concept of *issueless* riots shows. According to Marx (1970: 23), the idea of seeing riots as rational has

gone too far in the sense that scholars have stopped paying attention to a range of riots which are not primarily motivated by a critique of the current social order. He blames this on an inherent left-wing bias on part of many academics, which automatically connects protests involving students, ethnic minorities and populations in developing countries to the expression of injustice and political motivations. Whereas Marx does not deny that riots can be used as a tool to express grievances, he adds issueless riots as a third category – where outward actions are the same as with rational riots, but where elements of protest, ideology, grievance, lack of access to channels for redressing complaints and social change are at best insignificant factors or at worst, absent altogether (*ibid*. 23-24).

Marx highlights an important point; there is much variation between riots and this has to be taken into account when analysing the nature of their outbreak. This has been highlighted by the media's analysis of the 2011 riots in England, where commentators rarely made a distinction between the first wave of riots in Tottenham which have involved clashes with the police and the riots which later spread around the country and which often only involved looting. However, the label "issueless" riot has to be treated with caution, and attention has to be paid as to *who* applies that that label to riots.

The reactions by Sarkozy and the French police union after the riots in 2005 illustrate this point. During the course of the riots, Sarkozy explicitly used the words "scum" and "thugs" to describe the rioters, attributing the violence to criminal gangs of delinquents (Moran 2008: 2). Similarly, representatives of the police union called the rioters "the scum [of the suburbs] at war with the state" and called for "the eradication

of those who rot the life of the inhabitants of the suburbs and direct the youth there against the forces of order" (quoted in Moran 2008: 2). However, as has later been revealed, the intelligence service of the French police never believed this claim. Already during the course of the riots an internal report, which was later leaked to the press, stated that the violence was not organised or manipulated by any groups or gangs, either militant or Islamist (*ibid*. 3). In addition, most of the youth tried before the courts in Paris after the riots were unknown to the justice system and did not have the criminal pasts that belied the government's claims. However, by portraying the riots as the outcome of "scum" and gangs (echoing the terminology employed by Le Bon), Sarkozy not only asserted the need for repressive police action (*ibid.*), but also diverted attention away from any underlying problems, in effect perpetuating the status quo. As such, the "issueless" label should only be applied with caution and after thorough empirical analysis.

*The approach taken by this thesis*

By analysing the role of the police in the outbreak of the riots in Oldham and Lyon, this thesis is situated within the category of rational riots. It takes into account the role of authorities in the outbreak of the riots, and extends the critical analysis beyond individual characteristics of the rioters. It also traces the relationship between different groups over a longer period of time, to show how feelings of injustice have accumulated. As such, it falls within what Tilly (1978: 42) has called modern forms of collective violence, in which participants commonly express their grievance that they are unjustly denied their rights in one form or another. Whilst this thesis

acknowledges that issueless riots exist, it argues that this label cannot be applied to the riots in either Oldham or Lyon.

'Rational riots' can further be divided into two categories: firstly, instrumental riots, where their outbreak has been important in solving a group's problems; and secondly riots where a generalized belief is present, but where riots do not advance the interests of the group (Marx 1970: 26-29). According to Marx, instrumental riots are likely to involve a dissident group against authorities, whereas the latter often involves violence between groups divided on a range of grounds such as religious or ethnic lines, in which authorities only function as a bystander (*ibid*.). However, when it comes to riots by ethnic minority youth, the distinction is not as clear. As has been seen in France over the last few decades, riots between youth and authorities have erupted periodically and achieved little in the way of positive change. Indeed, the actions or reforms taken after a riot depend on how the government and the wider community define the original causes of the riots – it can either be framed in terms of discrimination on part of the majority, or as an unwillingness to integrate on part of the minority. The factor of 'youth' is additionally problematic, as it is quickly associated with a loss of respect for authorities, parents, and law and order.

# Chapter Three –

## *The riots in Oldham: Asian gang violence and the innocent white victim?*

This chapter will assess the dynamics leading to the outbreak of the riots in Oldham in 2001. What will be shown is that the police in Oldham failed to assure the Asian community that attacks on them were taken seriously. This chapter will argue that although the police did not violently harass the Asian community, it engaged into non-violent forms of harassment, and that this created a space in which local right-wing elements increased their attacks on the Asian community. The chapter will start with an overview of the events leading up to the riot's outbreak, focusing on the "trigger" moment. It will then establish the above claim in three steps: firstly, it will examine how the police dealt with racial violence in Oldham; secondly, this chapter will assess the attacks by white racist groups on the Asian community and reasons the community perceived that it was not afforded protection; lastly, this chapter will address the role of stop searches and police brutality against minorities.

*An overview of the events of the 26th of May 2001[2]*

On the evening of the 26th of May, an argument broke out between a number of white and Asian boys outside a chip shop on Roundthorn Road in Glodwick. According to witnesses, trouble erupted after a 16 year-old white youth threw a brick at one of the Asian boys playing cricket in the street, calling him a 'Paki bastard' (Searchlight Magazine 2003). After a brief fight, the young Asian boy ran home to inform his

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[2] The following account is largely based on the accounts of Waddington (2007: 97-98), as well as Searchlight (2003)

older brother of what had occurred. The two then decided to approach a house which two of the white boys were seen entering. According to Rashid and his brother Tanveer Ahmed, the front door of the house was slightly ajar, leading one of the boys to push it open further to see inside. Almost immediately, Sharon Hoy, the mother of one of the young white boys, who was inside the house with a number of friends, became racially abusive, calling Rashid and his brother 'f***ing black bastards' and 'Pakis' (Searchlight 2003). According to residents, the boys ran away, with Sharon Hoy chasing after them, shouting.

The situation then escalated when Sharon Hoy called her brother Darren, who was drinking in a local Oldham pub, with the message "a Paki has kicked the door in". The background of Darren and the friends he was drinking with seems to be crucial in how the events unfolded as the group consisted of British National Party (BNP) supporters, and members of a number of affiliated groups (Searchlight 2003). Earlier in the day, they had already been caught on CCTV, singing racist songs and harassing taxi drivers on the street, which involved a confrontation with the police in which one of the men was arrested (*ibid*.). After a brief deliberation, the group of about ten men set off in three taxis to the area of Glodwick.

What followed was a violent rampage in the area. Armed with sticks, Darren and his friends threatened Asians walking on the street and sitting in cars and smashed the windows of Asian-owned shops and homes. Victims included mothers with their children, as well as a pregnant lady who suffered from shock after her windows were kicked in. Subsequently, the police were called, eventually arriving on scene thirty minutes after the violence had erupted. Although police arrested most of the men

involved, the rumour had already spread that Asians were under attack by white racists who were proceeding unchallenged by police. Asian youth continued to pour into the area, increasingly upset with the fact that these attacks were allowed to have happened. This anger was exacerbated as a few of their number were arrested.

An hour later, about 500 Asian youths were involved in battles with the police in the centre of Glodwick, erecting street barricades and throwing bricks and stones at the police line, with over 700 petrol bombs being thrown in the space of just seven hours (Searchlight: 2003). Violence took place for three consecutive nights, with rioters setting fire to cars, a number of businesses and pubs and on occasions also clashing with a number of white youth gangs.

*Framing racial violence in Oldham*

In order to understand why the ethnic minority responded as they did, it is important to understand policing objectives in Oldham. Since the middle of 1998, the Chief Superintendent of Oldham, Eric Hewitt, had continually voiced concerns about 'Asian on white' gang violence in Oldham, based on the publication of statistics on race hate crimes which started at that time. For the years 1998-1999, 53% of victims were white, compared to 35% with an Asian ethnic background (Ray et al 2004: 686). In 1998, he argued:

*"There is evidence that [Asian male youth] are trying to create exclusive areas for themselves. Anyone seems to be a target if they are white. It is a growing polarisation between some sections of the Asian youth and white youth on the grounds of race,*

*manifesting itself in violence, predominantly Asian."* (quoted in Waddington 2007: 99).

Hewitt made similar remarks just a few months before the riots broke out, voicing concern about the increase of racist attacks by Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth gangs, again based on the publication of statistics (Kalra et al 2009: 52). This newest data showed that in the past 12 months, out of 572 racist incidents, 60% were committed by Asians on white men (*ibid.*). As has been pointed out by Ray et al (1999: 2; 2003), Hewitt portrayed the major problem of racial violence in Oldham as stemming from attacks by Asian youth on innocent whites.

However the way in which the police have interpreted these statistics - and subsequently the issue of racially motivated attacks in Oldham – is fundamentally problematic, as they have taken as objective measurements for reality (Waddington 2007; Kalra et al 2009; Ray et al 2004; Ray et al 1999). It can be argued that such statistics are highly skewed, as academics question the willingness of members of an ethnic minority to report racially motivated attacks to the police. According to Smith (2009), the decision to file a complaint to the police or an individual officer depends not only on the seriousness of the grievance and the individual's self-confidence, but also their confidence in the system's ability to follow-up and take action on the complaint, as well as the availability of support and assistance. In reality, people with a minority ethnic background are often less likely to file a complaint, which means attacks on Asians would be seriously underrepresented in official statistics. A remark from 21-year old student Suhal Hussain from Oldham just four weeks before the riots highlights both points:

*"I have seen Asians being attacked and they didn't always think it was worth reporting. Whatever the police say today, the fact is that they did not always respond to complaints from Asians in the same way that they did to complaints from white people."*

(quoted in Daily Telegraph 25th April 2001)

In addition, Oldham was unique in the sense that it took a very proactive stance towards the reporting of racially motivated crimes at that time. Jennifer Garner, community and race relations officer at Oldham police station, states that Oldham division was one of the first divisions that actively encouraged the reporting of racially motivated crimes (quoted in O'Neill 2002). However given the hesitance of minority ethnic groups to report such incidents, a proactive stance is likely to inflate official statistics even further; on the one hand it is questionable that this approach will overcome the problem of underreporting, and on the other it actively encourages whites to see attacks committed by people with an ethnic background as racially motivated. The loose definition of a racially motivated incident in Britain as 'any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person', underlines this problem. As such, it is no surprise that the statistics collected in Oldham inhibit some unique features in comparison to other divisions in the area covered by the Greater Manchester Police Force (Ray et al 2004; Ray et al 1999). Firstly, Oldham showed by far the highest numbers of racist violence compared to other areas, even those areas which are demographically similar and secondly, Oldham was unique in the sense that the majority of victims of racist attacks were whites (*ibid.*). This seriously questions the extent to which these numbers provide an 'objective' picture

of racial incidents - and by extension, the effectiveness and validity of the police's decision to focus on Asian gang violence.

This focus on Asian gang violence had the effect that all racist incidents involving Asians as perpetrators appear to be violent in nature, which is in line with Alexander's (2004: 532) picture of constructing Asian youth gangs as "the new Asian folk devil". In reality, only about 150 racist incidents in 2000/01 involved violence, out of which about half had been committed by Asians and the other half by whites (Chris Hilyer, Deputy Leader of Oldham Council quoted in Financial Times 27th April 2001). As such, a focus on Asian gang violence as Oldham's main and unique problem is doubtful, and served to downplay the attacks on the Asian community.

The police's actions against racially motivated crime at that time equally highlighted a focus on crime committed by Asians against whites, even within seemingly 'neutral' measures. In 1999, a Racial Crime Squad was set up in Oldham, only the second one in the wider GMP region, where a team of four sergeants would investigate racial incidents and build common profiles of suspects (Manchester Evening News, 27th October 1999). Whilst the police stressed that all forms of racial crimes would be targeted (ibid.), both Hewitt and Wilmot independently portrayed the setting up of this unit as direct measure against Asian attacks on whites. Hewitt openly admitted that the move had been partly prompted by an attack of four Asian youth on a pensioner (ibid.), whereas a year later Wilmot portrayed it as a response to a unique problem in Oldham, namely that Asian attacks on whites had recently outnumbered those by whites on Asians (Manchester Evening News 22nd August 2000). Similarly, an apparent increase in Asian gang violence nearly led to the instalment of CCTV

cameras in predominantly Asian areas (Kalra et al 2009: 48). No such measurement was proposed for any other areas, including those which Asians labelled as dangerous because of the activity of white racist groups within them.

Just four weeks before the riots, an incident took place which brought the issue of racist Asian gang violence further in the spotlight. On his way home from a rugby game on the 21st of April, 76 year-old pensioner Walter Chamberlain was attacked by a gang of Asian teenagers while walking through an industrial estate, being pushed to the ground and being beaten, resulting in a fractured cheekbone (Waddington 2009: 100). Headlines such as "Beaten to a pulp … for being white: Racism in Britain" (The Sun, 24th April 2001) were run in newspapers across the country, pointing to the apparent racist character of the attack and the problem of 'Asian on white' racism in Oldham. This attack seemed to vindicate a remark made by a few Asian youths to a reporter from the BBC two weeks earlier, claiming they were establishing 'no go' zones for whites in certain areas in Oldham (Waddington 2009: 100).

The police in Oldham also stressed that the attack was racially motivated. A Deputy Chief Inspector confirmed to the *Manchester Evening News* that the pensioner was racially abused before he was attacked, saying that he was told to get out of the area because he was white and therefore "not allowed in this part of the town", with one Asian youth saying, "This is our area – get out" (Manchester Evening News, 23rd April 2001). This was confirmed by a police force spokesman (The Guardian, 28th April 2001). However Mr Chamberlain did not mention this in his initial statement, and his family denied that there was a racial motive to the attack (*ibid*.).

This situation had put increased pressure on the Asian community at large, and especially on young people. Tariq Rafique, chair of the Pakistani Youth Association in 2001, voiced frustration that all Asians had been branded racist since the attack on Walter Chamberlain, rather than making a distinction between a small number of violent youth and the community as a whole (*ibid.*). In addition, whereas the police offered a reward of £10 000 for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators, nothing similar was done about two attacks involving Asian victims on the same day – one involving the stabbing of a taxi driver, and the other an attack on a teenage boy by a group of 15 white right-wing youth (CARF 2001).

*Organised right-wing attacks on the Asian community*

At the same time as the focus on 'Asian gang violence' increased, the BNP ran a successful election campaign in Oldham, with the slogan "Equal Rights for Oldham Whites" (Grumke et al 2006: 118), capitalising on the racial incident statistics released by the police (*ibid*. 117). The BNP was relatively successful in leading the white population to believe that it was the victim of an Asian race 'mafia' (*ibid*. 118); constantly handing out flyers and organising marches including a protest in front of the police station to react against 'Asian gang violence'. The Asian community on the other hand blamed the police for not preventing what they saw as racist intimidation (Manchester Evening News, 2nd June 2001). Significant support for the BNP amongst the population can be seen in the parliamentary election results of 2001 (just a few weeks after the riots), where the BNP gained 16.4% of the vote in Oldham West and Royton and 11.2% in Oldham East and Saddleworth.[3] Interviews conducted for the

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[3] Available from the Oldham Council Website: http://www.oldham.gov.uk/council/elections/election-results/election-2001.htm

Oldham Independent Review[4] (2001: 79-80) with white residents after the riots show that they are in general supportive of the police, however especially young whites stressed that increased police presence should be added on the street, and numerous comments were made regarding a lack of public safety. As such, sections of the white community equally questioned whether the police was doing "their job". Right-wing groups in Oldham seem increasingly to have taken matters into their own hands. In the four weeks prior to the riots, no less than three incidents occurred where the Asian community came under attack by racist groups, each of which led to a stand off with Asian youth. All three incidents exacerbated the feeling that the police solely cared about attacks on whites.

The first incident occurred during a Stoke City versus Oldham Athletic soccer game in the city, on the 28th April (CARF 2001; Waddington 2007: 101). Already before the game, white racists gathered in pubs in the city and were chanting racist songs and intimidating non-white pedestrians. Although the police did escort these groups to the stadium, racist abuse took place while walking through a predominantly Bangladeshi business and residential street in Westwood. One Bangladeshi business was attacked despite the presence of a number of police vans. It was reported that the police's failure to intervene in the matter led to a tense standoff between police and local Asian youth, with the hooligans being escorted away (CARF 2001).

Despite requests by the community to take a different route after the game, police led the soccer fans back through the same area, where this time Asian youth had already gathered to meet them, throwing stones and possibly a petrol bomb (CARF 2001;

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[4] The Oldham Independent Review was an official inquiry by the council into the reasons behind the riots. According to the review, the main reason for the riot was segregation and mistrust between the white and the Asian community.

Waddington 2007). With riot police being deployed to separate racist soccer fans from local Asian youth, tensions erupted between the police and the locals after the football crowd had departed. CARF (2001) reports that the police deployed dogs, truncheons and a riot van to disperse the crowd, with about seven people being injured by the police. As has been pointed out by Waddington, there was a feeling that the police turned on the Asian community rather than protecting them and providing 'de facto' protection for the hooligans (Waddington 2007: 101).

The second incident occurred on the 5th May, in which a group of NF and some BNP right-wing supporters gathered in the town despite a ban on all political marches by the Home Office (Searchlight 2001). Both police and media have called the day a success because the police seemingly prevented large scale clashes between the right-wing supporters and Anti-Nazi League activists who organised a counter demonstration. However, a number of events took place that cast doubt as to the successful nature of policing on the day (*ibid.*). Firstly, although the police had caught up with the right-wing group outside Oldham, they did not prevent them from entering the town. Secondly, a number of racists slipped through the police lines and gathered in a pub outside a predominantly Asian estate, where they initiated clashes with local youths. Thirdly, the police demobilised at the end of the day although many of the hooligans were still present, resulting in several dozen NF and BNP supporters entering predominantly Asian areas seeking trouble. As such, the policing on the day was less likely to be deemed a success by the Asian community who were left feeling vulnerable and neglected.

The third incident, spanning over four days, occurred in the week leading up to the riot. On Monday the 20th May, a number of former students who were NF and BNP supporters went back to their old school and threw stones at Asian students while shouting racial abuse (CARF 2001). This continued until Wednesday, with police failing to step in. On Thursday, students of the school mobilised to confront the right-wing group, which led to a large stand-off. On this day the police arrived to separate the two opposed fractions, arresting 14 youths in total, including ten former right-wing students. The fact that there were also four Asian students arrested for public disorder was met with anger, as they were seen to have mobilised on the grounds of defending themselves against right-wing incursions (*ibid*.).

*Racial Stereotyping and excessive use of force in Oldham's police force*

It might be too simplistic to argue that Oldham's police force was solely representing the white community. For example, a spokeswoman for the force highlighted that the police was not dealing with anti-white attacks only and similarly, the police requested a ban on all political marches from the Home Office to counter right-wing groups earlier in the year (The Independent, 25th April 2001). However non-violent harassment in form of an overall strong focus on 'Asian gang violence' by Oldham's Superintendent, combined with the fact that the police failed to prevent right-wing attacks on a number of occasions, meant that the police failed to assure the Asian community that their concerns were taken seriously.

In addition, as has become clear through interviews for the Oldham Independent Review (2001: 78), Asians felt that they were singled out for stop searches by the

police, further highlighting that they perceived the police to be aligned with the white community. Similarly, according to interviews conducted with Asian market traders after the riots, there was a feeling of increased surveillance by the police since the beginning of 2001, the time the newest statistics on race hate crime were released by the Oldham police (Ray et al 2004). Whereas there is no 'hard data' on the issue of surveillance, mandatory ethnic monitoring in relation to stop searches was introduced for all British police forces in 1996 (GMP 2002: 4), which gives an insight into the question as to whether the police was specifically targeting the Asian community.

A number of insights can be discerned. Firstly, according to data available from April 2000 to March 2001, Asians do not seem to be particularly targeted in Oldham in ordinary stop searches. In the period covered, they made up a total of 12.5% of all people searched (GMP 2002: 10), which corresponds roughly to an Asian population of 11.88% in Oldham (Office for National Statistics 2001: 66). In relation to other divisions in the wider Greater Manchester Police force area, Oldham has a slightly higher quota of stop searching Asians when compared to census data than any other division except Bury. However, the difference is small, and especially in light of methodological problems with this comparison it cannot be discerned that Asians are particularly targeted in Oldham.

Table 2.1 Stop Searches recorded by GMP division in 2000/01 for percentage of Asians stopped out of all stops, compared with percentage of Asian population

| Division | Asians stopped | Percentage of Population |
|---|---|---|
| Manchester | 6.4% | 9.13% |
| Salford | 1.01% | 1.39% |
| Tameside | 2.13% | 3.98% |
| Stockport | 1.55% | 2.1% |
| Bolton | 5.03% | 9.06% |
| Wigan | 0.23% | 0.44% |
| Trafford | 3.47% | 4.06% |
| Bury | 6.93% | 4.04% |
| Rochdale | 5.8% | 9.8% |
| Oldham | 12.5% | 11.88 |
| Total | 4.5% | 5.65% |

Source: GMP (2002: 10) and Office for National Statistics (2001: 66).

*Police brutality and excessive use of force*

As will be shown in relation to Lyon, police brutality has played an important role in the outbreaks of the riots in 2005; as such the question poses itself if this was also an influential factor in the outbreak of the riots in Oldham. According to official data on deaths in custody or in contact with the police, no people of Asian ethnic origin have died in custody or in contact with police in Oldham in the years between 1996 and 2001, the time from which ethnic background was monitored (Home Office 1997-2002). This is also true for the GMP as a whole. This does not mean that the

relationship between ethnic minorities and the British police has been an untroubled one over the years. According to the Institute of Race Relations (IRR: 2004), the years between 1978 and 2001 have seen over 150 incidents in which the death of an ethnic minority individual has given rise to concern, based on either suspicious or mysterious circumstances, including deaths in prison. According to information made available on the IRR website, which details location and nature of the incidents, this did not include any occurrences in Oldham.

As police brutality and excessive use of force do not necessarily lead to the death of the victim, it is vital to look at other sources which give an insight into the potential mistreatment of ethnic minority individuals through the hands of the police. Official channels to address this question are limited, based on insufficient coverage and doubt over whether members from ethnic minority communities are likely to file a complaint against the police. In regards to police brutality, while it can be discerned that in the three years leading up to the riots a total of 338 people of Asian origin complained about police misconduct, about 7% of total complaints (Home Office 1999, 2000, 2001), there are no more details of how many of these complaints have been filed in Oldham and for which reasons those have been filed.

In regards to the excessive use of force, evaluation of the confidence of the public in the British police complaints system showed that a significant number of people from minority ethnic groups were sceptical about the system and would not be inclined to use it (Clements 2008: 110). Not only does a previous negative experience of police aversely affect a person's willingness to complain, but people with an ethnic

background also said they would be more likely to issue a complaint with a human rights organisation or a legal advice centre.

For these reasons, an analysis of accounts other than those generated through the police is essential in gaining more insight into the question of whether police brutality or excessive use of force is a matter of concern in the town of Oldham. By and large, the issue does not attract much attention in the British mainstream media, with the exception of a high profile case. The Manchester Evening News (10th August 2004) reports that in 1997 then prisoner Shahid Farooq from Oldham got slapped and racially abused by a prison officer a day before his release – while surrounding officers simply stood by and watched. Although Shahid got an external court settlement of £17 500, it is unclear whether the officer got disciplined for his actions.

Accounts by the Forum against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) show that an absence of reports in the mainstream media does not necessarily portray the reality in Oldham. After the riots, FAIR sent a delegation to Oldham to engage with the local community and talk about problems affecting the wider community, where the delegation also met with a number of individuals alleging police brutality. Photographic and video evidence emerged of various incidents. Based on these accounts, FAIR helped to set up a local task team including two lawyers to help victims of police brutality in Oldham. Although this issue does not seem to be the main problem in the interaction between Asian youth and the police in Oldham, even a small number of incidents are more than likely to further weaken an already porous relationship.

*Conclusion*

It was not the direct relationship between police and Asian youth in Oldham which led to the riots, but rather the perceived relationship with the white community. A strong focus on dubious race hate crime statistics and numerous attacks by right-wing groups had the effect that the Asian community perceived the police to be indifferent about their concerns, and only to react to attacks on whites. Equally, right-wing groups perceived that the police were not 'doing their job of protecting whites from Asian gang violence', leading them to increasingly take matters into their own hands. As they attacked the Asian community on the day the riots broke out, Asian youth felt yet again that the police did not act to protect them.

# Chapter Four -

*The riots in Lyon: A long story of confrontation between the police and ethnic minority youth*

The previous chapter has assessed the dynamics behind the riots in Oldham, arguing that the police were perceived as being aligned with the white community and neglecting the concerns of the Asian minority. This non-violent form of harassment gave space for right wing groups to intervene, especially in the light of a focus on Asian gang violence in Oldham. In contrast, this chapter will argue that the key to understanding the outbreak of the 2005 riots in Lyon is the violent harassment on the part of the police. In Lyon, a more aggressive style of policing has satisfied local right-wing elements, but right-wing pressure is exercised through the political arena, especially on a national level.

Due to France's highly centralised police structure under the control of the Interior Minister, an analysis of the dynamics in Lyon will have to include a focus on national policies. In addition, in light of similar conflicts in the past, an analysis of the situation in 2005 greatly profits from a more historical approach. This chapter will show that Lyon's oppressive policing structure gave rise not only to organised protest, as was the case in the 1980s, but also led to escalation of violent confrontation in the form of riots. This chapter will start with an overview of the 2005 riots, highlighting the events that triggered their outbreak. The second part will approach Lyon from a historical perspective, to highlight decades of police abuse. The third part will assess the relationship between police and youth in the 1980s and 1990s, when second and third generations of immigrant youth first reacted to the issue of police violence. The

fourth part will analyse a political move to the right in the early 2000s that served to increase already existing tension between youth and authorities. Lastly, the chapter will assess individual experiences in Lyon, which confirm grievances based on police interactions.


*An overview of the 2005 riots[5]*

In Clichy-sous-Bois, on the northern outskirts of Paris, three boys of Mauritanian and Tunisian background were participating in a soccer match on the 27th of October 2005. On their way home after the game, they spotted the police Anti-Crime Brigade (BAC). According to one of the boys questioned later, they decided to run to avoid a lengthy identity check and questioning, which are routinely experienced by ethnic youth, and which can lead to detention at the police station for up to four hours (The New York Times, 7th November 2005). Trying to find a place to hide from the BAC, they climbed into an electricity substation. Once inside, one of the boys accidentally hit the transformer, killing the other two boys instantly. The third boy, badly burned, eventually found his way out. Later evidence showed that the police had seen the youth escape to the substation, but failed to make a simple call to the power company to shut the site down, a call which would have saved the boys' lives (Schneider 2008: 135). Instead, the police on duty commented "[…] their skin is worth nothing now" (police radio transcript, quoted in *ibid*.).


For Sarkozy, the situation was clear – since the boys were running away from the police, they must have committed a crime (*ibid*.). Just two days earlier he had promised to power hose the local youth, or "scum" as he called them, out of a poor

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[5] The events in Paris are largely adapted from the accounts of Schneider (2008), with additional sources which will be cited

Parisian neighbourhood. In addition, police denied having chased the youth, arguing the boys must have misunderstood their intent (Agence France-Presse, 1st November 2005). As word spread amongst the neighbourhood's residents, a series of small clashes broke out in Clichy-sous-Bois, followed the next day by a peaceful march by hundreds of residents of the area wearing t-shirts saying "Dead for Nothing" (Agence France Presse, 31st October, 2005). On the same night, police threw a teargas canister towards a local mosque where a number of boys were hiding from the police – again, Sarkozy denied that the police had done anything wrong (Schneider 2008: 135).

From this point, the riots spread around Paris and to nearly 300 cities and towns across France, including Lyon, where youths set fire to cars and engaged in clashes with police. Lyon was one of the cities hit hardest by violence, as clashes spread from the banlieues to the city centre (The Guardian, 13th November 2005). Whilst some French commentators blamed the spread of the riots to copycat actions encouraged by sensational international media coverage, this chapter will argue that Lyon's ethnic youth minority identified through personal experience with the events in Paris, leading them to riot.

*The North African immigrant community and the police in Lyon – a long history of tensions*

The relationship between Lyon's immigrant community and the police has been a tenuous one almost from its beginning. Like other European countries, France has been obliged to import labour from abroad for economic and demographic reasons (Grillo 2006: 30) with Lyon becoming one of the main destinations for migrants

(Lewis 2007: 33-34). Settlement took place outside the city centre in today's banlieues, where the foreign population grew rapidly. The foreign population in Vaulx-en-Velin, for example, rose from virtually zero in 1901, to a population of 48% in 1931 (*ibid*).

Whilst Lyon showed little interest in immigration control during the years of the economic boom, the depression in the 1930s rapidly changed this situation (Rosenberg 2006: 41-42). Expulsions, relatively rare in the 1920s, were normally caused by crimes that threatened the safety of people or their property. However, in the 1930s a shift occurred towards targeting the "surplus" population, so that petty crimes became a basis for expulsion (Lewis 2008: 261). Importantly, it was the police that had the key role in deciding who was expelled, highlighted by a quote from a newspaper at that time: "In a *real* Republic, expulsions would only be issued by a competent court after an investigation of both sides. But in our bourgeois anti-Republic, expulsion is by fiat, it is a police measure." (*L'Humanité* 1920, quoted in Lewis 2007: 42).

As has been pointed out by Lewis (*ibid.*), only a few repatriates had been convicted of crimes, most instead being deported after large-scale raids for issues such as "vagrancy" - as police had substantial room to interpret their powers of repatriation. Due to their status as colonial subjects, North African immigrants in Lyon became increasingly vulnerable, as they had no diplomatic representation. According to Rosenberg (2006: 166), the fear of falling into the hands of the police dominated the lives of North African migrants. Although this clearly predates the 2005 riots, it highlights an important point, namely, the overlapping of ordinary police work such

as crime control with the issue of immigration. As will be shown later in this chapter, this is a link which continues to be of importance in modern day France, and which opens up issues of racial stereotyping in everyday police work in Lyon.

The French-Algerian War from 1954-1962 left another imprint on the relations between police and North African migrants. While France was engaged in fighting overseas to secure its colonial belongings, the large number of Algerian migrants in France found themselves in a tenuous situation, being increasingly viewed with suspicion as potential traitors. This caused deep rifts in French society still visible today (McCormack 2011: 1131). According to Roach (1985: 111-112) and Silverstein (2010: 149) this situation, combined with the activities of the Algerian National Liberation Front (F.L.N.), led to heavy handed policing, which, whilst ostensibly aimed at breaking down the nationalist movement, had an extremely negative affect on ordinary North African men and women. Data on this, especially in English, is virtually non-existent. However, after long silence, French authorities have acknowledged that a massacre of about 200 French Algerian protestors took place in Paris in October 1961 (McCormack 2011: 1130). This illustrates the amount of brutality, which was deemed acceptable by authorities against French Algerians during the course of the war. Whilst an event of such scale does not seem to have occurred in Lyon, it highlights the tensions which must have been felt by the city's large population of North African immigrants and their children.

*Immigrant mobilisation and riots in the 1980s and 1990s*
Violence against the immigrant community on this scale is without doubt unacceptable today in France; however the issue of police brutality and targeting of

immigrants has not disappeared over the years and continues to be a source of tension. Actions taken by immigrant youth in Lyon in the early 1980s and 1990s provide an important insight into how pressure has continued since the collapse of France's colonies.

From 1980 to 1985, no less than 46 people were killed by the police in suspicious circumstances, with another seven being seriously injured. Three of these incidents took place in Lyon, all involving members of the ethnic minority community (A Toutes les Victimes Online; based on excerpts from Rajsfus 2002).[6] Out of all incidents, about three quarters were either second generation immigrant youths from the banlieues, or first generation migrants from North Africa. Compared with an estimated population of about 5-7%, this gives the impression that police were more willing to use excessive force against people with a foreign background.

Further, there have been few sanctions applied to police involved in such actions. In Lyon, 25 year old Ahmed Boutelja was shot dead by police in September 1982 and although charged with murder, the police officer responsible only received a 5 year suspended sentence (*ibid*.). A protest by Boutelja's family and friends outside the courthouse ended with the police firing teargas and beating them with batons. Another policeman, charged with murder for the shooting of Mohamed Abidou in Lyon in November 1982, was acquitted after pressure from the police union, whilst a third policeman was acquitted after shooting Norreddine Babas in the back while he was caught stealing.

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[6] This relates to instances which have been made public, actual numbers are suspected to be much higher, especially in terms of injuries

Beyond police brutality, ethnic minority youth in Lyon have also had to deal with everyday cases of police discrimination. An example of this is the checking of identity cards in Lyon in areas such as cafes (Grillo 2006: 61). Groups of immigrants have also been rounded up for ID checks in social situations, such as ski trips (*ibid*.). As such, there was a constant feeling of being 'singled out', based on skin colour. In 1982, 58% of minors in detention in Lyon were of foreign origin (Fysh et al 2003: 161). In addition, a study of youth delinquency in Lyon from 1978 to 1981 showed that incidents involving French youth were more likely to be filed without further action (32%) compared to 25% of cases involving immigrants (Carr-Hill 1987: 296).

Whereas the first generation of migrants have kept relatively silent about these issues, the 1980s have seen large mobilisations by their children against racism in France, and more specifically against police racism and brutality. Lyon became one of the main centres of protest in France with the founding of a number of initiatives and organisations seeking to protest and influence the actions of the authorities and the police. *Rock against Police*, *Za'ama d'Banlieue*, and the 1983 *March for Equality and against Racism (March des Beurs)* best illustrate how an oppressive structure has led to the formation of protest within the banlieues of Lyon.

*Rock against Police*, which has been adopted from the British "Rock against Racism" concerts, was a series of concerts organised in the banlieues of Lyon, Paris and Marseille in 1980 and 1981; founded in response to three separate incidents in which young men were shot dead by the police  under dubious circumstances in just three weeks (Hargreaves 2007: 132). That the focus was on the police rather than racism more broadly reflects the specific conflict between the police and the banlieue youth

(Fysh et al 2003: 164). Similarly, *Za'ama d'Banlieue* was an organisation founded by young women of Maghrebi origin, whose campaigns mainly centred on unfair treatment by the police and the justice system. The movement gained large influence among the Arab community in Lyon's suburbs, culminating in a large scale demonstration against a visit by right-wing Front National (FN) leader Le Pen in 1984 (Fysh et al 2003: 165). However, efforts to organise into a broader movement proved unsuccessful and while some smaller and local events against police brutality continued to exist, they remained unorganised and failed to take a political role (*ibid.*).

While these initiatives were trying to influence the behaviour of police and authorities through activism, Lyon was simultaneously seeing the first outbreak of clashes between ethnic minority youth and police, albeit on a smaller scale than was witnessed in 2005.[7] The first riot which is documented took place in September 1979, in the banlieue of Vaulx-en-Velin and like 2005 it was triggered by an instance involving the police. In this case, riots broke out after the public arrest of a local young man who was led off in handcuffs in order to be deported. Shocked friends and neighbours witnessing the incident saw the police as "conquerors" of their area (Willaume 2003: 13). Clashes with the police and the residents followed; however this incident received little local or national attention.

This changed with the so-called 'Hot Summer' of 1981.[8] Rather than conventional riots, the 1981 summer gave witness to 'joy-riding' activities by local adolescents, which involved stealing expensive cars in the city-centre and using them for races or

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[7] In fact, Lyon was the first city in France to witness riots by ethnic minority youth with French citizenship (Jobard 2009: 27)
[8] The Minguettes is a housing estate located in the eastern outskirts of Lyon in the banlieue of Vénissieux

for chases with the police, after which the cars would then be set on fire (Jobard 2009: 28). During the course of the summer, about 250 cars had been burnt in Lyon in a number of different areas. Local media, the opposition and ordinary citizens applied for the local council to take action, however it was the national Socialist government which ended up taking action. They implemented a national urban policy for the country's most troubled neighbourhoods, with Lyon's suburbs becoming one of the key priorities for reform (Le Galès 1994: 114).

Whilst these reforms focused on tackling a number of important issues faced by the youth in the banlieues in Lyon (increased funding for education, employment programs, physical renovation of rundown housing estates) the reforms did not extend to a re-evaluation of the relationship between immigrant youth and the police (*ibid*., Epstein 2009: 126). This was a major oversight considering the fact that this was a major source of discontent. Whilst some of the banlieues of Lyon were transformed into models of "urban renovation" (Le Galès 1994: 115), a significant part of the problem remained unaddressed.

Indeed, rather than addressing the issue, political developments following the election of Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister in 1985 further increased the tension between youth and police. Immediately after his appointment as the new Interior Minister, Charles Pasqua proposed that "decisions regarding expulsion from the country be taken not by the judiciary, but by local prefects [of police]", with the promise immigrants would be "deported in train loads" (quoted in Schneider 2008: 144). A focus on the connection between immigration and police work was further enhanced by a Bill passed in Parliament in the summer of 1993, which included the powers to

stop and search people who are suspected of being in France illegally (Beck et al 1998: 415-416). As has been pointed out by Beck et al (*ibid*. 416), a focus on illegal immigration in everyday police work equates to racial profiling, as judgement for the crime (illegal immigration) is made on appearance and colour of the individual. This presents a continuation of earlier practices, when decisions to deport people were made by the police, increasing the vulnerability of immigrants. Within this context, it is easy to see how immigrants would view the police as a threat rather than a social service.

These changes can be seen as directly increasing the tension between the police and immigrant youth, resulting in the increased frequency of clashes between the two parties in Lyon. In addition to a number of smaller clashes, the city saw four large scale riots in the 1990s, each triggered by a police killing. In October 1990, riots erupted between hundreds of youths and the police after a local 21 year old died in a motorbike accident. Witnesses to the accident reported that the police deliberately cut off the rider's path, causing him to fatally collide with the police car (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 8th October 1990). Interviews conducted with the rioting youth by journalists highlighted grievances surrounding identity checks, police harassment and deaths involving the police (*ibid*; Reuters News 8th October 1990). Riots erupted again in October 1990 after police shot dead an 18 year old local youth of Moroccan origin, who tried to circumvent a police roadblock (Reuters News, 11th October 1992); in October 1995 after the killing of a local man suspected of being a terrorist (The Globe and the Mail, 10th October 1995); and again in December 1997, after a youth was shot accidentally by a police officer playing with his gun in the local station (The Guardian 20th December 1997).

In all of the cases above (with the exception of the 1997 shooting), the police faced few sanctions for their actions. The police's position under the control of the Minister of Interior, has largely allowed it to be shielded from criticism or inquiry, an issue which has long been highlighted by Amnesty International (1994). Instead, the continuing outbreak of riots has led to further securitization and an increased police presence in the banlieues, with thousands of additional CRS special riot police added to the forces (Silvestein 2010: 154). CRS troops are tasked with moving into the banlieues at the slightest sign of trouble, however due to their obvious appearance – caged vans and officers in full riot gear – they often exacerbate the situation rather than calming down tension (Mouhanna, quoted in Fessard 2011: 1). Whilst this move was complemented by the creation of a new policing arm, the *police de proximité*, or neighbourhood police, to foster better relationships with the French police and France's citizens in 1997 (*ibid*. 2), the move was not accompanied by any policy tackling any of the problems associated with police brutality or racial stereotyping.

*A focus on security and law and order in the 2000s*

In recent years, the continuation of riots has led to an increased focus of portraying the banlieues as lawless zones and as a "sign of France's post-modern crisis" (Levasseur 2010: 1). Indeed, rather than examining approaches of policing and the relationships between the police and ethnic youth, the focus in the first half of the 2000s both in Lyon and France as a whole has been on increasing 'security' and 'law and order'. The rise of the far-right in France seems to have played an important role in this. In the 2002 French Presidential elections, FN leader Le Pen made it into the final round, winning more votes than Jospin, the Socialist candidate. A look at the election statistics from 2002 shows that Lyon, as well as its banlieues, have equally

seen a large push to the right.[9] In the first round, there was only one polling area in Lyon and the banlieues of Villeurbanne, Vénissieux and Bron (which are home to the largest ethnic minority communities in the area) in which the FN gathered under 10% of the vote. Rather, a result of around 20% was not unusual, in North-Vénissieux reaching as much as 24.7%.

Body-Gendrot (2000: 220) illustrates how the strength of the far-right in Lyon has increased pressure on the local mayor to implement a tough stance on public disorder. For example, after a fight between two groups of youths in a Lyon suburb that resulted in the death of one man, police were immediately mobilised to combat fear of street crime. Further, Lyon was one of the only cities that voluntarily invested in cameras for police cars, which allow the police to take pictures of people while driving through a neighbourhood. It is likely that this further increases the feeling of surveillance and of the police as outsiders.

On the national level, Sarkozy's appointment as Interior Minister led to changes in policing, which have affected youth all across France. Firstly, the policing of the banlieues became more centralised. On the one hand, Sarkozy put an end to the concept of neighbourhood police units, which he portrayed derogatorily as social workers (Mouhanna, quoted in Fessard 2011: 2). At the same time, difficult neighbourhoods and districts were put under the control of the CRS, a highly centralised riot police force, and the GIR, small specialised crime fighting units (Monjardet 2008: 48). As has been pointed out by Monjardet (*ibid*.), the central issue

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[9] Available at the French Interior Ministry website,
http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/elections/resultats/presidentielle/

is not that officers gain legitimacy by establishing relations with the public, but rather it is founded on the powers of constraint. In Sarkozy's words, "the best prevention is punishment" (quoted in Monjardet 2008: 42). This approach however is unlikely to ease tension in the banlieues. Rather, it has the effect that police and youth only interact when there is tension, rather than also having an opportunity for dialogue.

Secondly, Sarkozy focussed on a 'zero tolerance' approach to 'quality of life crimes', such as defrauding public transport, begging and loitering in public (Waddington et al 2009: 252). He further declared that all gatherings in the banlieues by young men were illegal (Schneider 2008: 148). Additional human and material resources (Monjardet 2008: 33), highlight the trend under Sarkozy of making the police more visible (Mitchell 2011: 416), with the goal to emphasise a police presence and come down hard on delinquents. These measurements have to be seen as an additional layer of discontent in the long history of police brutality and abuse which has been seen in earlier years. According to a 2005 newspaper article, the number of complaints against the police through law firms and initiatives in Lyon have increased substantially (Le Progrès, 9th May 2005), highlighting further deteriorating relationships.

*Voices of grievance in Lyon*

Official data which could give an insight into the treatment of ethnic minority youth by the police in the lead up to the riots in Lyon is meagre. On the one hand, France does not collect data according to ethnic origin, or any data on issues such as stop and search procedures, as such collection is prohibited by law. Although such statistics do

not provide an objective picture of reality, it nevertheless provides important insights into the issue of differential treatment. In France, the absence of such data is especially problematic in light of broad police powers to carry out stop searches, even if there are no suspicious circumstances (Beck et al 1998: 408). This is exacerbated by the fact that the French police openly acknowledges that they do not stop and search a representative sample of the population (Body-Gendrot 2010: 663).

Police statistics for individuals suspected of an offence broken up into the categories 'French national' and 'foreigner' do indeed seem to suggest that skin colour might play a role in everyday policing. From 1998 to 2004, 18.5 to 20 per cent of individuals suspected of an offence did not hold French citizenship (French Interior Ministry 2004: 63), yet this same group only constitutes 5.6% of the overall population (Zauberman et al 2003: 1074). Whilst some would argue that this difference simply reflects greater criminality on the part of foreigners (*ibid.* 1075), it does raise the question of racism in the police force, which in turn would likely extend to attitudes and behaviours to members of the ethnic minority community that actually hold French citizenship.

In relation to Paris, scholars have undertaken research in the form of interviews and focus groups to gain a better understanding of the perception police and youth hold of each other (for example see Body-Gendrot 2008, Kokoreff 2009, Mouhanna 2009, Schneider 2008). These give important insights as they have highlighted mutual mistrust and suspicion, confessions of racial profiling on the side of the police and frustration on side of the youth. However, no similar studies seem to have been

conducted for Lyon or its surrounding suburbs. Nevertheless, unofficial accounts underline that the findings for Paris are likely to hold equally true for Lyon.

In 2004, a spokesperson for an anti-discrimination group based in Lyon raised concerns about the issue of racial profiling (quoted in Open Society Justice Initiative 2009: 48). In his words, police controls make life difficult for any foreigner without papers, or anyone who "is too black, too Arab, too tan, too stereotype, too young, too poor". Police controls in Lyon are described as acts of public humiliation that are often arbitrary and brutal. In these acts, individuals are often made to lie on the ground or pushed against a wall (*ibid.*). This highlights the problem of combining everyday police work with a focus on targeting immigration, as has been discussed above, and shows that this seems to be a common feature in Lyon as well. The fact that such searches are viewed by the population as arbitrary is important, as this means the image of a police officer automatically evokes concern about an identity check. In addition, public acts of aggression such as pushing individuals against a wall or making them lie on the ground for the purpose of checking their papers impacts not only the individual in question, but also other who witness such incidents.

The issue of police brutality in Lyon is further highlighted by a local website, called Témoins Lyon – 'Witnesses Lyon' (temoinslyon.free.fr). It functions as a portal to denounce instances of police brutality and to make cases public. Information on particular cases does not date back very far, however an account of an instance of police brutality involving a woman of African background a few months before the 2005 riots broke out gives a good example of the ready use of violence against people

with an immigrant background.[10] Nadia Aggoune ended up at the police station one night to complain about a taxi driver. After asking the police if somebody could drive her home, because it was in the middle of the night, she was pushed away by a female officer with the words 'go home now.' While falling to the ground, Nadia held on to the police woman. After this, she was severely beaten and kicked by a number of officers, had her head slammed against the wall and was held in custody for a total of 14 hours. In the end, the police woman additionally sued her for insult. Incidents like this may act to encourage members of a minority not to voluntarily approach police. In turn, lack of contact between the two groups prevents the development of trust and dialogue and perpetuates mutual suspicion.

*Conclusion*

The key to understanding the 2005 riots in Lyon lies in making note of the violent harassment of the ethnic minority youth by the police. The deaths involving the two boys in Paris, followed by the denial of any wrong doing on part of the authorities highlighted to youth in Paris and Lyon alike that they were treated as second class citizens. Daily confrontation and police harassment have fostered this view for generations. The role of right-wing elements was absent in this, instead exercising pressure through the political arena.

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[10] Available at http://temoinslyon.free.fr/dotclear/index.php?2005/12/10/16-violences-policieres-couvertes-par-la-justice-et-nouvelle-affaire-doutrage-et-rebellion

# Chapter Five -

## *The riots in Oldham and Lyon: impacts of the relationship between state and police*

According to Castles (1991: 1)(Castles 1991), without some kind of comparison, either cross-national or cross-temporal, it is impossible to characterise national experiences. As this chapter will show, analysing the riots in Oldham and Lyon in a comparative perspective greatly enhances an understanding of the dynamics underlying rioting behaviour in these two cities. As has been pointed out earlier, France and Britain are similar in many respects which has made them popular for comparison: they are both democracies and part of Western Europe; have similar population sizes; and have both been colonial powers, resulting in the influx of significant immigrant populations, many of whom experience socio-economic discrimination and live in ghetto-like conditions. However, they also differ in an important aspect: France is a centralised state, and Britain is not. Whereas France's police operates under the control of the Interior Minister, Britain's police force is decentralised and relatively independent (Lawday 2000).(Lawday 2001) This chapter will argue that this factor has been of primary importance in explaining differences in riot behaviour in Lyon and Oldham.

This argument will be developed in two steps. Firstly, the underlying dynamics of the Lyon and Oldham riots, namely the role of violent and non-violent harassment and centralisation versus decentralisation of police forces, will be assessed. Secondly, it will be assessed how these factors have impacted upon white communities, especially

right-wing elements, and why racist attacks were a factor of the Oldham riots, but not those in Lyon.

*The dynamics underlying the riots in Lyon and Oldham*

As has been established in the previous two chapters, the role of the police has been instrumental in the outbreak of riots in both Lyon and Oldham. In the case of Lyon, the police have engaged in violent forms of harassment, characterised by instances of police brutality, humiliating identity checks and oppressive forms of policing that serve to bring the police into constant confrontation with the ethnic minority youth. This violent harassment has led to the development of significant grievances, that the government have failed to address, leading to a reaction by the ethnic minority youth of Lyon. In Oldham on the other hand, issues such as police brutality and excessive use of force might have occurred on a smaller level, but were not common features of everyday interaction between police and Asian youth. Instead the relationship between the police and ethnic minority youth in Oldham was characterised by a non-violent form of harassment, based around a strong focus on Asian gang violence and Asians as perpetrators.

The relationship between the police and the state in the two countries has been highly influential in shaping this difference. Firstly, the organisation of the French police under the authority of the Interior Minister has largely shielded it from criticism. As has been pointed out by both Lawday (2000) and Zauberman and Lévy (2003),(Zauberman 2003) the police is first and foremost accountable to the French state, rather than to its citizens, enabling discrimination of ethnic minority youth and other members of the public. It is seen as the "protector of the state", based on a long

history of popular uprisings in France (Lawday 2000: 5). As such, the relationship between the youth and police in Lyon has remained relatively unchanged over the years. This differs from the situation in Britain, where the police is largely independent from government and predominantly seen as service to the people and accountable to them (*ibid*.). The fact that the Greater Manchester Police was the first police force in Britain which decided to publish ethnic monitoring data for issues such as race hate crimes or stop searches (GMP 2002) (GMP 2002) shows that it is concerned with being perceived as accountable to all citizens. This means that violent forms of harassment as have been seen in France would not be tolerated on such as scale in Britain.

The difference between a centrally controlled police force in France versus local divisions in the UK has highly impacted upon the underlying dynamics in the two cities. In Oldham, the strong focus on Asian gang violence and Asians as perpetrators was a decision taken by the local police division. As has been addressed above, the Oldham police force had a unique way of actively encouraging hate crime reports, as compared to other divisions in the Greater Manchester Police Force, and made use of this data with little criticism about its validity. This reflects the room for independent actions by police divisions, which contrasts starkly with the French police, being tightly connected to the government. As may be recalled, Sarkozy fired a popular Toulon police chief for organising football matches with local youth – exemplifying that he did not tolerate any divergence from his overall hardline approach. In Lyon, the sources of grievances on part of the youth are highly connected to these decisions taken on the national level, as they enable violence and harassment against ethnic minorities in Lyon. On the one hand, the police fulfils a political role with the

targeting of illegal immigration, leading to increased racial profiling (Beck et al 1998: 415-416),(Beck 1998) and on the other, as has been addressed above, abuse hardly ever has consequences. In addition, the confrontation between youth and police within Lyon is often not with local police officers, but with highly centralised units such as the undercover BAC or the CRS riot police, which only have contact with the youth when there is tension. As such, the nature of the grievances on part of the youth is not so much the Lyon police, as the police per se.

This seems to be vindicated by extending the focus to other riots that have taken place in the two countries – which shows that while in France the trigger moment always shows relatively similar characteristics, they are more diverse in Britain. As has been highlighted, Lyon has seen numerous riots during the 1990s, always triggered by an instance of police brutality. This seems to hold true also for riots in Paris over the last years (Schneider 2008), as well as the most recent riot in Villiers-le-Bel in 2007, which was triggered by the deaths of two boys involving an accident with a police car. This differs to riots which erupted in Britain. First of all, they are rarer. Secondly, whereas riots such as those in Birmingham and Burnley in 2001 have shown similar characteristics to the riots in Oldham, the most recent example in Tottenham has been triggered by the shooting of a local youth and the disregard of a local protest organised by the community later on, similar to riots which broke out in Britain in the 1980s. As such, in France, the outbreak of riots seems to always follow a similar pattern. This pattern however is more diverse in Britain, pointing to a stronger role of the decisions made by the different divisions, as has also been seen in the case of Oldham.

*The role of the white community*

In turn, these two factors (non-violent versus violent and local versus national police decision dynamics) have impacted upon the role of the white community, and in particular the right-wing elements, in the Lyon and Oldham riots. In Lyon, the white community has not exercised an obvious role, with confrontation being limited to the police and ethnic minority youth. In Oldham however, the right-wing attacks have played a fundamental part in the outbreak of the riots, further highlighting to the Asian community that the police did not provide protection which in turn triggered the riots. It is argued here that the non-violent and violent modes of confrontation between police and ethnic minority youth have fundamentally affected this difference.

In Oldham, the role of non-violent harassment was critical. Firstly, non-violent harassment served to alienate the Asian population of Oldham. Secondly, the fact that non-violent harassment is much less visible than violent harassment impacted the perception of the far-right movement. In Lyon, the policy of violent harassment was extremely visible, highlighted in the case study by anecdotes of visible police presence, stop searches and presence of armed BAC and CRS units on the street. Non-violent harassment, by definition though, is much less obvious and visible. Whilst it is felt by the minority who is being harassed, the majority not subject to the harassment are unlikely to perceive its existence. As such, police discussion of Asian violence and Asian gangs served to increase fear amongst the white community (Ray et al 2004: 685)(L. a. D. S. Ray 2004), and lack of noticeable aggression on the police's behalf led the white community to believe that they were not being protected. In turn, a paradox of sorts emerged, whereby the Asian community felt harassed and the white

community felt that not enough action was being taken. This served to create a space into which the nationalist far right movement could take action on the streets and partake in violent confrontations under the banner of protecting their communities.

In Lyon on the other hand, violent harassment on part of the police against ethnic minority youth and presence on the streets had satisfied right-wing groups not to engage in large scale physical action in the way that occurred in Oldham. A newspaper search of French and English newspapers for the 12 months predating the riots in Lyon has shown that small right-wing demonstrations in Lyon occurred, especially in front of the Turkish Embassy, however no record of violent confrontation could be found. Instead, the right wing has exercised pressure through the political arena, predominantly at the national level. As has been assessed in the previous chapter, the NF was successful in exercising pressure on the national political discourse, as has been highlighted by Sarkozy's strong stance on law and order. In turn, this did not take the form of active confrontation with immigrant youth in the streets, and as such explains the absence right-wing extremists groups in the outbreak of the riots in Lyon.

In conclusion, the relationship between the state and the police force - manifested in a centralised system under the control of the Interior Minister largely shielded from critique in France and in a decentralised and more independent policing system in Britain - has played a major role in influencing the reactions of extremists in both Lyon and Oldham. In Oldham, the non-violent form of harassment of the ethnic community has opened up space for right-wing elements to "function as police officers", culminating into riots. In Lyon on the other hand, the relationship between

state and police has sanctioned violent harassment of young people of immigrant decent, in turn leading to riots without the direct involvement of right-wing extremists. Rather, pressure was asserted through political channels, predominantly the national arena in turn increasing pressure.

It is not claimed that these are the only factors that have influenced rioting behaviour in the two cities. There are potentially other factors which have influenced the absence of the role of the right on the streets in Lyon. For example this might relate to differences in segregation, which provide the right wing with fewer opportunities to come into contact and clash with ethnic minority youth. Further, the size and growing popularity of the FN, decreases the freedom with which it can act. Having to maintain an appearance of being respectable, credible and electable party, FN supporters have less ability to take their grievances to the streets or to manifest them in violent confrontation as was the case by BNP supporters in Oldham. Nevertheless it seems to provide insights into why right-wing elements have been involved in the case of Oldham, culminating in riots.

# Chapter Six -

## *A local outlook: The role of dialogue between police and youth*

The previous chapters have shown that the police played a key role in the riots in Oldham and Lyon, and that the different relationship between the state and the police force, one being the protector of the state and the other one a service to the people, can explain why right-wing fractions have arisen. This chapter will address the issue of neighbourhood policing, and especially the role of dialogue, as an alternative to the policing methods applied in both cities. It will examine how dialogue has been successfully used in the suburb of Kreuzberg in Berlin Germany in circumstances analogous to those in Oldham and Lyon. The successful implementation of the approach in Kreuzberg, serves as an interesting case to show how a city has moved towards more local and dialogue based approaches post conflict.

*The ambiguity surrounding the concept of neighbourhood policing*

In both Oldham and Lyon, communication and trust between the police forces and ethnic minority youth were distinctly lacking and played an instrumental role in the outbreak of the riots. In both cases the ethnic minority youth were to some extent seen as a threat which has had to be addressed. In Lyon, the ethnic minority youth was seen as a threat to public order, and in the case of Oldham, the threat originated from the idea of Asian gang violence. The problem with this lack of communication and understanding is that it creates tension and mistrust on both sides: ethnic youth do not see the police as a "public service" and react antagonistically to it, while police are often afraid to enter certain parts of neighbourhoods for fear of violence (Mouhanna

2009: 174). This situation creates a vicious cycle – leading to even more oppressive and distant methods of policing and greater backlash by youths (*ibid*.). France's heavily centralised policing system is especially problematic, as units such as the CRS do not have any contact with the youth other than in times of tension. Although Oldham's police force was more localised, based on a history of "the bobby on the beat" in Britain (Lawday 2000), the view was expressed by residents that the police either did not consult people to find out their concerns, or consulted 'elders' which were not representative of the community, particularly of the youth (Oldham Independent Review 2001: 78). In addition, Asians felt unfairly targeted. As such, dialogue in both cities was missing.

This highlights the importance of a more localised or neighbourhood policing approach involving communication and interaction between the different groups. However there is ambiguity surrounding this concept and the expectations which are placed on it, which can be exemplified by the history of community policing in France. In the 1990s, community policing was implemented in France to address the "divide between France and its police" (Fessard 2011). The policy focused on assigning police officers to certain areas to increase familiarity with the environment and its residents. In addition, police patrolled their areas by foot to increase the ability to actually enter into dialogue and relationships with the local populace (Chelini et al 2011). However, rising crime rates and lack of immediate results led Sarkozy to denounce neighbourhood officers as "social workers" as soon as he became Interior Minister under Chirac in 2002 (Mouhanna, in interview with Fessard 2011). Having concluded that the system did not produce satisfactory results, Sarkozy put an end to community policing, despite its apparent popularity with the general population

(*ibid*.). In addition, Sarkozy fired a popular Toulon police chief for working with neighbourhood youths (Schneider 2008: 148), underlining his message that "the police do not exist for the purpose of organising sporting tournaments, but for arresting delinquents" (quoted in Chelini et al 2011).

When assessing the success of the community policy program, a number of factors must be taken into account. Firstly, units such as the BAC and CRS continued to operate according to their highly confrontational principles. Indeed, as Schneider (2008: 147) points out community policing groups in France were supplementary to and had no impact on regular police and special units. Amnesty International (1994) reports highlight police mistreatment and deaths in custody during the period, often involving plain clothes BAC officers or the CRS. As such, any in roads made by community officers with ethnic youth can be seen as being undone by the perpetuation of the key problem in the system.

As such, 'the failure' of community policing might not so much relate to the nature of community policing itself, but rather to the static structure around it. As has been pointed out by Mouhanna (interview with Fessard 2011), the combination of a soft local approach and a disconnected hard-line approach is not coherent. The local contacts should instead be used to influence a more targeted approach by units such as the BAC. As such, although community policing is not a silver-bullet solution in itself, it seems to be the first step in building better relations between ethnic minority youth and the police and should be utilised by more centralised units, potentially diminishing the likelihood of riots.

*Police reforms after clashes between police and youth in Kreuzberg*

The police in Berlin is characterised by highly localised structures, developed after the reunification of West and East Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[11] The city is divided into six divisions, each covering one to three suburbs, and each headed by its own chief who answers to the head of the Berlin police. These six divisions are further split into 38 areas in which 150 teams are assigned to a particular location. As has been stressed on the police's website, this structure is aimed at developing strong ties of identification of the police officers with their specific locations and its residents.

Despite this approach, clashes broke out in the suburb of Kreuzberg in November 2006 between the police and local youth, the majority of whom had Turkish backgrounds. According to police accounts, officers were confronted by a number of young men as they arrested two boys for stealing an MP3 player earlier in the day. After they called for reinforcement, fights erupted between the police and about 80 to 100 youths (Focus 2006). However, similar to incidents in Lyon and Oldham, the accounts of residents differed from police accounts. According to *Der Spiegel* (2006), a number of older residents who witnessed the clash, of both Turkish and German origin, argued that the police were acting unreasonably during the arrest. Apparently, officers approached the two boys, who were only twelve years old, with weapons and batons drawn, and put them into handcuffs. A 23 year old confronted the police, saying: "You are all the same, just because you are wearing uniforms, you act like you can do anything." To this, one officer answered: "Go back from where you came

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[11] Information concerning the police structure in Berlin has been obtained from the police's website, available at http://www.berlin.de/polizei/index.html and http://www.berlin.de/polizei/bezirk/index.html

from, Germany is not for you." Residents say that the heavy handed response and racist remarks acted as the event that sparked the riot which followed.

Whilst the actions of the police in Kreuzberg are remarkably similar to the situations in both Oldham and Lyon, the Kreuzberg's police's response after the riots stands in marked contrast. Firstly, mediating talks between the police and the affected youth, including the 23 year old man who stepped in during the arrest, were immediately initiated to de-escalate the situation (Lukas 2009: 224, *Berliner Zeitung* 22nd November 2006). Despite Berlin's localised approach, it appeared that patrols in Kreuzberg were conducted by officers who were not familiar with the area, leading police chiefs to put in place new guidelines so that police officers who do not know the area will be exposed and sensitised to its particularities (Lukas 2009: 225). Secondly, Berlin additionally implemented 'contact area officers', the now smallest statistical units in Berlin (Lukas 2007: 4). Distressed areas in Berlin are staffed by two to three officers, who possess excellent communication skills, and who walk through the areas serving as a contact person for the residents' problems and concerns.

Importantly, the response of the Kreuzberg police acknowledged that there was an underlying problem in the interaction between the police and the youths. Unlike both Oldham and Lyon, the Kreuzberg police addressed this source of tension as the key factor in the outbreak of the clash. The absence of any large scale riots in Berlin, despite a range of social problems analogous to the case studies examined in this thesis such as higher unemployment, economic deprivation, socio-spatial segregation, employment discrimination and political marginalisation, seems to point to the validity of this approach (Lukas 2007, 2009).

Engaging into dialogue with the youth involved in conflict differs strongly from the approach taken in Lyon (and France in general), where the voice of the banlieue youth was glaringly absent in any form of discussion after the riots in 2005. In reality, the question about the role of the police itself was absent too. Similarly, although Oldham issued reports into the reasons underlying the riots, there was no direct dialogue between youth and police officers, and a lot of the work focussed on structural problems such as segregation.

In France, the concept of neighbourhood policing units remains to be viewed with suspicion. Concepts of dialogue and accommodation seem to be incongruent with the larger state philosophy of the police as an agent to protect the state. Although community policing was  reintroduced in 2010 with the creation of the Special Ground Brigades (*Brigades Spéciales de Terrain* – BST), the focus of these units has been on getting 'tougher' and more focused on the control of 'territory' and prevention of crime, as opposed to the formation of community relationships and development of community dialogue (*Liberation* 2010). Similar to Sarkozy in 2002, the current Interior Minister has argued that the BST are not social workers (quoted in ibid.). Indeed, the idea of dialogue and increasing trust and ties with the community does not seem to feature prominently.

Oldham has not implemented any direct changes to the structure of policing after the riots, however the traditional role of neighbourhood policing is much stronger in Britain than it is in France (Lawday 2000). That this concept continues to be valued can be seen by the introduction of Community Support Officers across Britain, including Oldham, as a result of the Police Reform Act in 2002. These community

support officers are part of a local policing team and have the task of providing reassurance to their local communities and addressing specific local issues (Clements 2008: 133).

# Conclusion

A range of approaches have been used to understand the causes of riots, encompassing factors such as social disadvantage or failure to integrate. However, whilst socio-economic conditions might be regarded as necessary conditions, they were not enough by themselves to provoke the riots in either Lyon or Oldham. Instead, this thesis has shown that both riots were provoked first and foremost by the role of the police. The key to understanding rioting behaviour in Lyon and Oldham is the relationship the police has with the state in both France and Britain.

In both cities, ethnic minority youth were subject to police harassment. However, the nature of this harassment differed between the two cities. In Lyon, ethnic minority youth were subject to violent harassment in the form of police brutality, numerous deaths at the hands of the police and aggressive use of stop and search procedures. In Oldham however, the ethnic minority youth were subject to non-violent harassment. Examples of police brutality are rare in Oldham. Instead, the ethnic minority youth were harassed through a non-violent form, mainly by the police's focus on Asian gang violence.

This thesis has argued that the reason that police employed different forms of harassment was due to their relationship with the state. In France, the police force is centralised and its key role is as protector of the state. This makes the police accountable to the state and positions it against the population. This relationship allowed the Minister of the Interior to shield the police from criticisms and legal action associated with claims of police brutality. On the other hand, Britain's police force is decentralised so that forces spread across the country are provided with the

freedom to adjust their policing strategies to the local environment. This relationship and proximity to the local population additionally makes the police more accountable. Indeed, examples of police brutality as experienced in France would be less likely to be tolerated in Britain.

This structure has important ramifications for rioting in both countries. In France, the policing approach used in Lyon is replicated across the country, increasing the chances of aggressive policing giving rise to grievances amongst ethnic youth leading to more wide spread rioting. In Britain on the other hand, the policing policies in Oldham can be seen as being unique to the location and are not necessarily reproduced in the same way elsewhere in the country.

The second question that this thesis set out to answer was why the composition of the riots in Lyon and Oldham differed. In Oldham, ethnic minority youth clashed with the police and right-wing extremists, whereas in Lyon clashes were limited to the police and the ethnic minority youth. This thesis has shown that this was also a result of the nature of the harassment applied in both cities, leading back to the different relationship between state and police. In Oldham, the police's use of non-violent harassment was less visible to the wider community. This created a situation in which the white population felt that the police was not doing enough to protect them from Asian gang violence, a perception heightened by the police's public focus on race related crime statistics. This served to create a space in which right-wing groups could confront ethnic minority youth under the banner of neighbourhood protection.

On the other hand, the French police's use of violent harassment in Lyon was extremely visible, in effect satisfying right-wing groups that the police were doing their job, reducing the need and ability of these groups to enter into the mix. Instead, right wing activity shifted to the political arena, predominantly at the national level exercising pressure in that sphere.

This thesis has therefore raised an important issue relating to the strategies that the police apply to ethnic minority youth. A clear commonality between both cities is that the ethnic minority youth were seen as a threat, which created a vicious cycle: policing was increased, the aggressiveness of policing increased, creating grievances amongst ethnic youth, who responded by confronting the symbol of their grievances: the police. This in turn led to increased policing. Chapter Five of this thesis provides a third option for police strategy: neighbourhood policing. It argues that if police can build relationships and dialogue with the local population, they are more likely to remove the source of tension. Further, these relationships provide a channel beyond rioting to redress grievances. The success of the neighbourhood policing model in Kreuzberg to diffuse stand-offs between the police and the local ethnic minority youth highlights the efficacy of this model.

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