The Polis of Global Protest: 
Protest and Policing during the G8 in Scotland

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Abstract: Successive protests at international summit meetings over the past decade have led to recurrent assertions about 'global protest' and 'global civil society'. In this paper we take issue with such abstract and sweeping concepts to provide a detailed and contextualised analysis of the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland. By assessing the dynamic interplay between police and protestors we argue that local variables were critical to the experience of this manifestation of 'global protest'. Focusing on the policing of events in Edinburgh we highlight the pre-conceptions and assumptions underpinning police operations and point to the need for a more interactive understanding of police/protestor relations. Global protest, thus, emerges in relation to the 'polis' (political community and police), and neglecting this relationship leads to narrow and incomplete analyses.

Introduction
In July 2004, the G8 group of world leaders announced that it would hold its next annual meeting in the rural golfing retreat at Gleneagles, central Scotland. Immediately, as a community policeman put it, ‘there was an outpouring of you know: Genoa, Evian, Seattle’ (Tayside 1). The global meetings of G8 leaders have become so synonymous with violent clashes between police and protestors that the mere listing of conference venues was sufficient to raise the spectre of violence. Genoa and Seattle in particular have become bywords for violent global protest due to recurrent reports in the media, and the Scottish press reprised all the horror stories (complete with pictures) in the build up to the meeting in 2005.¹

The stories were accorded particular prominence because the Scottish police do not have a history of dealing with mass public disorder. As a senior Tayside officer put it:

‘Not much has happened here … just the odd bits and pieces which everyone thoroughly enjoyed and no-one got hurt. The G8, however, is of a very different magnitude. For a start we are talking about 10,500 cops coming up [From around Scotland and England]’ (Tayside 2).

¹ A list of cited interviews, and the status of the respondent, can be found at the end of this article).
Such interviews unsettled our focus on the activists engaged in global protest and broadened the scope of our enquiry to encompass the social context within which any such protest takes shape and is played out. Della Porta and Filleule (2004) highlight the mutually constitutive interplay between policing and protest and argue that policing must be regarded as a critical factor in social movement action. Crucially, as they note (2004: 217) the police should not simply be read as an extension of the state, but must be comprehended as actors in their own right.

In keeping with this finding, the run up to the G8 summit witnessed much emphasis given to the notion of a ‘Scottish approach to policing’. Whilst the existence, or otherwise, of such an approach was hotly contested by interviewees, the phrase highlights the significance of locality. We have recently (Gorringe and Rosie 2006) argued that the activists participating in the 2005 G8 summit protests were embedded in a national context which influenced not only who took part in the demonstrations but also the modes of organisation and mobilisation. This paper focuses on policing to chart the extent to which the global is shaped by the local. In emphasising police (or ‘polis’ as they are known colloquially) actions and perspectives on the 2005 summit we contribute to a more complex account of the way in which global activism is mediated in and through specific places. In so doing, we offer a corrective to romanticised and sweeping accounts of the global justice movement which assume the presence of a global civil society and tend to gloss over more localised interactions (cf. Stammers and Eschle 2005).

The Research
The paper draws on a research project conducted before, during and immediately after the G8 summit in Gleneagles. We carried out interviews with senior police officers and protest participants before and after the summit, conducted conversations with dozens of ‘ordinary’ (often extraordinary) protestors, and undertook a review of newspaper coverage. This data is complemented by participant observation at key protest sites and events between July 2nd and 7th 2005. We also commissioned an opinion poll of 1,001 Scottish respondents selected at random as part of a larger survey by pollsters TNS. This focused on people’s perceptions of the demonstrators and anticipation of disruption and violence. Finally we surveyed 524 people on the massive Make Poverty History march which preceded the summit and aimed to put pressure on world leaders to take action on global debt, trade and aid. Whilst in no sense representative, the combination of methods offers us a basis on which to consider the complex interplay between global and local factors underlying ‘global protest events’.

Global Protests?
The rise of global protests in recent decades leads Hubbard and Miller to posit the existence of a ‘truly global struggle’ against neo-liberalism: G8 summits, ‘cannot now take place without the presence of demonstrators’ (2005: 230). Whilst authors such as Mayo (2005) link this to the emergence of a ‘global civil society’, others are more cautious and nuanced in their assertions. Diani, for instance, insists that ‘the embeddedness of actions conducted on global issues … is strongly mediated by the features of local civil societies and political systems’ (2005: 65). Our research into G8 related protest in 2005 certainly corroborates this analysis. It was abundantly clear that the central protest events followed a national logic as much, if not more, than a
The upshot was that 225,000 people marched through the city of Edinburgh in the largest demonstration ever witnessed in Scotland without a single protest related arrest. The social demographic which saw a predominance of NGO and Church groups on the march had a bearing on the experience, but this constituency was no accident. Make Poverty History (MPH) was a meticulously planned ‘set piece’ which was carefully coordinated with the police and deliberately distanced itself from the protests surrounding other such summits (Lothian & Borders Police (LBP) 1). The open, tolerant and ideological commitment to a ‘diversity of tactics’ (including violence) which characterised past confrontations (Juris 2005) was actively discouraged. Alternate forms of political expression, thus, were relegated to the margins.

In large part the impact made by global days of action in Seattle, Genoa, Cancun and Davos stems from the fact that a multitude of activists, causes and methods have been accommodated. In freezing out the more radical voices of the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement, MPH succeeded in focusing attention on a number of core issues but also contributed to the de-legitimisation of extra-institutional actors. The Gleneagles summit offers an ideal setting for the analysis of global protest precisely because the disparate strands that feed into the loosely aligned mass of people clubbed together under the ‘Global Justice’ moniker, were sequestered off into separate spheres. In tracing the interactions between police and protestors at the divergent events that took place over the course of the first week of July we are better placed to draw conclusions about the localisation of global politics.

‘I mean to be honest with you’, as a Scottish Socialist Party politician put it, ‘the policing on the Saturday and the Monday was as much of a contrast as I think you’ll ever see’ (SSP 1). Part of the reason behind this, as a senior Lothian and Borders Police officer explained, was that ‘we didn’t have the same trust in planning with them [other protestors] as we had with Make Poverty History, who were excellent’ (LBP 1). Far from an undifferentiated and uniform confrontation with ‘the state’, it is clear that the various aspects of ‘global protest’ were negotiated on the ground in interactions between a discretionary police force and diverse protest groups. It is in this context that we concur with Stammers and Eschle’s finding that ‘the local and the global are mutually constitutive with localities playing an active role in shaping the impact and reception of global processes as well as being shaped by them’ (2005: 57).

In his sophisticated account of contemporary social activism McDonald (2004, 2006) argues that Global Movements are best comprehended as structured around experience and action rather than identity. Focusing on the emerging ‘grammars’ and forms of ‘personalised’ global activism he paints a convincing picture of the ebb and flow of the most recent forms of mobilisation and characterises them as communities of experience in which participation and symbolism are the defining features. His insightful analysis of a ‘Critical Mass’ event – where cyclists take to the roads en masse to reclaim the streets from motorised transport – highlights the fact that it is in-and-through action that the event occurs. Without the cyclists there would be no event and yet there are no formal structures or organisations masterminding things. Compelling though this account is, it pays insufficient attention to the social background of political protest, the various spaces within which protest is performed...
or the ‘topography of power’ that links them together (Gupta and Ferguson 1999: 8).

As Della Porta and Filleule (2004) point out, however, even law-abiding and consensual displays of protest disrupt daily routines and bring the issue of protest policing to the fore. The variability of responses over time and between spaces means that the question of policing can never be taken for granted. McDonald’s emphasis on ‘action and experience’ in this context, appears to restrict his analysis to democratic regimes. Where repression is the dominant expression of police authority, as Ellison and Martin (2000: 690) note in their study of Northern Ireland, activists can be denied recognition and the degree of reciprocity that is required for the construction of a collective identity that can underpin sustained action. Furthermore, regardless of whether protestors perceive themselves to be a united collective, the police develop a ‘short-hand’ about certain categories of people and their behaviour. The division of activists into ‘genuine’ protestors, ‘troublemakers’ or the ‘rent-a-mob,’ directly affects the style of policing encountered (Della Porta and Filleule 2004: 226).

The experiences of protestors, thus, can only be fully comprehended when they are contextualised in the specificities of each event. Both the style and the form of policing impacts on protest, but the significance of a detailed analysis is underscored by Gillham and Marx (2000: 212) who note the ‘significant degree of indeterminacy and tradeoffs, no matter what decisions are made’ by protestors or police. In their study of the Seattle protests they highlight the multitude of factors – from police training and the legal context to the presence of the media and police attitudes - which affect the way in which a global protest event is played out. In what follows we briefly chart the various demonstrations, marches and protests that occurred prior to and during the Gleneagles summit before analysing the interplay between police, protestors and media and drawing out the implications.

**Police Perceptions**

The main protest event surrounding the G8 summit in 2005 was the massive march by campaigners urging the world leaders to Make Poverty History. MPH was not only the largest march of the week it was also the first – it took place on the Saturday before the summit started on Thursday. As such, as several commentators and interviewees stressed, it promised to ‘set the scene’ for the ensuing protests. One respondent, for example, insisted that ‘Lothian and Borders [Police] have a huge responsibility in setting the tone’ for the rest of the week (Tayside 2). Almost a month prior to the march, however, the faint outlines of the action to come could be discerned. Already the categorisation of activists into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ protestors had begun, and the likely mode of intervention had been mapped out.

In relation to MPH, a Tayside interviewee spoke of the police role as extending beyond crowd control to crowd management and welfare – ensuring that ambulances can get through, being concerned about the heat and people falling like flies in the sun – reinforcing the image of the march as an event to be managed or facilitated rather than controlled. ‘If anything happens’, he continued, ‘it will likely be after the Stop the War [STW: a coalition of left-radical groups united in opposition to the Afghan and Iraq wars] rally’, which took place on the following day. Even here, however, the threat posed by the demonstration was underplayed and it was anticipated that trouble might take the form of ‘a couple of drunken brawls’ (Tayside 2). The key differentiating aspect between the two set-piece events over the weekend – marches
with a pre-determined route, established destination and organised rally – was, as our LBP respondent observed: ‘That we’ve [LBP] got an history in Edinburgh of Stop the War coalition not doing what they had agreed to do, acting in an inappropriate way, not being trusted’ (LBP 1).

Two years beforehand, on the eve of the Iraq war, activists in Edinburgh had deviated from the negotiated, consensus based mode of politics that dominates protest in Scotland. Buoyed, in large part, by the significant presence of school-age activists – as yet un-schooled in the art of protest – the STW marchers had torn up the rule book and disrupted traffic over three days of spontaneous activism that saw route plans discarded, roads blocked and police stations besieged. These innovations were limited, it must be stressed, and the established repertoire served as a constraint (cf. Tilly 1986: 390). Within the expanded parameters of protest, thus, the activists remained peaceful, negotiated with police authorities and disbanded punctually between fine and six each evening. Nevertheless, the refusal to abide by the prevailing norms ensured that the STW was classified in the ‘troublemaker’ category in the run-up to the summit in 2005. Protestors making their way to Edinburgh, thus, were confronted by the specific pre-history of political engagement which pre-disposed police authorities to adopt differing perspectives and act in differing ways in relation to certain protest constituencies.

Global protest, thus, is mediated through the locally specific manifestations of police/protestor relations. This fact is further reinforced by the fact that the print media remains largely national in scope. Media representations are not uniform, therefore, and can unduly influence the atmosphere within which protest events occur. In his account of the Genoa summit in 2001, Juris presents the starkly differing accounts that appeared in the Italian compared to the Spanish media. ‘The media did not just report on the space of terror in Genoa’, as he astutely opines, ‘they helped produce it’ (2005: 426). In the context of sensationalist media coverage in the Scottish and wider British press, one Tayside cop feared that these could become a self-fulfilling prophecy and noted that: ‘Cops read papers too’ (Tayside 2). In other words, the police are not inoculated against sensationalist reporting and recurrent accounts of violence and anarchy filters through into their preconceptions and apprehensions.

In the run up to the MPH event, the media were replete with fears about violence, ‘baying mobs’, ‘bedlam’ and ‘riots’ (Gorringe and Rosie 2006: 5-6). The prime target of the reports were the ‘anarchists’, primarily associated with protest events on the Monday and Thursday, who – it was feared – would ‘infiltrate’ the orderly MPH procession. It is clear that the media not only help produce the space of ‘terror’, but pave the way for it. Police preparations pending the 2005 summit displayed an acute awareness of this and launched newsletters, websites and innumerable press conferences to correct misleading information. In the town of Auchterarder – adjacent to the Gleneagles Hotel – for instance, an officer was installed as ‘a G8 community spokesman in Auchterarder to liaise with locals and alleviate their fears’ from a year before the actual event (Tayside 1). Part of the rationale for this posting was a perception that past summits had been poorly prepared for. ‘I knew that the press would resort to outlandish claims if not pure invention and people would get more and

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3 Although these event occurred well before the research on which this paper is based, both authors were present at, and observed, the events in question.
more scared in response to the scare stories. So [Plod] was on hand to deal with people’s concerns’ (Tayside 3).

All our police interviewees emphasised their determination to ‘keep Auchterarder and Edinburgh open’ and refuse to fuel alarmist speculation about protest violence. ‘Some are saying they are not going to do that much business this month and so they are going to board up and go away’, one interviewee revealed. ‘Those in involved in the retail business are not best served by that. From my point of view I think it’s quite sad, that somebody wants to board up’ (Tayside 1). Paradoxically, this determination stems as much from a conviction that some protestors are out to cause trouble as the reverse. Della Porta’s three-fold categorisation of police stereotypes was completed with the depiction of a group of ‘leisure protestors, there for a ruck [confrontation]’ (Tayside 2). Exaggerated accounts of violence and disorder, our respondents felt, merely encouraged a certain type of protestors to attend.

Many of the preconceptions that we encountered in police interviews centred around the contested concept of legitimacy. In his ‘reflections on the democratic policing of demonstrations’, Marx argues that increasingly sophisticated intelligence operations have enabled the police to be more discriminatory and selective ‘rather than stereotyping all demonstrators … they can be focused on those groups thought most likely to behave violently’ (1998: 259). The problem with such discretionary power, however, is that certain groups are branded as illegitimate ‘troublemakers’. One respondent, for instance, spoke of meeting with the G8 Alternatives coalition of left-wing groups to discuss plans, before continuing:

‘Then you get the more hardline, or outlandish anarchist groups. We had one chap in here – your stereotypical anarchist if you like – bandana, dreadlocks and dark glasses came knocking on my door – didn’t want to give his name – and was asking about campsites in the vicinity!’ (Tayside 1).

Such broad-brush characterisations easily translate into action-orientations. Asked whether he would draw a distinction ‘between legitimate protestors who use the channels, and others, non-legitimate, who don’t’, one Tayside officer was emphatic: ‘Oh Yes!’ (Tayside 3). He insisted that various means had been used to try and establish contact with such actors to no avail. The upshot was a differentiation between the ‘good’ citizens on the MPH march, the radical – but basically allegiant – protestors in G8 alternatives (which ‘is managed by people like Anwar [Glasgow based Human Rights lawyer] who know what they are doing’ (Tayside 2), and then the ‘anarchist’ fringe: ‘Criminal Tourists I’ve called them, it is a nice phrase that captures much of what they are about’ (Tayside 3). The illegitimacy of certain protestors, thus, was established prior to the actual summit. As one respondent opined:

‘The Make Poverty History lot are largely a peaceful group. They have largely achieved their objectives already, because that’s what everyone is talking about. It’s on the agenda. Globalisation, well people are talking about climate change which they say they are interested in. But anarchist groups, they are just there for a ruck’ (Tayside 2).
Whilst Marx (1998) points out that the targeting of ‘likely troublemakers’ actually permits a more open and facilitative approach to ‘legitimate protest’, the assumption that certain groups are ‘looking for trouble’ carries with it the threat/promise of a more robust response. In sum, well before the G8 protestors actually mobilised (or arrived) in Scotland, they faced a police force which ‘knew’ who they were and how to deal with them. In part these preconceptions fed off the media circus that attends each global protest event, but more immediately they were fostered by local media, police culture and police/protestor interactions. In the following account of the week’s protests we consider the extent to which these pre-established frames influenced protest policing.

**Route Marches**

Each day between the 2nd and 7th of July 2005, witnessed a different demonstration, march, rally or protest. From the MPH march on the Saturday, through protests outside the detention centre used for Asylum seekers on the Tuesday to the blockade of the summit on the Thursday as the leaders arrived. The sheer number and spread of events meant that we were unable to attend every one. In what follows, therefore, we focus on the events that either we or our interviewees witnessed directly and draw on media reports where appropriate. The MPH march was remarkable for the larger than expected turnout but primarily for the huge disparity between prior fears as articulated in the media and the actual event (Gorringe and Rosie 2006). Policing on the day was friendly and relaxed. ‘All people will see’, a Tayside officer intimated before the occasion, ‘is Scottish polis in flat caps and yellae jackets. All very nicey-nicey, very friendly – “this way to the toilets madam”-style of policing’ (Tayside 2).

The objectives, organisation and demographic of MPH render this unsurprising. The family-oriented approach, predominance of NGO and Church groups and small army of demonstration stewards meant this was a consensual as a protest march can be. Indeed, the LBP website carried a message of welcome to MPH participants from the Lord Provost and Chief Constable of Edinburgh. Policing, as Earl (2003) and Della Porta and Filleule (2004) emphasise, cannot simply be equated with repression. The police, they note, are instrumental in facilitating or channelling protest as well. The efforts made in Edinburgh to enable the huge number of people to circle the city-centre reflected the prior assumptions about the legitimacy of the occasion. This pre-conception was not only conducive to a relaxed atmosphere though. The police do not simply control protest they are instrumental in how it is perceived and represented. Significantly, for the argument presented here, we contend that the preconceptions of the police affected not only the experience but also the interpretation of MPH.

In the salutary media coverage of MPH, most accounts gave some space to an altercation between a group of around 60 Black Blok anarchists and the police. The group were identified on the fringes of the march and corralled in a side street and cordoned off for over an hour. As a Tayside cop observed:

‘Those who were surrounded were very apprehensive, because being cordoned off abroad is usually a precursor to the police wading in, laying about with batons and making arrests. Whereas it was never our intention to even arrest them at that point. They were expecting a much heavier response’ (Tayside 3).
Our LBP interviewee confirmed that ‘serious confrontations’ on the outskirts of the march could have resulted in many arrests but for the fact that the police did not want to tarnish the general mood of the day (LBP 1). Had the police opted to emphasise disorder, clamp down on ‘misbehaviour’ and make arrests then media coverage and public opinion might have been swayed in a particular manner and Edinburgh could now feature alongside Genoa, Seattle and other bywords for violent Global protest. Instead, the group were slowly released, press photographers on the ground were denied easy access to the situation, and the dominant motif of the march was of peaceful bonhomie. These interactions bring police/protestor relations to the fore and introduce a specific ‘local’ factor into the analysis of a ‘global’ event. Had such an event occurred during the Stop the War march, we contend, the response would have been more aggressive.

Other events offered the opportunity to gauge the validity of this assessment and it is to these we now turn. On the day after the MPH demonstration a much smaller number of people took part in the pre-arranged and sanctioned Stop the War Rally. Initially, however, the size of the demonstration did not entail a proportionate reduction in policing. Indeed officers in protective equipment were in evidence and there was a tangible police presence. As the march neared its destination, however, there was a marked diminution in police. ‘The police seemed to revert to the kind of softly-softly approach, and in fact disappeared. At one point on Carlton Hill [the end point of the rally] I thought that I can’t see any cops at all’ (Rosie, Fieldnotes). When this was put to the Lothian and Borders Police he insisted that:

‘Sunday was different from Saturday only in that on Saturday I was policing for 120 [thousand] and I got 225, on Sunday I forget the numbers, but I think I was policing for something like 25 and I got 5. So the ratio of police to demonstrators on Sunday was rather different, and the police were more obvious. Just because of the numbers’ (LBP 1).

Whilst this explanation rings true in the specific context, the officer added a degree of complexity to the picture by raising the question of trust immediately thereafter. From this perspective, the policing on the Sunday accords perfectly with the preconceived notion that STW cannot be fully trusted and have ‘a history’ in Edinburgh. The police, thus, melted away as the rally neared its conclusion and showed no signs of the spontaneity that marked previous protests. The initial intimidatory presence, in this light, was intended to deter a deviation from the prearranged route. Indeed, later in the same interview, it was noted that:

Putting the officers out in full protective equipment is a non-verbal signal to say there are some rules out here, and some rules you can get away with, but there is a rule here, and the rule is this line of police officers will not let you pass (LBP 1).

The sternest tests of policing, however, lay ahead. MPH and STW are coalitions around established political actors cohering around mainstream (albeit contentious) issues. ‘Poverty’ and ‘War’ are uniformly accepted as undesirable and a broad spectrum of social opinion is aligned behind each campaign. On Monday 4th July, however, the ‘Carnival of Full Enjoyment’ promised to make ‘capitalism history’ and engaged in anti-systemic protests that refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the
law enforcement authorities. Monday brought police face to face with those commonly
described as ‘anarchists’ which, in this context, stands as a proxy for radical or
even violent protestor. Negative police perceptions of these groups, as noted above,
cast them as ‘out for a ruck’, ‘illegitimate’ and ‘troublemakers’. It is only in
the context of this frame, we argue, that events on Monday can be comprehended.

**Containing the Carnival**

What was later to be dubbed the ‘Battle of Princes Street’ [Edinburgh’s main
commercial thoroughfare] was billed simply as a ‘carnival’. Participants were urged
to congregate at one end of the city centre at noon, but beyond there was otherwise no
predetermined sequence of events. The absence of any clear focus and the diffusion of
activists around the centre means that it is difficult to construct a coherent account of
what happened, but some flashpoints during the day offered an opportunity to assess
the situation. Somewhere between 300 and 600 protestors turned up at the allotted
meeting place, but there was no critical mass and the crowd swiftly dispersed into
separate blocks. One section of several hundred people broke away and headed away
from the centre towards Canning Street in the city’s financial district. This move had
been anticipated, however, and the protestors soon found themselves blocked in. This
incarnation of the carnival came to a premature end as those caught up in the cordon
remained penned in there for the next five hours.

In ‘Arresting Protest’, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) report into
protest policing during the 2003 anti-war demonstrations, NYCLU urges the police to
abandon the practice of confining protestors within barricades. The restriction of
mobility entailed in the penning in of protestors means that people are unable to
obtain food or water, go to the toilet or go home. When asked about the erosion of
civil liberties, our LBP respondent was frank: ‘The principle is that peoples’ personal
liberty gets infringed because there is no alternative. The alternative is to allow
anarchy to win and there will be no control in society’ (LBP1). Police and press
reports noted the presence of black-clad and masked activists in the crowd, but
throughout the five hour period there was no violence or aggression on the part of the
demonstrators. Closer contact with the ‘hooded anarchists’ also revealed that many
were youngsters out for a thrill rather than violent confrontation. That sat round
playing cards or played improvised games of football. The one protest stunt involved
one such individual clambering onto a roof and mooning at the police.

The forces of law and order hardly helped to defuse a difficult situation. There was no
communication from the police informing protestors about when or whether they
would be allowed to leave. Furthermore, when the group were finally released, police
actions compounded the confusion by applying different rules to different people.
Section 60 of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994 was cited as the control
order imposed on central Edinburgh for the duration of the protests. Section 60, as the
Legal advice section of activist website ‘Urban 75’ explains, ‘is a new police tactic at
major demonstrations used effectively to control, subdue and gain personal
information about protesters despite having the extraordinarily limited power simply
to “Stop and search in anticipation of violence”’. The legal basis for barricading
protestors, thus, lies in the catch-all ‘anticipation of violence’. The concern voiced by

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4 See ‘Legal Advice: Section 60’: [http://www.urban75.org/mayday01/s60.html](http://www.urban75.org/mayday01/s60.html) (Accessed 31/05/06).
Urban 75 over the abuse of S60 was evident in abundance in Edinburgh. One of the authors was dealt with in the proper manner: the searching officer identified himself, his number and force before conducting a cursory search for weapons. Two people accompanying the author, however, were not provided with background information (thus rendering any search illegal), asked to provide names and addresses, photographed and cautioned not to protest in the near future.

Police discretion, it is clear, may be subject to abuse, especially when the control order in question is relatively unknown or ambiguously defined. One senior officer was sanguine about such discrepancies: ‘Inevitably in any unit you have people who are more confident or less confident, people who accepted their training and embraced it, and simply not bothered with it and couldn’t care less’ (LBP 1). The SSP politician, however, termed the policing a ‘disgrace’ and spoke of constituents caught up in Canning Street and detained without water or facilities (SSP 1). The circulation of such accounts, as Reicher et al. (2004: 569-70) argue, can increase the policing ‘costs’ of containment by discrediting and de-legitimising police action.

The issue of legitimacy was further raised because the intimidation of ‘carnivalistas’ was not restricted to the muddled interpretation of a control order. At one end of Princes Street, protestors were prevented from spilling out onto an approach road by the six foot mobile barricades of an ‘iron horse’ – ‘a trailer, holding out a metal barrier, which really works, it just seals an area off’ (LBP 1). Hundreds of police in protective equipment (riot gear) also blocked off each end of Princes Street to prevent a march from heading down past the retail chains. Elsewhere, in the heart of historic Edinburgh – adjacent to the main train station and the Scott monument – a stand-off developed between police and about 200 protestors.

A BBC report aptly described the ‘Carnival’ as ‘a day-long game of cat and mouse’ (Todd 2005). The protestors’ refusal to abide by the rules or engage in set-piece demonstrations meant that confusion prevailed. Small bands of protestors – often no more than 20 or 30 strong clustered at junctions, confronted police and inverted the symbolic order of the city. Most of the smaller events were good-natured and dominated by protestors in colourful clothing, samba drums and clown outfits. Having slipped past the ‘iron horse’ around 30 people occupied a key junction just off Prince Street and pranced around in time to drums and whistles. A handful of flat capped police and traffic-cops looked on. Given that traffic had been diverted, the symbolic gesture of defiance was met with tolerance. At each protest site, furthermore, throngs of passers-by, like-minded but uncertain activists and onlookers gathered to see what was happening. Dotted through the crowds, though were ‘masked individuals dressed in black who had clearly come to show a more aggressive face of anti-G8 protest’ (Todd 2005). It was where these individuals were clustered that the police presence was heaviest. ‘The right and ability to protest with passion and relative safety’, as a political activist put in the Scottish Left Review, ‘disappeared when unprovoked police aggression was met with the disruptive retaliatory actions of the masked marauders’ (Matheuse 2005: 13).

This was the case at the Scott monument where the ‘peaceful demonstration turned into an ugly confrontation’ (Todd 2005). Serried ranks of police on horse-back and dressed in riot gear blocked of the end of Princes Street and were confronted by protestors – many dressed in black. As the stand-off became increasingly heated,
hooded activists took up the chant of ‘polizia assassini’ (by reference to Genoa) and pressed forward against the police line. There was aggression but, at least initially, no violence. Throughout the two hour face-off the protestors occupied the road abutting Jenners (Edinburgh’s Harrods equivalent), Marks and Spencer (subject to activist boycotts relating to the Palestinian struggle) and other retail outlets. Not once, however, were attempts made to smash windows or inflict damage. The lack of a clear objective, however, obviously troubled police officers. Uncertain whether to hold the line or retreat there were periodic displays of aggression. At 2.45pm, for instance, as the chanting crowd pressed up against the police line, the mounted officers drew their batons and thrust forward into the crowd scattering the protestors, many of whom took refuge in Princes Street gardens. Immediately the horses were withdrawn to be replaced by shield-bearing and helmeted police.

The policing that we witnessed was aggressive, overbearing and unimaginative. Our LBP respondent described the ‘gold standard’ of policing as resting on three key planks: make contact, ascertain protest objectives and set boundaries (LBP 1). Underpinning this democratic approach to policing is communication, but this was markedly lacking. Reicher et al. (2005: 268) make the telling point that whilst ‘there exist large reserves of armoured vehicles, baton rounds and so on which are hardly ever used … communicative technologies [such as mobile LED screens or loudspeaker systems] which would probably prove useful in virtually every crowd event are virtually non-existent’. The failure of communication extended to tourists, passers-by and shoppers, some of whom got caught up in the melee or locked into shops at various points. The absence of dialogue meant that the mutual antagonism of protestors and police briefly became violent. As police officers with batons moved in on the crowd, benches, bins and geraniums were uprooted and flung at the police.

The LBP officer insisted that ‘police officers have been seizing weapons of clips with nails on them, razor bladed belts. We’ve got petrol bombs and acid bombs’ (LBP 1). None of these more offensive weapons, however, were in evidence on Princes Street. Indeed, sections of the crowd, dismayed by the action started replanting the geraniums. At one point as the disturbance intensified and a group of officers stormed the crowd to arrest a perceived ringleader, we noticed a group of five police officers in yellow jackets and flat caps standing by in the gardens. No attempt was made to approach or attack them and the chanting crowd was focussed against the lines of riot cops. It was at this juncture that the ‘violence’ was at its peak. Protestors with banner staffs and sticks clashed with baton wielding police officer and bottles, cans and stones were hurled at police lines.

As dusk fell the scenario became ever more confused. Excited by the disturbance the crowd was swollen by local youth (many of whom voiced their resentment against the English police officers) and cobbles were torn up in a side street. Policing at this point seemed (to an untrained eye) to be chaotic, reactive and aggressive. Lines of cops charged protestors to clear an area only to move on and leave the area to be re-occupied once more. ‘There were two occasions on Monday’ our LBP respondent confessed, ‘when I almost lost control. That’s with 700 police officers on the ground, and I lost control’ (LBP 1). This certainly seemed to have happened in the early evening. Aggressive police in riot gear tried to clear St Andrews Square and did so by charging the crowd, shoving interested onlookers with shields, shouting and swearing at people. Each time they stood off nothing happened, and then the attempts to
disperse people would begin again. There was no systematic attempt to close off the area or communicate with people however and each successive charge merely moved the crowd elsewhere. The ‘battle of Princes Street’ died down as night fell, police numbers diminished and people lost interest and drifted away.

‘Criminal damage’ over the course of the day amounted to ‘two windows, 200 geraniums and several park benches’ (LBP 1). ‘To those people who’ve seen like political protest, confrontations with the police’, as our SSP interviewee suggested, ‘… it was nothing. It was quite frankly an embarrassment to call it a riot’ (SSP 1). In her impressionistic account of the day, Matheuse (2005: 12) dubbed it the ‘Carnival of Full Deployment’. The title is apposite on several counts. Of the three protests discussed in this paper the ‘Carnival’ was by far the smallest in terms of numbers and yet provoked the most robust police response. In the remaining sections of this paper we offer an analysis of the variations in protest policing before concluding.

Policing Global Protest
Heading home around 7.30pm on the Monday evening one of the authors stopped to talk to police officers on Princes Street:

A: Was there really any need for all those riot police?
C: Yes, definitely. We’re not prepared to stand there and take stuff … In any EU country there would have been a much more aggressive response’ (Gorringe Fieldnotes).

The relative restraint of police forces in Britain (and particularly Scotland) compared to continental Europe was a recurrent theme. ‘In Europe’, one officer said, ‘I’m sure you’re well aware, you know, it’s confrontation, big sticks’ (Tayside 1). Our LBP interviewee concurred:

The alternative is the way they do it on the continent … You line the police on the road, the bürgermeister has the authority to say ‘this is the line’. And on that line they put up enormous steel barricades, with razor wire on top, and the razor wire is on the public side of the barricade. And if public come over that barricade, they are met with overwhelming force from the police, with tear gas, water canon, rubber bullets the lot … We deal with it differently (LBP 1).

Certainly, policing in Edinburgh reinforced the distinctions between the militarised ‘King’s police’ in countries like France and the unarmed ‘community bobbies’ characteristic of Britain (Della Porta and Filleule 2004). What violence and aggression there was was minimised. Our SSP respondent termed the policing on Monday ‘awful, disproportionate, utterly offensive, provocatively’ (SSP 1). Residents caught up in the scrum similarly insisted that ‘police in riot gear are not welcome’ (Gorringe Fieldnotes). The LBP website, by contrast, carried scores of messages applauding the police action and commending their professionalism (LBP 2005). The lack of serious injuries and comparatively small number of arrests accords with a common finding that public order policing in Western Europe and North America is increasingly focused on toleration rather than repression (Della Porta and Reiter 1998, Marx 1998, Reicher et al. 2004).
Whilst concurring with such analysis, Waddington and King (2005: 490) suggest that ‘international summit meetings’ may buck this trend. ‘Soft-hat’ policing, they argue, presents an accommodating façade that shrouds the increasing use of surveillance, ‘selective incapacitation’ and ‘crowd management’ (ibid. 491). The diversity of protest events in Edinburgh permits a detailed consideration of these findings. It is abundantly clear that the Scottish police subscribe to a democratic ethos in which the ‘facilitation of peaceful protest’ is significant. Each of our interviewees stressed the need for communication, de-escalation and ‘soft-hat’ methods. The following was typical:

Problems can escalate when they are not dealt with at a tactical level: Let’s suppose an operational officer gets a custard pie in the face from some clown and, quite understandably, drags him over the barrier and a ‘thing’ goes off. Someone [a senior officer] on CCTV sees what’s happening and saying ‘get a PSU [Police Support Unit – Riot Cops] in there quick’ is the **wrong answer**. Get him out of there. An officer’s been pied by an eejit [idiot] and is boiling about it – get him out of there cool him down (Tayside 2)

Another respondent emphasised a key difference in approach between the Scottish police and other forces. Asked about the deployment of riot police he was adamant that ‘we don’t have riot police’. Not, at least, in the sense of ‘specialised riot police who are housed in barracks’ (Tayside 3). He also emphasised the efforts he had made to contact that various protest factions and initiate a dialogue, including an interview for the Camcorder Guerrillas. Speaking of the Gleaneagles protest later in the week he stressed that: ‘My officers were under instruction, strict instruction, that we wanted a pleasant, carnival atmosphere’ (ibid.). He highlighted three operational priorities:

Firstly, don’t exacerbate a situation where none occurs. Officers should be able to take a bit of ribbing and teasing and so on. Secondly, if we immediately resort to arrests and so on, then we are faced with a logistical problem ... Thirdly, we wanted to facilitate protest. It is good for mainstream politics to enter into dialogue and facilitate people in expressing their views (Tayside 3).

Leading members of the Scottish police clearly operate on the basis of a sophisticated understanding of crowd behaviour and do not abide by discredited versions of crowd psychology which cast activists as irrational or deviant. ‘The police are not narrow minded – they instinctively know how to deal with people’, as one cop put it. ‘OK, they may not have studied issues or have a detailed analysis. Academics study, but cops **experience**’ (Tayside 2). There were numerous statements about, and examples of, police accommodation of protest objectives (cf. Waddington & King 2005, Reicher et al. 2004). The LBP officer insisted the ‘confrontational policing rarely works, and pointed to ongoing attempts at communication:

‘It was very difficult because there was no allocated sort of spokesperson, but we did say ‘if you don’t get contact with the organisers, get contact with the protesters’. And when they assembled on the corner of Princes Street … that is what we did - go and talk to them: “What you are intending to do? What are you trying to? Where do you want to walk to? You do understand what you’re doing is unlawful? Etc etc” and help them to do it. Remember, what we actually ended doing was a procession, with people playing music, lots of costumes, people
with balloons around. That happened on Princes Street because they said that’s what they’re going to do and we found a way to help them do it. It was only when it deteriorated, when people decided they’re not going to have a procession, they were going to do more difficult things, and eventually just started carrying out deliberate attacks, that the situation deteriorated (LBP 1).

At the root of the problematic dynamics in Edinburgh on Monday was the thorny issue of anti-systemic protest. How do you protest against the system if you have to work through and with it and, conversely, how do you police by consensus if there is no one to talk to and no set plan? Arguably the difference in policing over the three days boils down to the difference between a known quantity and the uncertainty posed by the unknown. Mediating the encounter was the stock of stereotypes, assumptions and identities that gave each camp a sense of ‘knowing the other’. The presence of English constables in Edinburgh brought home the localised nature of legal structures and the ways that even rights must be understood in context (actions which are legal in one setting may not be elsewhere), but the discretionary powers of the police emphasised the fact that protest policing may be more localised even that this. As one officer pointed out:

People believe that police can only do what they are authorised by law to do. And in fact that’s not true. Police can do whatever they think is necessary at the time, irrespective of the rule of law, it’s just if they act outside the rule of law, they are accountable for it, presumably in either criminal court, or in civil court (LBP 1).

These powers of discretion bring the question of police training and pre-conceptions to the fore. As one respondent put it: ‘we have been briefed a bit on what to do and had a couple of intelligence updates. To be honest with you though, the force could have done more internally in terms of education and managing people’s apprehensions’ (Tayside 1). ‘Cops’, one interviewee expressed it, ‘read papers too’. Unlike others, though, they are in a position to act upon those understandings.

The veneer of ‘soft-hat’ policing papered over tougher attitudes and less nuanced readings of the situation: ‘Just as people can feel anonymous in a crowd – the mob if you like, cops can feel anonymous too’ (Tayside 2 – emphasis added). Implicit here are the traces of ‘old-school’ crowd psychology in which the whole is seen as more than the sum of its parts and the processes and identities underpinning crowd formation are sidelined. Official codes of practice, as Waddington and King (2005: 501) note, are often observed more in the breach than the practice. A failure to address prevalent stereotypes and a perception of the ‘crowd’ as a homogenous, volatile actor make such breaches more probable. Spread through our interviews were numerous references to protestors as ‘the opposition’, ‘criminal tourists’, ‘anarchists’ (in a derogatory rather than analytic sense).

The gulf between anti-systemic protestors and the police was emphasised when CC Vine assured us that he was keen to accommodate and facilitate protestors and even ‘whisked some of them up to the gate [at Gleneagles]’. The ‘radicals’ in question transpired to be Friends of the Earth and Church of Scotland Bell Ringers. When such mainstream, establishmentarian critics are presented as exemplars of protest, we can better understand the police actions on the Monday. Police expectations and reactions
arguably helped to shape the protest response. At 2pm on the Monday in Charlotte Square, a segment of the day’s events was being played out. A group of 50 to 100 people (mostly Clowns) confronted a line of policemen in protective equipment.

‘Something happened, somebody passed a word to the police line, and they turned, ran back to their vans, and left 50-100 rampant ‘anarchists’ in possession of the field. Having briefly chased after the vans waving dusters and flags cheering and shouting: ‘we scared the police off’ - they dispersed and traipsed off looking for more action’ (Gorringe Fieldnotes).

In this instance, and others, the heavy police presence was the demonstration. Without them the protestors dispersed. The reinforcement of protestors by beer-swilling local lads in the evening similarly owed more to the existence of a target. Faced by this scenario, one interviewee was blunt. Had we withdrawn the police, he argued:

It could be there is no target. Equally members of the public might be scared out their wits, and the businesses on Princes Street could have been trashed. Which professional police officer is going take that risk? (LBP 1).

Unless and until such risks are taken, however, the prevalent motif of global protests will be confrontational. The relative quiescence of the 2005 G8 summit may suggest that ‘remote or difficult to access’ locations minimise protests, but there is also an argument that police/protestor interactions are crucial. Our respondents were convinced of this and felt that the softly-softly approach to policing (as compared to European styles) resulted in a subdued protest response.

**Concluding Remarks**

Viewing the demonstrations surrounding the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland through the prism of ‘global protest’ or ‘crowd control’ merely obscures the central significance of police/protestor relations. Contrary to past accounts of urban violence it is now apparent that policing is a key variable in ‘the instigation or escalation of disorder’ (Waddington and King 2005: 501). As such, analysis of ‘global protest’ needs to incorporate the local social, political and historical context so as to comprehend the social identities and frames that inform police/protestor encounters. The protests witnessed in Genoa and Seattle cannot simply be ‘imported’ into a novel context. Rather, as we have argued, such protests are subject to localised dynamics which impact upon their course, style and representation. G8 2005 (as played out in Edinburgh at least), thus, says as much if not more about Scottish (or British) policing and protest repertoires than about international summit protests. In conclusion, therefore, it is worth considering the implications of this analysis at this local level.

Whilst it is immediately apparent that the Scottish police is infused with the democratic ethos that is increasingly characteristic of ‘Western’ policing, it is less obvious that this has translated into specific principles, perceptions or tactics. Reicher et al (2004) emphasise the urgent requirement to dispel the dangerous conflation of a ‘single mass of people’ with a ‘single psychological crowd’. They stress the need to differentiate between actors particularly at the point of confrontation. Whilst differentiation played a pivotal part in police operations in Edinburgh at key points on the Monday groups were lumped together and treated as a dangerous collective. Such perceptions not only prevent non-hostile elements from leaving, but can affect in-
crowd interactions to the extent that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Reicher et al. 2004, Waddington and King 2005). Traditional attempts to communicate through community mediators simply do not work for anti-systemic groups, but innovatory tactics or communication strategies have yet to be deployed.

In the days before the summit one officer summed up the prevalent policing perspective:

‘The first priority is obviously the security of those attending the summit and not next in line, but alongside that, we have to make sure that the local community are protected and I’m sorry, but the interests of the protestors have to come behind those two issues’ (Tayside 1).

Rather than viewing protestors as a ‘nuisance’ to be managed, our analysis and the joyful experience of the MPH march suggest, the above priorities should be understood as interlinked. Gleneagles 2005 looked nothing like Genoa, in large part, because of local variables. If aggression and distrust can become self-fulfilling prophecies, so too can facilitation and co-operation.

Cited Interviews:
Tayside 2 (interviewed 9 June 2005). Senior Officer, Tayside Police.
Tayside 3 (interviewed 28 July 2005). Senior Officer, Tayside Police.
SSP 1 (interviewed 5 August 2005). Senior, Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) politician. The SSP are a key component of Stop The War and G8 Alternatives in Scotland. They had, at time of writing, six seats in the devolved Scottish Parliament.

Cited references


