

From social control to urban control? Urban protests, policing, and localization in Germany and England (1960s to 1980s)

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Introduction

Because the police exercise the state monopoly of physical force, it is a key institution when it comes to the analysis of issues of social control. As outlined in the introduction to this issue, when our aim is to study how police control works, our main focus should not be on strategies formulated by high-ranking decision-makers. Rather it is very important to see how these strategies shape police work on the streets. Moreover, a comparative perspective can help to avoid inappropriate generalizations. Urban street protests are a promising case to test the traditionally held view that German police are very state-centered and tough as well as the contrasting image of English police—held to this day—which is dominated by the myth of the liberal and friendly »Bobby.«

The policing of urban settings has been discussed in historical studies as well as in criminological publications. The 1970s and '80s saw a close cooperation between both scholarly fields with, in the main, the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at the center of analysis (Sack 1972; Kappel 1987; Lüdtkke 1992; Reinke 1993). This interdisciplinary dialogue is much less typical for studies which focus on policing and crime in the second half of the twentieth century. Such studies appeared later—most have been published since the 1990s. In these years, however, interdisciplinary dialogue had already lost momentum (for an overview of the history of policing see Fürmetz, Reinke, and Weinhauer 2001; Weinhauer 2003; Briesen and Weinhauer 2007; Lüdtkke, Reinke, and Sturm 2011). Since these years, in Germany, historians of crime mainly quote historians and most criminologists quote authors from

their own field, although sometimes references to sociological studies are made (valuable exceptions are Eisner 1997; Dinges and Sack 2000; Krasmann and Martschukat 2007). In Great Britain, there is still a more lively exchange between criminologists and historians and vice versa (Center for Crime and Justice Studies 2011; Lawrence 2012). With this paper, I would like promote the need to renew this interdisciplinary co-operation between history, sociology, and criminology.

Cities are a promising field to restart an intellectual exchange between history, sociology, and criminology, as there are many stimulating sociological and criminological studies which can be re-read by urban historians. While Henri Lefèbvre's triadic concept of urban space (lived, perceived, and conceived)³¹ has been widely discussed and practiced in the social sciences, it very seldom informs the works of historians (Döring and Thielmann 2008). This disparity is also true for his evocative thoughts on the urban revolution («La révolution urbaine») and on the role of the state in forging urban societies (Lefèbvre 1972).³² Manuel Castells, whose pioneering 1983 study *The City and the Grassroots* (Castells 1983) has been overlooked by most German urban historians in favor of his more recent work on network society, offers an important approach to emphasizing the importance of fights by urban social movements in reshaping urban meaning. Moreover, criminologists researching the wide field of «cultural criminology,» such as Keith Hayward, Jeff Ferrell, and Susanne Karstedt, have very much to tell historians about how urban consumption, fun-driven urban action, and emotions (e.g. fear) interact with crime (Hayward 2004; Ferrell and Websdale 1999; Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2008; Karstedt and Farrall 2006). David Garland's works on

31 In this model, space is not a mere container but a relational concept which shapes and is shaped by human actions. Space integrates urban practices (lived), perceptions/concepts (perceived), and symbolically constructed (conceived) elements.

32 This lack of interest among historians also becomes obvious when we look at the recently booming discussions about how Lefèbvre's multifaceted approach can stimulate new research (see Goonewardena et al. 2008).

changing cultures of control underline—as do historical studies—the manifold political and cultural caesurae of the 1970s (Garland 2001, 96; Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael 2012).

Cities may serve as a good test ground to take advantage of the approaches and insights generated by all these authors, as cities have a long history as sites where police forces and protestors meet, sometimes violently. The urban protests of the last third of the twentieth century offer a good opportunity to analyze the interaction of policing, urban space, social movements, and consumption. This article analyzes in the main the policing of street protests during the 1960s to 1980s in Germany and in England (for sociological studies on protest policing see Waddington, Jobard, and King 2009; Winter 1998; Della Porta and Reiter 1998; for a historical case study see Weinhauer 2003). My arguments are structured by the following assumption: In both countries, until the 1960s, policing street protests still aimed at completely controlling a physical territory including the movements of persons or groups within it, leaving only very few pockets for independent spatial appropriations by protestors. This pattern of protest policing, established in the nineteenth century, was originally developed to be employed against protests which used urban space mainly as a mere stage to present their aims. The police focused their actions on restoring an abstract social (England) or state (Germany) order. I would like to call this pattern of protest policing *social control protest policing*. In urban neighborhoods in the early/mid-1980s however, this pattern of protest policing was challenged in an unprecedented manner. The two main questions are: how can we explain these violent clashes between police and 1980s protestors, and why is protest policing in both countries still struggling to make necessary changes?

The main challenges to 1980s protest policing came from a process I prefer to call *urban localization*. Inspired by Lefèbvre, I understand localization as a complex set of factors encompassing the (re-)discovery of the potentialities of local urban space. Space in this case was a power resource for identity formation, for stimulating visions of the future of the urban, and for satisfying consumer needs. In order to make clear the problems of practical policing, which resisted many ad-hoc police re-

forms, the first section puts a strong focus on the police of the 1960s. Internal problems, patterns of perception/communication and comparative aspects of German and English police forces are analyzed, while interaction with urban protestors is only briefly sketched. As the 1980s are much less well-studied, the second section both briefly outlines the culture of the police and give an overview of social and cultural changes and the interaction of urban protest, localization, and policing.

1960s policing: Protests *in* the city

European cities of the mid- and late-1960s saw some turbulent student protests. In West Germany, student protestors aimed mostly at political change, while their English counterparts were more focused on cultural issues; although, as recent research has underlined, cultural aspects also played an important role in 1960s protest movement in West Germany. The protestors usually articulated their aims without referring directly to aspects of urban life. They addressed university reforms, transnational issues like the Vietnam War or international solidarity, but also abstract political or cultural issues such as democratization or liberalization of drug use (Weinhauer 2006; Stephens 2007; Klimke and Scharloth 2008a and 2008b). These movements acted *in* the city and used urban space merely as a stage.

In both countries, in the 1960s and '70s the policing of protests was shaped mainly by actions that aimed to achieve not only the control over a contested physical territory, but also over the movements of (masses of) people (Della Porta and Reiter 1998). As will be demonstrated below in greater detail, using this model of policing street protests, the police tried to restore (local) order (England) or to protect the state as a whole (Germany).

Talking about *the* German or *the* English police, however, is problematic, as there was nothing like a single uniform body of police. In West Germany, the federal states (*Bundesländer*) had jurisdiction over police matters. Moreover, until the mid-1970s, some cities had independent city police forces. These were based in federal states territory which formerly had been occupied by the US American troops, including Bavaria and

Hesse. Although the number of police forces in England and Wales went from 152 to 43 between 1962 and 1985 (Scruton 1985, 54–55), we still cannot talk of one English police force. Moreover, the commissioners of the local police forces, the police chiefs, were largely autonomous. Again and again in England it was stressed that »the police are not the police of government but of the community« (Reiner 1985, 17). This, however, changed dramatically in the 1980s.

The collective protests of the 1960s did show the police less in their favored role as friend and helper and more as the agency responsible for putting the state monopoly on physical violence into practice. Moreover, among many West German student protestors, the police represented a fascist past. In 1967/68, this murderous past came into public awareness because in many German cities, for example Hamburg and Wuppertal, there were trials against policemen (many of whom were still in active police service) who had participated in National Socialist mass murder (Weinhauer 2009).

German police: Protecting the state

In the 1960s, German police forces acted in a transitional phase in which police tasks had to be newly defined. The main problem was that many West German police forces struggled to emancipate themselves from traditions of paramilitary policing which had their roots in the Prussian police of the Weimar Republic (Weinhauer 2003). While this transition was well under way in day-to-day police work and in policing youth riots, the policing of protests which were labeled as »political« was still strongly influenced by paramilitary concepts and traditions. The most important Weimar legacy was the civil war model of social control protest policing. It guided the perceptions of the police when it came to handling protests labeled as political (see Werkentin 1984; Weinhauer 2003). The key feature of this civil war model was the employment of heavily armed police troops who were willing to end all protests by any means and at all costs—including shooting at the protestors and even killing them. This civil war model was still taught at police training centers up until the early 1970s.

Generally spoken, against the background of a deep-rooted anti-communism, many West German policemen shared a dislike of the soft policing of political protests. When it came to an analysis of the 1960s protests, the master plan and mastermind theory of protest dominated the thinking of policemen and of most politicians. First, both groups of officials were sure that political protests were not spontaneous actions, but part of a (communist) plan drawn up in advance. Second, such political protests were organized by professional ring-leaders who turned crowds into »acute masses« (*akute Massen*). These masses were seen as acting as one single, acutely threatening, homogenous being out to destroy any given order. This view of acute masses, a concept inspired by the late nineteenth century French psychiatrist Gustave Le Bon, was shared by police comrades in other countries (see Weinhauer 2003, 274–77; Weinhauer 2011a). Mass behavior, as West German policemen were sure to know, was manipulated by *Rädelsführer* (ringleaders) who strove to turn their followers into acute masses whose actions would inevitably lead to communism (Stiebitz 1956; Pulver 1960). The destructive potential of these acute masses was very high, thus, the ringleaders had to be isolated and seized by the police.

Even in the Cold War conditions of the otherwise quiet 1950s, policemen sometimes drew their arms in order to protect the West German state against its communist enemies. But these weapons were very seldom used. In Hamburg in May 1951 the police violently squashed student protests against public transport fares, one protestor was shot dead in May 1952 in Essen during an anti-rearmament demonstration, and in Munich in 1954 police fought street battles against consumer protests. Most of the time, the demonstrators were highly disciplined members of the German labor movement or equally disciplined activists of the peace movements of the late 1950s (see Kraushaar 1996, 428–30 and 603–5). However in 1966–68, in many West German cities, student activists employed new patterns of protest and provocation. Would West German police again draw—and this time use—their weapons?

1960s German policemen had shown great inflexibility in handling spontaneous and creative student protests. This was reinforced by the

contemporary police culture with its pattern of masculinity centered on the »man of action.« His main task was to protect the highly mythologized state, if need be at the cost of his own life. When these men were deployed against political demonstrations—where acute masses would inevitably occur and thus communism was lurking—it was irrefutable that such protests had to be fought hard and determinedly. These policemen likened the actual situation in West Germany with the demise of the Weimar Republic and thought that the democratic order was threatened or about to be undermined.

During these protests, however, the police forces of the federal states of West Germany did not follow one single concept but employed various police intervention tactics. A confrontational concept of policing these protests—which has been a main focus of existing research—was employed in West Berlin, where on June 2, 1967 student Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by a policeman. It was not only the city's unique political situation which led to these well-known clashes with the police, but also the fact that the Berlin police were inspired by strong anticommunist sentiments and employed a confrontational civil war model of protest policing in its purest form (see Sack 1984; Busch et al. 1988).

Another precondition—which is often forgotten—also had repercussions on the policing of political protests: the way the media, in this phase mainly the press, reported about local police interventions. While Berlin, with the dominance of the Springer press, was a good example of how these processes of mutual radicalization could work, big cities in North-Rhine Westphalia were at the opposite end of the scale. Hamburg was situated somewhere in between, as it was home not only to some critical weekly journals (*Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel*), but also to the *Hamburger Morgenpost*, a daily newspaper that did not always demonize protesting students. In this city, and also in Munich, police intervention tactics followed a softer line—first theoretically, then also practically. These reforms did not mean that no physical violence was employed by policemen. In Hamburg and some other cities, however, at least the institutional setting was (slowly) changing towards a less confrontational

mode of protest policing. There are three factors which can help explain why this conceptual change became possible.

First, efforts of reforming protest policing were put forward by political actors who were socialized outside the ranks of the police forces—not by policemen themselves. These politicians began to control »their« police forces. As a consequence, in Hamburg in 1967, the guidelines for protest policing were radically revised. Second, crucial steps towards an explicit reform of the civil war model of protest policing had been taken before 1967/68—which means before the main wave of political protests began. These reform processes started in Munich after the Schwabing riots in June 1962 (Fürmetz 2006) and in Hamburg after a demonstration in front of the US consulate in July 1966. Third, in Munich as well as in Hamburg, new channels of communication for policing political protests were established. In Munich in 1964, the police were assisted by a Study Group for Political Psychology and Communication Research and by a psychologist. In Hamburg a planning group was established in October 1966 and a psychologist was employed in 1969 (Weinhauer 2001, 314; Weinhauer 2003, 300–301). The planning group in Hamburg brought together policemen, politicians, officials from the trade unions, church leaders, and local interest groups. Their task was to discuss appropriate measures for protest policing and to work out special recommendations for the police. Unsurprisingly, in their early stages all these measures—be it the flexible reaction or the invention of new channels of communication—met harsh opposition from leading policemen in Hamburg.

Although these reform-oriented politicians tried to change police intervention tactics, in practice this was hard to achieve on the spot (on the following see Weinhauer 2003, 328–30). Two unique features of 1960s police culture—the specific group culture and the dominant pattern of police masculinity—can explain this delay. Among 1960s policemen, forming and being part of highly cohesive collectives was very important. During police interventions against political protests, however, these informal collectives of »men of action« made the police uncontrollable. Policemen over the age of thirty in particular were disappointed

that they could not act against the demonstrators as radically as they thought was appropriate. As a consequence, these frustrated policemen built small groups that fought their own battles against political protesters. Even their direct superiors could not stop or control these groups of policemen, because their members consciously cut themselves off from any communication with the rest of the force. These violent actions of uncontrollable groups of West German policemen revealed a specific aspect of West German police culture which also contributed to the escalation of violence: the obvious paradox of putting a Weimar-oriented civil war model of protest policing into practice when the social conditions had changed dramatically. For one, since the late 1950s, the use of firearms against protesters—a key element of the civil war model—had become nearly unimaginable in practical policing. This in turn intensified disorientation among West German policemen.

English police: Restoring order

During the 1960s, protest policing in England was different than in Germany. There were only scattered individual acts of physical violence in 1960s protests, on the side of policeman as well as on the side of protesters. Such acts did however occur during the anti-Vietnam protests of March and October 1968 in London. Especially in the days before the October 27, 1968 protests, the press campaigned against them, spreading rumors about a militant plot or speculating about an escalation of violence as in France in May 1968 (Thomas 2002, 289). The general expectation, however, was that

although nobody intended to provoke a confrontation with the police, given the expected numbers of both demonstrators and the police, some violent incidents and resulting casualties would probably be unavoidable (Halloran, Elliot, and Murdock 1970, 36).

And indeed there were casualties in October 1968. A careful investigation of contemporary sources reveals, that 74 policemen and 96 protesters and bystanders were injured, but only seven policemen and 22 protest marchers or bystanders had consulted a doctor. The overall impression was that most injuries arose »out of being pushed against the

police cordon by pressure from behind« or »were consequent upon being in a large crowd.« Injuries included »fainting and shock together with abrasions and lacerations sustained while falling to the ground and being kicked and trampled on during sudden movements of either the police or the crowd« as well as »lacerations from objects thrown, particularly splinters from banner sticks« (ibid., 50–51). Moreover, the majority of protestors were not professional revolutionaries who aimed to overthrow the government. Rather, the longtime perspective of these protests was »concerned with the strengthening of existing institutions,« aimed at »inclusive participation,« and the protests themselves were »acts of »ordinary« people« (Thomas 2002, 297).

Although there were individual acts of police violence, overall in 1968 police tactics »cleverly defused potential areas of confrontations« (Thomas 2008, 349). Or as the Chief of the London Metropolitan Police put it in his report reviewing the events of 1968:

I take the view that we should deal with violent confrontations by traditional methods [...] we do not wear protective clothing, and do not make use of tear gas, water cannon, barbed wire barriers or any equipment that could be said to give rise to provocation to the demonstrators.³³

Moreover, after the protests of October 1968 in London there was a collection of 300,000 signatures congratulating the London police »on their tact, restraint and good humour.«³⁴ In a 1969 report, the commissioner of the London Metropolitan police was still convinced that the »policy of using traditional methods in dealing with these demonstrations is the right one and in this the police service is supported by the vast majority of the general public.«³⁵

33 *Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for the Year 1968* (London: 1969), 9.

34 *Ibid.*, 42.

35 *Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for the Year 1969* (London: 1970), 10.

Until the 1970s, four factors contributed to a less violent modus of policing street protests by the English police (Halloran, Elliot, and Murdock 1970; Geary 1985; Weinhauer 2008). First, in contrast to their German counterparts, English policemen did not see the existence of the state as threatened by the protestors. Although they did also see »acute masses« acting during street protests, these crowds did not aim to challenging the state order, but rather disturb the local order or peace. English policemen lacked the strong commitment to anticommunism as well as the mythological glorification of the abstract state. Second, although it was a mere myth, the image of the English Bobby contributed strongly to inhibit further escalation of violence on both sides. However distorted and mythological this image may have been, it had a de-escalating impact. On the one hand it convinced the policemen that they would be able to meet all challenges, and on the other hand it reassured the student protestors that police violence had clear unwritten limits. This was reinforced by the fact that 1960s street protests were attended mainly by well-educated members of a predominantly white middle-class (Nehring 2005, 399). Third, these white middle-class protestors and policemen—at least until the mid-1970s—were part of a shared network of communication, which strongly inhibited processes of de-humanization of the respective other side. In German cities, this lack of non-violent communication was a key element contributing to the escalation of violence in student protests. At least some German cities, as I have demonstrated above, tried to overcome these obstacles. Fourth, until the 1970s, the English police could be fairly relaxed in fighting collective protests at home, as the case of Northern Ireland amply demonstrated what could happen if the police was really challenged by coordinated acts of physical violence. All in all, since this system of informal checks-and-balances was kept intact, in England there was no urgent need to reform the established pattern of social control protest policing, as was the case in 1960s West Germany.

Localization and 1980s policing: Protests *about* the city

During the 1980s, European cities saw a wave of urban protests in which protestors and the police often clashed violently. The urban protests in

1980s Germany and England took place in societies which had thoroughly changed since the 1960s. First, it became obvious that the 1980s had seen an erosion of central social norms and values, giving way to more diverse sets of informal rules and to the localized identities which I have described above. As a consequence, a process which had already started during the 1960s gained momentum. The concept of a stable and holistic social order had eroded; no longer did individuals need to be educated to find their place in a clearly defined society, rather the reigning idea was that individuals had to be trained to be able to make choices in a diversified consumer society (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012; Wills 2005, 182–83). Second, beginning in the late 1960s, social scientists in Germany and in Britain discovered a set of intertwined changes in urban societies which were perceived as being very dramatic. Urban riots, crime, and violence, committed mainly by young men, had gained massive attention (Brand and Cox 1974; Rees and Lambert 1985).

Although these phenomena had accompanied the history of urban settings at least since industrialization and the intensification of urbanization during the nineteenth century, in the last third of the twentieth century these problems, and the threats they posed, seemed to have become exacerbated, leading to a thorough urban crisis (Eisner 1997; Häußermann and Siebel 1980). This crisis was not only caused by changes in the perception of some already well-known urban problems, but was also the product of decay in inner-city neighborhoods and of infrastructural problems which led to a loss of control over urban growth. Third, the perception of this urban crisis that had been growing since the 1970s was intensified, since at the same time there was a growing awareness of spatial aspects of urban life (Lefèbvre 1972; Castells 1983; Sennett 1970). Until the early 1960s, an interest in abstract urban planning together with a belief in social progress shaped the perception of urban problems (Haumann 2011). Since the 1970s, however, local aspects of urban life gained importance. This newly gained power of the local also affected the urban protests of the 1980s.

West German police: Still »seeing like a state«

Before the wave of new urban protests hit West German cities in the early 1980s, West German police forces underwent technical, organizational, and tactical changes. Starting as early as the late 1950s, technical police equipment for routine policing had been modernized, mainly in the form of radio patrol service and related organizational changes. By the 1980s, everyday policing had adapted to social changes. The tendencies of urban inhabitants to be more engaged in local urban policy on the one hand, and to express a higher fear of crime on the other hand, were met by the police with the reinvention of local beat policemen, the *Kontaktbereichsbeamten* (KOB). These local beat policemen went on regular foot patrols and had to establish good relations with the inhabitants of their neighborhood (Busch et al. 1988, 97–99). They were supposed to keep an eye on social tensions and crime while also improving services for disabled and elderly people. While middle-class citizens greeted the invention of KOB, the critical left and members of the underclass criticized this localized police practice as a kind of decentralized big brother.

While these reforms in routine policing were welcomed by many policemen and also by many local citizens, it was much harder to modernize police tactics against protests labeled as political. As a consequence of the uncontrollable police interventions against 1960s student protests, police training was updated, mainly by concepts which relied less on military ideals than their predecessors (on the following see Weinhauer 2003; Busch et al. 1988). Moreover, in the early 1970s, West German police forces, as one element of attempts to de-militarize their intervention tactics, established specialist teams (*Sondereinsatzkommandos* and *Mobile Einsatzkommandos*) to handle exceptional situations. Additionally, the *Bundesgrenzschutz* (Federal Border Guard) was trained to handle violent protests. In the 1980s however, it was still open to question what all these organizational reforms meant when it came to practical policing of mass street protests in a localized urban setting, among them the massive anti-nuclear protests of the late 1970s, and the 1980s wave of urban squatting

When we look at how localization affected 1980s urban protests, several factors stand out. While many 1960s protestors in West Germany wanted to change the whole political system (or sometimes the whole world), 1980s urban protests had in the main more local aims. First, these protests were expressed by urban social movements (Castells 1983). These urban movements (citizens' initiatives, urban action groups, etc.) did not primarily address abstract social changes. Their actions and protests were *about* the city and they even put the future of the city on the agenda. Second, these urban protests addressed aspects of life in the city through a primarily local lens. Third, in these locally-focused urban social movements, (local) aspects of consumption often stood at the forefront (Castells 1983; Weinhauer 2011b). Fourth, 1980s activists lived in closely interconnected microcosms, nicely captured in the term »two cultures« (*zwei Kulturen*, Hoffmann-Axthelm 1979). It postulates that West German society was separated into two cultural camps: On the one side stood the social majority which shared mainstream norms and values, and on the other side were the many young people who had turned their back on these norms. Thus it comes as no surprise that 1980s protestors, fifth, articulated a strong interest in local democracy. They demanded participation in urban planning, became more aware of social problems in their neighborhoods, and self-confidently formulated ideas about the future of local urban life (Haumann 2011).³⁶

Taken together, these localized urban social movements posed crucial challenges to police forces. The interaction between 1980s urban protestors and the police in German cities has not yet been covered by historical research in any detail. We still have to rely on contemporary political and social science studies (Busch et al. 1988; Winter 1998), which have little to say about urban and spatial aspects. The rich contemporary literature in both countries that looks at the relationship between the police and the state/government comes to quite similar

36 This search for local roots also found expression in a powerful interest in local everyday history. In Germany and England the *Geschichtswerkstatt*/History Workshop movement gained momentum (Bausinger 1980; Lindenberger and Wildt 1989; Vorgänge e.V. 1980).

insights: In the 1980s, the police became something like a disciplining super power, employing violence on a massive scale. There seemed to be a master narrative asking: »Is Law and order out of control?« (Scraton 1985, book cover). How could this happen? Why were these police forces not able to adjust their modus of policing street protests to the challenges created by localized urban protests?

To begin with, West German protest policing in the 1980s was shaped by a mixture of continuity and change. The hermetic occupational culture of the police, with its unique pattern of masculinity, inhibited more far-reaching transformations. Technical and organizational reforms had influenced street policing, which was now mainly the task of units of specially trained young men, the *Bereitschaftspolizei* (riot police). As a consequence, 1980s police interventions were no longer dominated by uncontrollable campaigns of revenge by ad-hoc groups of older policemen. However, the police still aimed at achieving full social control; its intervention tactics were mostly built on worst-case scenarios in which protestors acted extremely violently and tried to reach their political aims by actions planned well in advance.

On the level of norms and values, there was a similar mixture of few changes and strong continuities. Only very slowly could policemen be convinced that protest demonstrations were an important civil right which had to be protected by the police. At least on the formal level, the May 1985 verdict of the Federal Constitutional Court on the freedom of assembly urged the police to tolerate demonstrations and to communicate better with their organizers (Winter 1998, 66–67 and 197). In small steps, the state-centered philosophy became modernized (see Weinhauer 2003, 119–20). For older policemen, who had mostly been trained during the Weimar Republic, the state was a mythological sacred entity, which they wanted to protect even at the cost of their own lives. As a consequence of the expansion of the welfare state in the 1970s, West German policemen's view of the state slowly became more concrete; the state was de-mythologized. In these years a perspective evolved of »seeing like a state« (Scott 1998), which still gave high priority to the protection of the now more concrete state. Policemen in the 1980s tried to discern

whether the urban protests were legally legitimate or illegitimate. Influenced by the cold war climate, many of them shared the perspective of the West German press, which continually tried to find connections of Berlin squatters to left-wing terrorists. In police bulletins, policemen—often using metaphors of warfare—debated the extent to which these protests threatened the whole political system (*Polizeinachrichten* 1982; Freund 1982; Ganschow 1983).

Among the more militant protestors there was also a confrontational spirit fueled by a dichotomous view that could—similar to that of policemen—only distinguish between them (police, state officials) and us (the militant protestors). Because of this binary model of interpretation on both sides, tensions between protestors and policemen escalated easily and confrontations often got of hand. Neither side, however, used guns, etc. In the 1980s, this line was only crossed once in November 1987, when two policemen were killed by pistol shots fired by militant activists (Geronimo 1990, 144–45; Diederich, Schindowski, and Hoffman 1987; Anders 2008).

When we try to analyze what exactly localization meant for the street protests of the 1980s, several factors come to the forefront. In Berlin, local squatters expressed their needs as urban consumers mainly through demands of cheap housing in which they could find space to realize their aims of local democracy and an autonomous life in a community of the like-minded. These activists were aware that it was important to establish good relationships to their »normal« local neighbors. These local goodwill efforts sometimes worked and were able bridge the divide between the »two cultures« (Lessing and Liebel 1981). Many urban protestors also stressed the fun-driven aspects of local revolt, a pattern which—exceptions aside—was much less widespread among 1960s protestors: The alternative left-wing daily newspaper *die tageszeitung* spoke of »joy looting« (*Freudengeplünder*)³⁷. One self-aware squatter underlined the thrilling aspects of fighting in the streets of his (local) neighborhood:

37 Quoted in »Da packt dich irgendwann 'ne Wut,« *Der Spiegel* 52, December 22, 1980.

You can feel our power when there's a rampage on the streets: up to the tips of our toes in the fastest sneakers. It's the quivering of desire and fear in your stomach when the panes shatter after the liberating throw, in running while you laugh. You're the coolest. Half proud warrior, half sleek animal. They can't get you as long as you're not scared. (Härlin 1981, 24–25)³⁸

All in all, light-years separated the policemen's cold-war modus of »seeing-like-a-state,« which was blind to spatial aspects, from the locally-based spatial imaginations and perspectives held by activists of the urban social movements of the 1980s. Thus open communication between protestors and the police was nearly impossible. Their occupational culture and their state-centered perspective prevented policemen from figuring out how to handle such localized fun-driven actions, in which policemen were also, in the purest sense of the word, players in a game, and sometimes contributed—as I have mentioned above—to an escalation of violent encounters. All in all, in West Germany, urban police forces were unable to reflect critically on the role police interventions played in the escalation of street violence. This was another factor which shaped the tensions in the relationship between local urban movements and the police in West German cities. Thus it comes as no surprise that among the young urban protestors, nearly nobody was interested in discussing reforms or a better control of the police. In their view, this institution was too strongly interwoven with—and too much a part of the norm and value systems of—the hated state (Wissmann and Hauck 1983; Willems 1997; Balistier 1996).

English police: Challenges of the »community relations« myth

In England the deep caesura for the police as an organization in general and for policing street protests in particular came more than a decade later than in West Germany. While in West Germany, police intervention tactics had come under severe critique since the 1960s student protests, the English system of policing street protests had survived nearly unal-

38 See also Scheer and Espert 1982, 138–40; Gudrun Grundmann et al. 1981.

tered. Could the English police, as was the case during the 1960s, successfully meet these challenges by simply resorting to its »tact, restraint and good humour«? As has been indicated above, it could not.

Similar to in West Germany, policing in localized English cities had to cope with the consequences of social and cultural changes, and also with an urban crisis that was more intense than in West Germany. The deep irritation of English social and political elites at having »to abandon thinking of a nation as a homogenous entity« in the 1970s can hardly be overestimated (Waters 1997, 238). Society was structured by ethnicity, which marked an important social divide. Since the mid 1960s more and more migrants were concentrated in run-down inner-city neighborhoods. There was a growth in racist attitudes and racist politics directed against these »aliens.« Violence against minorities, such as »Paki-bashing« (physically attacking Pakistanis) increased (Webster 2005; Kettle and Hodges 1982, 53–54) and the fascist National Front mobilized against non-whites. During the Notting Hill, London street carnival in 1976 and 1977, the police (equipped with shields for the first time ever in 1977) was involved in skirmishes quarrels with immigrant youth.³⁹ In these years, it also became obvious that the police developed an »institutional racism« (for an overview see MacPherson 1999; Lea 1986) against non-whites. As a consequence, a »racialisation of disorder« (Rowe 1998) gained ground in 1980s Britain. On the political level, the 1976 installation of the Commission for Racial Equality was at least an effort, albeit deficient, to counter the growing racism in British society.

In English cities it was not squatting or the student protests of the 1960 and '70s that caused the changes in protest policing, but rather a series of severe urban unrests which reverberated like a shock wave throughout the country (Gudrun Grundmann et al. 1981, 21–27; Benyon and Solomos 1987a; Frost and Phillips 2011). These riots hit Bristol (April 1980), Brixton, London (April/July 1981, September 1985), Toxteth,

39 See *Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for the Year 1977* (London: 1978), 23–24. The contemporary terms for immigrants were »black,« »people of colour« or »West-Indians.«

Liverpool (summer 1981), Moss Side, Manchester (September 1985), Handsworth, Birmingham and Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham, London in October 1985. On the political level, these events led to many enquiries, among which Lord Scarman's report on the early riots, first published in November 1981, became the most well-known (Scarman 1983; see Gifford 1986; MacPherson 1999).

The riots in Brixton in April 1981, in which 450 people were injured, 207 vehicles were damaged, and 354 arrests were made, were an expression of an extremely deteriorated relationship between the police and the inhabitants of black neighborhoods (on the following see Willems 1997; Benyon 1984; Benyon and Solomos 1987a). Common police methods included »swamp 81,« arrests on suspicion and stop-and-search, as well as saturation policing: All these interventions were instrumental in sparking off the riots. In Brixton, a police intervention named »swamp 81« (early April 1981) brought more than one hundred local plainclothes police officers into black neighbourhoods to search for criminals without contacting any community representatives beforehand. In the view of leading policemen, this was a »resounding success« (Kettle and Hodges 1982, 105) with 118 arrests made and 943 stop-and-search actions undertaken. For the non-white inhabitants, however, this sometimes brutal police action added to the tensions in the neighbourhood. Additionally, notoriously brutal non-local SPG (Special Patrol Group) policemen entered poor Brixton neighborhoods, sealed them off and checked people for drugs, stolen goods, etc. This kind of saturation policing was carried out disproportionately often in black residential areas. Moreover, police actions based on the Vagrancy Act of 1824 allowed the police to arrest a person on suspicion of loitering with intend to commit an arrestable offence (repealed later in 1981). Through these police actions, the mutual trust that, as we have seen, existed in the 1960s was severely eroded on both sides. This was true not only in Brixton, but in many other black neighborhoods in British cities.

The final spark in Brixton came on a Saturday afternoon in early April 1981 when street policemen tried to help a young immigrant who was bleeding. A series of misunderstandings culminated with people attack-

ing police cars. What followed was a weekend of burning cars and looted stores, but also of collective pleasures and a temporary euphoric atmosphere. The looting was not aimless: big chain stores and pubs known for their racial discrimination were attacked while local stores remained untouched. The 1980s urban riots even had a soundtrack, a song by the punk band The Clash, »Guns of Brixton«, which could often be heard on the street, sometimes played on stolen audio equipment.

English newspapers, in their reports on the urban riots of the summer of 1981, set the stage for a debate about better police equipment (riot gear, vehicles, weapons) which reappeared time and again throughout the decade (Murdock 1984). On the TV and in the press, the police use of tear gas in July 1981 (the very first time on the British homeland) was described as entirely necessary. The reporting on the 1981 riots contributed strongly to the militarization of the English police in the following years (Murdock 1984, 93). In most of the debates among English policemen in contrast, there was still a widespread belief that the police acted as a mediator of social tensions and, in their view, itself did not play any (important) role in the escalation of tensions (Reiner 1985).

The dominating narratives explaining the roots of the 1980s riots underline several factors. On a general level, contemporary critical literature, spearheaded by Stuart Hall et al. with their path-breaking study, *Policing the Crisis*, which diagnosed a deep crisis in cultural and political hegemony in Britain, where mugging and »black crime« became »virtually synonymous« (Hall et al. 1978, 327) and race had »come to provide the objective correlative of crisis« (ibid., 333). At the center of any serious explanation of the 1980s urban riots, as social science research pointed out,

must be the catastrophically bad relationship between the police and young black people. Theirs is an antagonistic relationship. They expect, on the basis of long mutual experience in particular areas, that each is up to no good. Each regards the other as suspicious, likely to be violent and likely to lie about whatever they are doing. (Kettle and Hodges 1982, 247)

This does not mean, however, that both sides were equal. While one side held the monopoly on state violence, the other had much less formal power at hand. As one black Brixton youth put it, it was not the stop-and-search policy alone which created tensions but the number of times people were searched on the street. We should not forget what Tony Jefferson has stressed in a recent article (Jefferson 2008, 117): black youth were »not just arrested more »because they are black« but »because they are young and male and »rough« working class black.« Since the late 1970s a breakdown of police relationship with black communities became apparent (Hall 1987, 45–46).

The 1970s also saw the development of a growing police autonomy that fostered some critical patterns of behavior including institutional racism, misuse of police discretion, and a proliferation of stop-and-search actions (whenever a policeman thought a person might plan or have committed a criminal offense), which all aimed mostly at young black people. Thus it comes as no surprise that critical debates evolved around police autonomy or police discretion, which were rooted in a hermetic informal occupational police culture where the police officer had

considerable autonomy in defining and responding to specific situations. The only formal briefing police officers receive before handling difficult situations and different people is a woefully inadequate police training course. Consequently, the police receive most of their training on the job from other more experienced officers within the police work group. [...] This informal training has the most powerful influence on police ideology. For it is in the confines of the messroom or the police club that the prejudices of the police appear most sharply. This is a camaraderie of survival, a uniting against the pressures of internal hierarchy and outside criticism; it is also a collective identity built on shared assumptions about race, gender, youth, class [...]. It is within this occupational culture that the »enemy« is defined, attitudes are shaped and prejudices reinforced. (Scruton 1985, 49)

When compared with their West German colleagues, perceptions of 1980s English policemen were not characterized by visions of a my-

thologized state or by »seeing-like-a-state.« Instead, it was the strong emphasis English policemen put on good relations with »their« community which generated strong tensions. A growing disillusionment about this myth of having good ties to the local community—which had been at the basis of the »tact, restraint and good humour« of 1960s English policemen—became apparent. First, more and more police officers were transferred from local beats to radio patrol cars, thus »becoming a »fire brigade,« losing the contact with the members of the public«⁴⁰ (see also Kettle and Hodges 1981, 6; Wells 1987). Second, this loss of contact was all the more challenging as during the 1970s many policemen realized that even these weakened ties only applied to predominantly white communities. Third, community policing, which in those years was something like a universal cure for many problems policing faced, could not help to overcome these problems. Police committees, set up to control community policing, often turned into assemblies of extreme right-wing and racist people. As one member put it, you »cannot even discuss the issue of black people [...]; indeed it is difficult even to mention the word »black« (Benyon and Solomos 1987b, 93).

The multifold symptoms of crisis, deteriorating police-community relations, aggressive policing, and institutional police racism alone cannot explain the 1980s riots. All these arguments must be contextualized in processes of localization. Beginning in the 1970s, the inhabitants of inner-city neighborhoods, among them many black neighborhoods, developed a strong local identity which went hand in hand with a heightened awareness of acts of local discrimination. In the early 1980s, more and more black people became convinced that policing black people was synonymous with »policing without consent« (Kettle and Hodges 1981, 65).

In many migrant neighborhoods, for example in Liverpool (on the following see Frost and Phillips 2011, 70–76), networks of local community centers, community relation councils, and community action groups

40 *Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for the Year 1969* (London: 1970), 13.

(Rock Against Racism, anti-apartheid, Chile solidarity) filled these quarters with life and created a consciousness of belonging and shared identities. The manifold economic, housing, and labor-market problems should not be forgotten, but the people of these quarters were not passive victims of the police. On the contrary, drawing on these networks, citizens mobilized against a police force that was seen as a sometimes unwelcome and aggressively racist intruder (on the important role of this »community spirit« see Watt 2006, 793). Young men in particular self-confidently defended their territories against groups of white policemen trying to clear the streets where they had gained a local reputation, even if it was in the networks of the booming inner-city drug trade (Brookman et al. 2011). These actions challenged the police on a terrain where they claimed to be the only legitimate actor, »the single agency preventing the territory they police from descending into chaos and disorder« (Lea 1986, 154). The importance of these local tensions and interactions have long been overlooked by the literature (see the critique by Girling, Loader, and Sparks 1998; Keith 1993).

Local citizens were also massively upset about many national newspapers reports portraying their neighborhood as »run down« or as a »black ghetto« or describing riots with metaphors of war (»battle,« »war,« »riot-torn streets,« »blitzed by mobs,« etc.) without making any reference to the networks or institutions of local civil society. These irritations added to the existing tensions and fueled the urban protests of the early 1980s in a highly important way. This self-assured locally based protest culture aimed primarily at influencing the local urban environment through direct actions. These actions were driven by a quest for subjectivity and by a striving to extend participation in a consumer society, a society shaped much more by individual needs than by uniform mass consumer products.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued for a re-energized interdisciplinary cooperation of historians with authors from sociology and criminology. Such a fruitful cooperation could be put into practice in several ways. Historians

should be much more aware of the wealth of information gathered by contemporary criminological researchers. Their publications are still all too often overlooked—interestingly especially in the field of post-1945 contemporary history. It is not only the source material which makes these studies so useful. Historical research could also benefit from the methods and concepts elaborated by these authors. Concepts of »space« as outlined above can be a very good basis for this interdisciplinary cooperation. On a medium level of abstraction, »space« can act as a bridge to bring locally-oriented research (source-based and conceptually reflexive) together with research interests that focus more on theoretical models. A challenging test field for this cooperation could be the elaboration of theoretically informed bottom-up perspectives on spatial issues asking how the global is constituted by (trans-)local processes and transfers (see Epple 2013; Sassen 2005). This perspective would allow historians, sociologists, and criminologists to contribute even more innovatively to the booming scholarly interest in global urban studies—a field which promises to generate many intellectually stimulating debates.

Focusing on police control practices in urban settings in West Germany and in England in the 1960s and 1980s, this paper aimed at demonstrating some of the analytical benefits of a space-oriented, localized perspective. Inspired by Henri Lefébvre, this perspective takes the triadic concept of space seriously, in which space integrates urban practices, perceptions/concepts, and symbolic issues. This contributed to a better explanation of why 1980s police interventions escalated into violence in both countries. In 1980s West Germany and England, the policing of street protests still aimed at completely controlling a physical territory as well as the movements of all persons or groups. This modus of policing was deeply challenged by a process of urban localization. Localized urban protests used local urban space as a multifold power resource. Spatial issues stood at the center of local protests about local democracy and consumer needs, and helped formulate visions of the future of the urban. With these actions, local citizens self-consciously claimed the right to protest on *their* streets in *their* neighborhood to present *their* aims. Police actions oriented towards completely sweeping urban ground and

thus ignoring most of these highly localized aims of 1980s urban protests always ran the risk of a massive escalation of violence.

An alternative model of protest policing geared towards decentralized urban control rather than complete social control would have had to have rested on three pillars. Such an urban control protest policing would have required the police 1) to respect the appropriations of local urban space driven by identity politics, urban imagination, local democracy, and consumption. This would have allowed the police to realize that such protests originally aimed neither at an abstraction such as regime changes nor at disturbing an abstract social order; 2) to develop decentralized locally- and space-sensitive tactics of policing, thus giving up the aim of restoring an all-encompassing abstract social or state order; and 3) to self-critically reflect the role of the police in interactions with protestors—and thus in potentially escalating violence.

Generally, in England as well as in West Germany, avoiding or minimizing violent clashes between the police and urban protestors by working towards a model of decentralized urban control policing would have had to overcome many obstacles. In both countries, breaking up the hermetic culture of the police with its unique pattern of masculinity would have been the most important step forward. In Germany, police culture was instrumental in perpetuating state-centeredness. Although the state was demythologized, when it came to protest policing, many 1980s policemen mainly followed the cold-war modus of »seeing-like-a-state,« which was blind towards the importance self-assured, locally-oriented 1980s protestors gave to spatial aspects. The difference between these two perspectives made meaningful communication between the two groups nearly impossible. Moreover, the strict mental separation of routine policing on the one side and the policing of protests which were labeled political on the other side worked massively against establishing alternative models of protest policing.

While it was the state-centered perspective of the police which generated or intensified violent tensions in West Germany, in England it was ironically the strong local focus of the police. Beginning in the 1970s, English policemen had to realize that local urban communities had changed

dramatically. The police had to deal not only with higher numbers of, but also with more self-confident, black citizens (and protestors) who were deeply embedded in localized civil society networks. As many urban neighborhoods became ethnically mixed, the high priority policemen gave to (the myth of) good community relations now became a source of ongoing conflict. These local tensions were fueled by an institutional racism shaped by the occupational culture of the police. Highly-valued community policing could lead to a mutual re-enforcement of racism among white urban inhabitants due to racism among policemen. In England, implementing urban control police tactics would have meant that the police would have to have given up its self-image as a neutral mediator of social tensions. Policemen would have to have realized that the police itself was a central actor in such often racialised conflicts. This, however, is a task the police still must grapple with today.

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