In 2005 hundreds of thousands marched through Edinburgh to lobby the G8 to 'Make Poverty History'. The coalition's own assessment of the campaign highlighted the importance of the media in mediating protest messages by focussing on the extent of media coverage. Media, however, have their own agendas. Detailed analysis of newspaper coverage preceding the G8 Summit suggests a disjuncture between protest and media frames. Indeed fears over the coming protests fomented a moral panic and cast protestors as contemporary folk devils. This paper explores how far newspaper accounts of G8-related protests were 'framed' in terms of social movement aims as opposed to media discourses on violence and disorder. In conclusion we caution against uncritical claims towards media coverage as a gauge of movement 'success' and offer a more nuanced account of the interplay between social movements and the media.

‘Make Poverty History’ (MPH) was launched to place the issues of trade justice, debt and aid on the 2005 G8 summit agenda. In January 2006, marking one year of campaigning, the coalition released a report which, utilising the language of the advertising sector:

...analysed a sample of 1,200 cuttings from national newspapers, magazines, online and regional titles over a circulation of 50,000. The sample alone generated over 1 billion opportunities to see with an advertising value equivalence of £136.5 million.  (MPH, 2006)

MPH claimed to have established itself as “part of the news agenda” and that “50% of articles analysed included mention of at least one of the campaign's three demands of trade justice, debt cancellation and more and better aid”. They concluded:

The Make Poverty History campaign was the biggest anti-poverty movement this country has ever seen and the response from the UK's media was phenomenal. As well as raising awareness of the campaign's demands, the media coverage has sparked popular
debate on the policy changes needed and played a vital role in mobilising millions of people to take action against global poverty. (MPH, 2006)

Media coverage is celebrated here as reaching a wider constituency than protest alone is able to. Given the difficulties faced by activists trying to influence the news agenda (Philo 1993, Hoynes 2005) MPH is justly proud of this achievement. Media institutions, however, are not neutral conduits. They have their own priorities and opinions - which may conflict with SM objectives.

This paper explores how far newspaper accounts of G8-related protests were ‘framed’ in terms of social movement aims and how far in terms of anticipated violence and disorder. This illuminates a dynamic between ‘event’ and ‘causes’ in media accounts. Analysis of newspaper coverage before the 2005 Summit reveals sharp differences between protest and media frames. Some media frames fomented a moral panic casting protestors as folk devils. Coverage of MPH needs to be assessed against this backdrop, and we caution against uncritical adoption of ‘advertising value equivalence’ as a marker of ‘success’.

**Mediated Messages**

That Britain’s “biggest anti-poverty movement” should mark a year’s campaigning by claiming media ‘success’ is unsurprising:

... politics is communication: politicians’ pronouncements, terrorists’ bombs and peaceful protest alike are geared to ways of communicating with people. All political conflict takes place largely within and through organised media of communication. (De Jong et al 2005:1)

Increasingly, organisations from trans-global corporations down to the humblest local campaign strive to become ‘media-savvy’. For example, the World Development Movement (WDM) routinely record “media ‘hits’” - the number of press items in which they are mentioned. Securing such exposure means that WDM “is widely seen as punching above its weight” (Timms 2005:125). Activists recognise that media attention can be captured by “bold and creative” protests (Gaber & Willson 2005:104). For MPH this meant high-profile celebrity-led advertising and campaign wristbands. The campaign culminated when a ‘human wristband’ encircled central Edinburgh. MPH peppered its campaign with media-friendly stunts including the distribution of hard-hitting and star-
studded films and exhortations to buy fair-trade underwear and declare ‘Pants to Poverty’.¹

Reliance on celebrity, and ‘photo-opportunity’ recognises that media give preference to the ‘spectacular’ over the ‘mundane’. Such coverage may come at a cost: events garner wide coverage, whilst trends, ideas, campaigns or causes are largely ignored. There is an inherent danger that the more spectacular the stunt, the higher profile the celebrity, the more news coverage a campaign wins - but the more the underlying causes of the campaign are obscured.

Campaign ‘success’, thus, is measured by ‘quantity’ of coverage rather than ‘quality’. The language of opportunities to see and media hits implies that even bad news has value. Sarah Berger noted that the peaceful intentions of most protesting at the G7 in Genoa were “overtaken” by a violent minority. Though opposed to violence, Berger noted that it had:

… attracted enormous media attention around the world. Scenes of rioting and mayhem dominated the television screens, yet the coverage was not all sensationalist and hostile. It included extensive analysis of neo-liberalism and the underlying causes of debt amongst the world’s poorest countries. … I have reluctantly concluded that it seems necessary to have both the threat and reality of violence and property destruction and even possible loss of life, in order to force our agenda for a fairer world onto the international stage. (2005:87)

For some, then, a realisation that media attention is focussed upon ‘spectacle’ leads to accommodation with (if not uncritical acceptance of) violence. Berger’s reluctant conversion raises the crucial issue of whether and how resolutely non-violent campaigns such as MPH are ‘framed’ or ‘interpreted’ through the media’s understanding and use of prior events. Just as “politics is communication”, so too all communication is political:

Media and their sources frame the news agenda, structure the debate and create what we perceive as the reality in which we live. In this sense, news media play a hegemonic role in our society – their perceptions and interpretations of the world become common sense. However, this process is continuous and creative, not static and rigid … It is this common sense that has to be both engaged with and challenged by those seeking to achieve social change.

(de Jong et al 2004: 6)

**Media framing, media ‘bias’**

MPH argued for three key global reforms: ‘Trade Justice’; ‘Debt Cancellation’; and ‘More and Better Aid’ (MPH 2004). How far these themes were reported or discussed depended on how media accounts ‘framed’ the G8-related protests (on ‘framing’ see McLuhan 1960; Goffman 1974). Altheide defines media frames as “the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed” (1997:651).

Media frames affect which message gets across since they shape public discourse and delimit the boundaries of debate. Frames vary but McFarlane & Hay argue that ‘marginalising frames’ prevail in accounts of protest. These “emphasize violent crime, property crime and riots, carnivalesque and freakish aspects of protest, childish antics, and moral and social decay” (2003:218). Earl et al (2004) note how frames establish a ‘hierarchy’ in which certain events or issues are more likely to gain coverage than others. This can feed into biases of ‘selection’ and ‘description’ in which certain events are either omitted or presented in a particular way.

Murdock’s study of a 1968 London anti-war rally found that a media focus on ‘militant extremists’, ‘anarchists’ and anticipated violence: “served to concentrate attention on the forms of actions to the neglect of underlying causes” (1973:160). He argued that such ‘bias’ relates to journalistic expediency rather than to ideology:

> The need to render information intelligible to the reader means that ... news stories cannot be presented in a complete vacuum. The journalist must therefore situate the event within a framework ... already familiar to the reader.  

(1973:164)

Whilst the 1968 rally was ‘situated’ with reference to the (‘familiar’) riots that year in Paris and Chicago, the proposed G8-related protests in Scotland were situated largely against media accounts of Genoa, 2001. Kolb’s (2005) suggestion of an ‘upward spiral’ is inverted here where media accounts feed off each other in the simplistic portrayal of the Genoa protests as violent - even though most protestors were peaceful and that much of the violence involved police authorities. Within such accounts ‘Genoa’ offered:

> ... a single dramatic image which made immediate sense of an ambiguous situation. The news process therefore establishes its own links between situations, links not at the level of underlying structures and processes but at the level of immediate forms and
images. Situations are identified as the same if they look the same. In this way news rewrites history for immediate public consumption. Murdock (1973:165)

Despite Berger’s optimism, ‘Genoa’ is not remembered for the underlying political and economic impulses prompting thousands to protest:

For many observers, Genoa is synonymous with protest violence, a metonym evoking images of tear gas, burning cars, and black-clad protesters hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at heavily militarized riot police. Juris (2005:413)

Juris argues that - over the short-term - coverage of Genoa switched from unremitting hostility towards protestors to a condemnation of police tactics. Over the longer period, as details and nuances fade, the “dominant media frame” has returned to the violent protestors. ‘Genoa’ refers to the “mass-mediated image of the Battle of Genoa as an iconic sign of wanton destruction” (Juris 2005:414).

Media necessarily assume that their audience has some knowledge – however sketchy – of background issues. This is largely because much news focuses on ‘episodic’ rather than ‘thematic’ issues. They report events rather than providing:

information that contextualizes an issue or problem [and] focuses more on general developments, trends, or conditions that contribute to problems ... social movements often seek thematic media attention to some broad social concern by generating an episode or event that may be newsworthy in itself. A successful effort requires that media coverage of the protest event focuses on the issues the movement seeks to address, rather than on the event used to attract media coverage. (Smith et al 2001:1404)

It is not enough for a protest to ‘make the news’. Success is more accurately measured by how far (if at all) the event is treated thematically; draws “attention to underlying themes of injustice, inequality, or oppression”; and to the extent these are transformed into “an ‘acute’ issue that demands urgent attention on a crowded social agenda”. (Smith et al 2001:1404)

Understanding media coverage as ‘thematic’ or ‘episodic’ offers a more nuanced reading of movement impact than advertising value equivalence. In this light Berger’s view that “both the threat and reality of violence” may be necessary to put global justice on a media agenda may be
counter-productive. Violence may “possess a drama ... perfectly suited to the punchy formulations of banner headlines and the photographic aesthetics of a double-page spread” (Flyghed 2002: 29), but such coverage is double-edged:

The presence of counter-demonstrators, arrests, and/or violence produced more reporting on the demonstration event itself and less attention to the issues at stake. These conditions also tended to produce news spin that favored authorities rather than demonstrators.

Smith et al (2001: 1415)

Ironically, then, militant groups who “stage spectacular violent performances, partly, to gain access to the mass media” allow the interests of the status quo (in the view of these same militants) to “manipulate violent images, decontextualizing and reinserting them within narratives that frame protestors as dangerous criminals or terrorists.” (Juris 2005:416). In other words, emphasising the spectacular may ensure that protest intentions are neglected or undermined.

Problems for activists arise in that where banal routines of campaigning fail to capture media attention, a stunt or violent protest may well do so. This can produce a vicious circle whereby ‘ordinary’ increasingly fail to achieve protest aims, perpetuating a pursuit of coverage through spectacle which falls prey to the episodic coverage dictated by a limited ‘media attention cycle’ (Earl et al. 2004: 70). Juris argues that “social movement struggles are largely waged through media wars of symbolic interpretation” (2005:416). This being the case, the reliance on spectacle undermines social movement agendas.

Protest success comes to be defined in terms of spectacle, but the dominant frames and images of protest focus upon (actually relatively rare) violent events. Furthermore, media focus on violence fosters a “protest paradigm” within which “protestor voices [are] de-legitimized, marginalized and demonized” (McFarlane & Hay 2003: 212). As Flyghed notes:

These non-representative events are drummed into our consciousness ... and are normalised so that they turn into perceptions of an ever-present threat. There is often what might almost be termed a demonisation of such threats. (2002: 37)
‘Genoa’ and ‘anarchists’

Cohen discussed media coverage of 1960s youth cultures in terms of ‘Folk Devils’ and ‘Moral Panics’ (Cohen 2002). Despite clear parallels, little work has utilised these concepts with regard to political protest or political violence. Most accounts have focussed on relatively powerless folk devils at the margins of society. Given that such groups are largely ‘non-political’, Donson et al argue that ‘anti-capitalist protestors’ - organised, enjoying access to resources, and pursuing sophisticated goals - represent “a new type of folk devil” (2004:2). Unlike traditional folk devils who threaten the moral order, anti-capitalists “represent a systemic challenge” to the political order (2004: 26). Anti-capitalists are thus ‘Folk Devils without a panic’ since - in Donson et al’s view - a moral panic would (“ironically”) require an airing of precisely those outré political views that the construction of the folk devil sought to silence (2004: 10-11).

Yet many moral panics do occur without the airing of alternative viewpoints, serving to stifle rather than produce debate. Moral panics “come in different sizes – some gripping only certain social categories, groups, or segments, others causing great concern in the majority”, they “erupt fairly suddenly … and, nearly as suddenly, they subside” (Goode & Ben-Yahuda 1994a:157-158). Further, the very concept of the ‘folk devil’ serves to curtail debate since it is predicated on stereotypical accounts of deviance. The folk devil by its very construction precludes discussion.

We argue that ‘Genoa’ and ‘anarchist’ have become media short-hands to invoke the folk devil Donson et al describe and that the ‘radical’ folk devil has a much longer lineage. As Juris points out:

Social conflicts that challenge liberal core assumptions – such as private property or the legitimacy of the state – are usually muted, tamed, and incorporated within hegemonic frames. The mass media tend to construct militant protest in particular as dangerous and criminal. (2005:423)

Goode & Ben-Yahuda note the centrality of media institutions to the construction of deviance through recurrent coupling of particular groups with forms of anti-social behaviour.

Once a category has been identified in the media as consisting of troublemakers, the supposed havoc-wreaking behaviour of its members reported to the public, and their supposed stereotypical
features litanised, the process of creating the folk devil is complete; from then on all mention of representatives of the new category revolves around their central, and exclusively negative features. (1994b:29)

Such havoc-wreaking was flagged in media accounts prior to the 2005 G8 Summit through the invocation of two stock terms – anarchist denoted a particularly malevolent type of ‘revolutionary’ folk devil; Genoa epitomised the havoc wreaked when the folk devil was loose. The folk devil was invoked although the major protest campaign – MPH – was resolutely opposed to confrontation or violence, and claimed UK government ministers amongst its supporters.

“The anarchists’ World Cup”: Invoking Folk Devils

There are plenty hoping to use the jamboree as an excuse to create as much bloody mayhem as they can. The G8 is the anarchists’ World Cup, their dream date. Burnie (2005)

Examining the various terms used to frame protests at the 2005 G8 Summit illuminates the nature of journalistic short-hands and their evocative power. Rather than focussing on reportage of actual events, therefore, we examine accounts in anticipation of the G8. Our analysis focuses on the six months prior to the protests (i.e. 01 January to 30 June 2005). Further, we limit our data to UK national, regional and local newspapers, although much analysis focuses on the distinctive Scottish newspaper market.

Anticipations of violence and disorder were central themes in the press imagination. By contrast, underlying issues of why groups were planning to protest were marginalized, often absent. Small groups such as the Dissent! Network garnered, proportionate to the number of people they actually mobilised, far more coverage than MPH. Before unpacking how key terms were deployed it is useful to formulate a clear sense of their incidence. To do so we used the LexisNexis database to search within 149 UK-based newspapers, ranging from the (Aberdeen) Evening Express to the Yorkshire Post.

Our initial search identified all articles (01 January through 30 June 2005) containing the reference term ‘G8’. Then, within this sub-sample, we searched for articles containing the following terms:

2 [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/xchange-international/].
Gleneagles, Climate change (location of the 2005 Summit and one of the three key themes to be discussed)

Okinawa, Genoa, Kananaskis, Evian, Sea Island (previous Summit locations)

Make Poverty History and its three key slogans: Trade Justice; Drop the Debt, More and Better Aid.³

Live8, Madonna, Long Walk, Bob Geldof (Live8 and the 'Long Walk to Freedom' were campaigns – loosely associated with MPH – featuring artists like Madonna and Geldof)

Anarchist(s); Anarchy; riot; violent/violence; chaos; disorder

The overall incidence of these terms are shown in table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>N</th>
<th></th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gleneagles</td>
<td>2,592</td>
<td></td>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live8</td>
<td>469</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okinawa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Long Walk To Justice</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genoa</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kananaskis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Geldof</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evian</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Anarchist(s)/Anarchy</td>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea Island</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Riot</td>
<td>314</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Poverty History</td>
<td>1,516</td>
<td></td>
<td>Violent/violence</td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Justice</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop the Debt</td>
<td>298</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More &amp; Better Aid</td>
<td>270</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of articles containing term ‘G8’</td>
<td>6,203</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LexisNexis.

In the simplistic language of ‘media hits’, three terms had the greatest impact. Gleneagles (location of the Summit) and Make Poverty History were ubiquitous, but the celebrity figure of Geldof had, in these crude terms, as much impact as the MPH coalition. None of MPH’s key aims achieved as many ‘hits’ as one of the items on the Summit agenda (climate change), and had no more presence within media output as Live8 or Madonna. Further, more articles contained references to riots, violence and/or anarchists than to MPH’s key aims.

³ To capture reformulations of MPH’s slogans we included ‘debt cancellation’, ‘more aid’ and ‘better aid’ in our searches. The incidence of the precise slogans were: ‘Drop the Debt’ (71) and ‘More and Better Aid’ (94).
Across the UK press, therefore, the ‘media-savvy’ MPH campaign was ‘outbid’ by themes of protest disorder and violence. This can be seen in the fact that journalists were far more likely to invoke Genoa than any other recent Summit. Summits at which there was little by way of violent protest – Okinawa, Kananaskis, Sea Island – were rarely mentioned.

**Unmasking the Devil**

It is not enough, however, simply to show that certain terms were used. As a corrective to analyses focusing on ‘media hits’ we wish to highlight the negative terms used to discuss activism and illustrate how these came to frame understandings of the upcoming protests.

As we might expect, presentational style varied across newspaper type. For example, the tabloid *Sunday Mail* ran an extensive story in January 2005 under the lurid headline “Ready to Riot G-Hate: Anarchists stage secret talks to plot chaos at Gleneagles”. The article was accompanied by violent images from Genoa. Mindless violence was presented as part of an insidious ‘anarchist’ conspiracy:

> Anti-capitalist campaigners have called a secret meeting to plot tactics for violent protests at the G8 summit in Scotland. An umbrella coalition called *Dissent* are staging the talks in Germany and invited hard-line activists from across Europe. Organisers of the anarchist group want to create an elite corps of ‘experienced activists’ to lead thousands of demonstrators when world leaders arrive at Gleneagles. They will also be training medics to deal with their wounded. They have told activists their aim is the ‘total disruption’ of the Gleneagles summit.

*McDonald (2005)*

Note the elision of ‘anti-capitalist campaigners’ with ‘anarchist’, and the militarised language (‘elite corps’; ‘wounded’ rather than injured). The article continued:

> More than 10,000 police will be drafted in during the meeting of leaders of the world’s richest nations. A total air exclusion zone will be set up over central Scotland and RAF jets are being put on stand-by for the two-day conference in July. Police want to avoid a repeat of the riot at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, which led to the killing of one protesters by an armed policeman.

*McDonald (2005)*

---

4 Scotland’s best selling Sunday - circulation of almost 500,000.
Again a militarisation: police ‘drafted in’, fighters patrol the skies. The nightmare scenario is a ‘repeat of ... Genoa’, although it is noticeable that it is the police who wish to avoid such a repeat (rather than protestors or the public). Genoa-style ‘horror’, it seems, was the ‘anarchist’ aim:

Yesterday, an Edinburgh spokesman for Dissent gave a chilling warning about their plans. He said: 'It is a very violent world and these people are using it to maintain their power, so we won’t hesitate to use the same weapons. The focal point might be the summit but, unlike other summits, there are a lot of other cities involved, which gives us access to a lot of opportunities'.

McDonald (2005)

The article mixed potent and sensational ingredients. Supposed plans were framed in militarised, secretive and conspiratorial terms; and the activists – ‘anarchists’ – were aiming to produce violence (“we won’t hesitate”). The account fed into contemporary fears of terrorism and emphasised the un-knowability of where and how the anarchists would strike.

Yet the article contains another story, not immediately discernible, and a key, though implicit contradiction. How was it that a ‘secret meeting’ was known to, and reported by, a Scottish tabloid newspaper? And how secretive and dangerously unpredictable is a shadowy network with “an Edinburgh spokesman”? At no point did the article consider, let alone explore, Dissent’s motivations. In the absence of reported motive the reader could be forgiven for thinking that these ‘anarchists’ were devils indeed.

This story was fairly representative of tabloid sensationalism. A Scottish Sun story warned of ‘The Gr8 War’:

Scotland could become a battleground as protesters finalise their plans to wreck the G8 summit. Previous summits have ended in bloody - and deadly - clashes with police. Anti-capitalist websites give a shocking insight into their plans, which include flaming barricades and the storming of banks.

Cox & Donohoe (2005)

Here again ‘secretive’ radicals and militarised themes. The Scottish Daily Mail also found an ‘anarchist’ insider:

Anarchists bent on bringing mayhem to Edinburgh are in the final stages of planning ... Anarchist leaders drew up plans at a secret meeting in Glasgow last weekend organised by the radical Dissent
collective. An insider said: 'The idea is now to use the nice fluffy middleclass war on poverty in Africa as a cover for some more direct mayhem.' A final planning meeting by the group is expected to take place this weekend at Edinburgh University. *Scottish Daily Mail* (2005)

Note here *Dissent’s* supposed disdain toward the broader protest movement – and the inherent danger in even ‘respectable’ protests. MPH is to be cynically manipulated by those “bent on bringing mayhem”. Assiduous readers might again note that the location of the ‘final planning meeting’ is not only known to the *Daily Mail* but proved to be one of Edinburgh’s major institutions. Other newspapers also found it surprisingly easy to ‘infiltrate’ secret meetings and uncover plots:

> Last week, a *Sunday Express* reporter infiltrated one of the groups during a three-day training session to prepare demonstrators for violence. He was told extremists ... are determined to cause a repeat of the violence in Genoa four years ago, when one protester was killed.
> Stanley & McKeown (2005)

Such accounts *de-politicise* radical organisations and protests, condensing them into ‘moments of violence’. The point of the protests, the issues being discussed at the various meetings, the range of organisations and individuals raising issues are not marginalised – they are *absent*. Demonisation is complete when successive articles implicate such organisations in the death of a protestor in Genoa, a frame suggesting a wanton disregard for human life.

Protest politics in such accounts are stripped of their *protest* element and become synonyms for violence or, activities which - inadvertently or otherwise - lead to violence. These accounts, quite contrary to the hopes expressed by Berger (2005) are resolutely ‘episodic’ rather than ‘thematic’. Nor was such sensationalism limited to the tabloid press: ‘quality’ newspapers also utilised the short-hands of ‘anarchy’ and ‘Genoa’:

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Anarchy</em> and <em>Genoa</em> in the quality press (selected headlines)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Genoa, Geneva - now Auchterarder gears up for G8’, <em>Guardian</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Anarchy at the G8’, <em>Sunday Herald</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Police call up 10,000 to prevent repeat of Genoa’, <em>Times</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whilst sensationalism was less marked in the ‘quality’ press, it was hardly absent. A Sunday Times reporter revealed the “G8 chaos plans of anarchists” after he had “spent six months posing as an anarchist to discover a sinister plan to unleash chaos on Scotland during the G8 summit”. Impressively, he “breach[ed] the inner sanctum of the British anti-capitalist movement, becoming privy to some of its most sensitive plans”. Predictably he concluded that anarchists were “determined to wreak havoc” (Lamarra 2005a & 2005b).

Similarly a Times journalist went “Inside the secret world of anarchists” to the ‘Festival of Dissent’ where:

A remote farm in the Lanarkshire countryside was transformed ... into a city of well laid-out army tents and marquees resembling a military encampment. The military aspect was no accident. This was a “war summit”, where about 300 anarchists - some dressed in urban guerrilla garb in freezing temperatures - had gathered to draw up plans to paralyse Scotland during the G8.

In penetrating this “secretive group of militants” the Times uncovered “the nature of many of its plans - and the willingness of some militants to resort to violence in their determination to disrupt the summit” (Luck 2005).

Such stories reprised the sensationalism of tabloid accounts, but the theme of secrecy was again undermined by extensive ‘revelations’–journalists had little difficulty in finding and infiltrating ‘secret’ meetings. This relates less to investigative skill than the fact that most of the ‘secret’ meetings were nothing of the sort. Take, as one example, the ‘Festival of Dissent’, described above as a “secretive group of militants” conspiring on a “remote farm”. In fact the gathering was held close to a major motorway junction and was widely publicised, including through a
press release. As Lamarra (2005b) later noted, the ‘Festival of Dissent’ was “crawling with journalists”.

The folk devil, clearly, is well established – so much so that sensationalist stories - so long as they conform to and confirm established stereotypes - are constructed on the thinnest of evidence. Donson et al (2004) are right that the demonisation of ‘anarchists’ has precluded debate. However, we argue that the demonisation of radical activists occurs precisely because they are presented (and interpreted) as a threat to the moral basis of the political order. As Runkle (1976: 367) notes, “Since the condemnation of violence is nearly universal, our sensibilities are not badly disturbed by pejorative definitions”.

Incessant association of ‘anarchism’ with violence creates a moral panic about illegitimate, unauthorised and unjustified forms of action. Concern about legitimacy and image was reflected by the insistence with which groups like MPH denounced violence. The extent of this panic is evident if we turn away from the condemnations of ‘anarchists’ to consider media portrayals of ‘respectable’ protestors.

‘Ready for a riot?’

If sensationalist themes obscured the motives of radical groups, the constant invoking of ‘Genoa’ and ‘chaos’ also characterized coverage of ‘mainstream’ organisations including MPH. Such groups and their motives (even where media sources were unsympathetic) were seen as ‘legitimate’. Nevertheless, much coverage focused on the likelihood that violent groups would ‘hijack’ them. Within this theme were assumptions that even the most well-intentioned could lose control of themselves. Cox & Donahue (2005) cited one ‘senior police officer’ warning that “it only takes a handful of lunatics to turn the mood of these big events”.

Newspapers sympathetic to MPH carefully tried to separate ‘legitimate’ and ‘extremist’ protest:

It should be an honour for Scotland to host the G8 Summit. It ought to be an opportunity for ordinary people to change the course of history by making their voices heard and demanding proper aid for Africa. But this huge event will also attract lowlife thugs intent on violence. Anarchist groups from London and further afield are targeting Edinburgh and they are determined to cause trouble. If there is any violence, it will do nothing to help the cause of Africa or end poverty ... That is what the G8 is really

---

about. That is what peaceful protest can help achieve. And we cannot let extremists bent on rioting deflect from that task.

*Daily Record* (2005a)

The emphasis here is on the need to make “voices heard” – violent protest is not only abhorrent in itself (the strategy of “lowlife thugs”), it drowns out ‘legitimate’ concerns and ‘real’ issues. The *Record* consistently backed MPH and three days later it editorialised again:

> The Make Poverty History movement needs committed, peaceful demonstrators. What it can do without are anarchist head-bangers determined to run riot through Edinburgh next week. Anyone thinking about using the G8 for their own political ends ... should realise that any trouble will detract from a sincere call to world leaders to do more to alleviate suffering in Africa.

*Daily Record* (2005b)

Other titles went further still, arguing that the threat of anarchist infiltration rendered ‘legitimate’ protest *irresponsible*. The *Daily Mail* editorialised:

> There should always be room in a mature democracy for law-abiding citizens to alert the leaders of the world’s most affluent nations to issues surrounding Third World debt. But only the most naive among them can be ignorant of the fact that these peaceful marches are ripe for the hijacking by people hell bent on operating outside of the law and outside of the normal structures of democracy ... Try asking the battle-scarred citizens of Gothenburg, Seattle and Genoa if they now think peaceful protest at this event is possible.   

*Daily Mail* (2005)

The moral panic is evident: ‘extremist thugs’ not only deny justice to those in abject poverty, they threaten to *infect* legitimate protest, turning ‘law abiding citizens’ into criminal deviants. The logical conclusion was that peaceful G8-related protest was impossible: violence was inevitable.

Premonitions of impending violence were most pronounced in Edinburgh’s Scotsman Group titles (the *Scotsman*, *Evening News*, and *Scotland on Sunday*) – to the point that they constituted a virulent, if localised moral panic. By June 2005 the Scotsman Group titles were questioning the motives (and sanity) of even the most respectable protestors. One *Scotland on Sunday* headline, a week before the protests, asked “Ready for a riot?” The paper editorialised that whilst reasonable people “continue[d] to feel a deep and committed sympathy for Africa:
It is high time grown men and women recognised the distinction between a compassionate, concrete and focused plan to relieve poverty in Africa and an emotional spasm - which is what the organisers of the G8 protests are indulging in.  
*Scotland On Sunday* (2005)

The paper criticised what they saw as an overly accommodating approach by the authorities and, in particular, Lothian & Borders police:

Even the forces of law and order have been seduced by the rhetoric of protest, as evidenced by the claim of ... the assistant chief constable ... that all in Edinburgh agree with the aims of the protesters. His presumption is incredible. It is quite possible to believe that Africa needs assistance without backing an idiotic plan for far more people than is safe to descend on Scotland’s capital resulting, at best, in massive disruption, and at worst, serious disorder.  
*Scotland on Sunday* (2005)

“Lurid coverage is itself a threat to public order”

Whilst the Scotsman Group set itself up as the guardian of the moral order in a “world heritage city”, even its coverage was occasionally more measured. The *Evening News*, for example, reported that: “Detectives have been monitoring extremist groups for months and discovered no evidence of plans to organise riots or other large-scale disorder” (Stow 2005). One *Scotsman* columnist warned that press coverage:

... raises some profound and disturbing questions about the way our society is changing; about when, for instance, we became so terrified of dissent and so wary of free speech that even an event as respectable as the Make Poverty History march ... has to be treated as a major threat to public order ... we have to be clear that people have a right to demonstrate peacefully, and that that right should be celebrated in a free society.  
Mcmillan (2005)

Yet despite evidence that the police had no expectation of ‘riots’, and despite the willingness of some commentators to address mounting press hysteria, Scotsman Group headlines continued to fuel fears. In June the *Scotsman* claimed that officers policing G8-related protests would be armed with ‘taser stun guns’ (McDougall 2005). Senior police officers publicly denounced this as “erroneous reporting”, and warned of “a dangerous form of journalism that raises the fears of the public and those people who wish to protest lawfully”. This “makes the job of police
officers on the front line all the more difficult” (ACPOS 2005). A senior officer insisted:

We do not have water cannons. We do not use plastic bullets. The equipment being issued to officers is the standard baton, CS canister, shield capability and protective padding. We do not use firearms. Our officers are well trained in keeping public order of a violent nature. They deal with incidents of this type every Friday and Saturday night.
Quoted in Lindsay (2005)

However, the condensed power of the signifiers ‘anarchy’ and ‘violence’ outweighed such denials. Thus, in the absence of evidence, or even with evidence to the contrary, speculation sufficed:

There has been widespread speculation that the police will take the continental approach to riot control and deploy water cannon, plastic bullets, tear-gas and baton guns. A four-mile ring of steel will surround the 850-acre Gleneagles estate.
Lamarra (2005b)

The media, of course, is not monolithic and, confronting the “full panic mode”, one of Scotland’s more thoughtful columnists warned:

We all know what it is really about: selling newspapers. G8 chaos is what Edinburgh people want to read about. But that doesn’t make it right ... Newspapers have a responsibility that goes beyond the next day’s fish suppers. Of course public safety is a legitimate issue. But relentless forecasts of imminent violence tend to attract precisely the violent elements you don’t want to come while deterring peaceful demonstrators. Lurid coverage is itself a threat to public order. Remember that if the bottles fly in July.
MacWhirter (2005)

Getting the message across?

Few bottles did, in fact, fly and the huge MPH rally passed without a single protest-related arrest (Gorringe & Rosie 2006). Yet much press coverage focussed instead on the star studded Live8 concerts or repeated predictions of forthcoming chaos. As a media-friendly ‘spectacle’, the symbolic ringing of Edinburgh’s city centre by hundreds of thousands of white-clad protestors fared poorly against Madonna, U2, and black clad anarchists.
Returning to MPH’s claims that: “the response from the UK’s media was phenomenal”. MPH undoubtedly won coverage, but it is not at all clear that this “sparked popular debate” in the way MPH have claimed. Despite ‘respectable’ credentials, unwavering commitment to peaceful protest, and its sophistication, dominant media frames were generated not by thematic interest in world poverty and global justice, but by a desire for spectacle. MPH’s celebrity sponsors fed media appetite for stardom, but the campaign also suffered from a pre-existing frame - dangerous ‘anarchists’ and ‘Genoa’. These short-hands were ubiquitous in the lead up to the 2005 protests and fostered a localised moral panic despite the actual character of the MPH coalition.

It is difficult to imagine a global justice movement more removed from the world of dangerous, conspiratorial revolutionaries than MPH. A coalition of high street charities, NGOs and religious organisations, it persuaded the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Scotland’s First Minister, and other establishment figures to pledge their support. Yet in the media imagination the ‘anarchist’ folk devil proved irresistible. Social movements, rather than thinking in terms of ‘media hits’ and ‘opportunities to see’ need to think more deeply about the role of the media in creating, narrowing, and stifling debate.
References


Burnie, Joan (2005), ‘The G8 is the Anarchists’ World Cup so I’ll take Jack’s plan, thanks’, Daily Record, 03 June, p13


Cox, Peter & Donohoe, Graeme (2005) ‘The Gr8 War’, Scottish Sun, 24 June, p4

Daily Mail (2005), ‘Hijack threat to a G8 protest’, 07 March, p12

Daily Record (2005a), ‘Record View: Let’s not ruin it’, 24 June, p8

Daily Record (2005b), ‘Record View: March In Peace’, 27 June, p8


Lamarra, Paul (2005a) ‘Revealed: G8 chaos plans of anarchists’, *Sunday Times*, 29 May, p1


Lindsay, Morag (2005), ‘Emergency services are braced for invasion by G8 protesters’, *Press & Journal*, 02 June, p8

Luck, Adam (2005), ‘Inside the secret world of anarchists preparing for G8 summit’, *The Times*, 16 April, p8

MacWhirter, Iain (2005), ‘First you scare them and then you play on their fears’, *The Herald*, 22 June, p16

McDonald, Toby (2005), “‘Ready to Riot G-Hate: Anarchists stage secret talks to plot chaos at Gleneagles”, *Sunday Mail*, 23 January, p49
McDougall, Dan (2005), ‘Weapon that killed 104 will be in G8 police armoury’, Scotsman, 20 May, p2


Mcmillan, Joyce (2005), ‘Our neurotic mistrust will only damage society’, Scotsman, 23 April, p22


Scotland On Sunday (2005), ‘Time for straight talking on G8’, 05 June, Pg. 16


Stow, Nicola (2005), ‘Police intelligence plays down fear of large-scale G8 violence’, Evening News, 14 May, p5