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PACIFYING DISRUPTIVE SUBJECTS: POLICE VIOLENCE AND ANTI-FRACKING PROTESTS

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Abstract

This article considers the policing of protests against “fracking” at Barton Moss, Salford, Greater Manchester between November 2013 and April 2014. The article seeks to make sense of the policing response to the protest camp established at the Barton Moss site and to consider what the policing of anti-fracking protests reveals about state responses to resistance in the current era. The article begins by sketching out the background to fracking in the UK and to the specific protest at Barton Moss. It then provides some detail about the nature of policing experienced at the camp during its five month operation before considering how the policing of anti-fracking protests – and protest policing more generally – need to be considered in relation to the general function of police. To do this we draw upon the concept of pacification to consider both the destructive and productive effects of the exercise of police power and suggest that this concept, and the reorientation of critical policing studies that it demands, are essential for understanding police and state violence in contemporary liberal democracies.

Keywords

Police; fracking; protest; pacification; violence

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“Fracking” in the UK – all out for shale?

Fracking or hydraulic fracturing is the process of extracting shale gas from solid rock hundreds of metres, if not kilometres, below the surface by pumping water, sand and chemicals at high pressure into the rock. While onshore drilling for gas is not new, the energy industry has developed new techniques that allow for drilling horizontal wells through shale rock formations – unlike more conventional vertical wells drilled to access natural gas since the 1940s – and these have been employed in the US over the last 20 years to gain access to previously inaccessible reserves of shale gas. The experience in the US has given rise to a ‘dash for gas’ across Europe in which energy companies and governments have sought to move quickly to exploit unconventional shale reserves identified across the continent, including in the UK (Schiller, 2011). The UK Coalition government and its New Labour predecessors have embraced fracking and exploratory drilling has begun in a number of sites across England to assess the possibilities of fracking, with the first licence granted in 2007 for exploration near Blackpool, Lancashire (Webb, 2011). The development of new techniques for fracking has however been controversial from the outset as communities and environmental groups across the globe have raised concerns about the negative impact on local environments, land, air and water pollution (Howarth, et al, 2011), as well as the broader issue of maintaining a reliance on carbon intensive fossil fuels in the face of climate change (Gross, 2013).

In the UK fracking is now at the heart of government strategy on “energy security” and is a central component of energy policy. The process of moving from exploratory drilling to gas extraction is being encouraged with the launch of new onshore oil and gas licences in July 2014 and changes to trespass laws (Carrington, 2014b) in the face of widespread opposition. This opposition has seen the development of new coalitions of local opponents, alongside more established national climate and social justice groups. Test drilling in Lancashire in 2011 triggered two small earthquakes (Bawden, 2011) and this led to a temporary moratorium being imposed on fracking. While this ban was short-lived – lifted in 2012 – the episode further demonstrated for many the dangers associated with fracking and opposition has spread as new drilling sites have been revealed across the country. Despite the assurances of the UK government and the fracking industry about the safety of the process, concerns remain about the environmental impacts – at the local and global scales – and opposition in the UK has continued to grow across the party political spectrum¹ and beyond.

Following the lifting of the moratorium in 2012 the first major show of force by anti-fracking protesters came in the Sussex village of Balcombe in summer 2013. The opposition to fracking at Balcombe brought together local opponents and more established environmental campaigners and anti-fracking activists who were met with a significant police presence from both the Sussex and Metropolitan police forces. The protest at Balcombe involved blockades of the drilling site and attempts to raise awareness about the existence of, and dangers associated with, fracking (Red Pepper, 2013). Despite the police response, the protest resulted in the company involved, Caudrilla, withdrawing (temporarily at least) its fracking application (Chivers, 2013).

Fracking in the ‘Desolate North’

Shortly after the events in Balcombe the company IGas, specialists in onshore extraction of

¹ Although the main political parties in the UK have supported fracking whilst in government, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties face significant internal opposition from members (see, Tall, 2013; Wheeler, 2014; and Conservatives Against Fracking, 2014).

oil and gas, began exploratory drilling to test for reserves of coal bed methane and shale gas in November 2013 at Barton Moss, Salford. Planning permission for the appraisal and production of coal-bed methane was granted by Salford Council in 2010 and the arrival of IGas in November 2013 was met with local opposition. Before the drilling started a protest camp was established at the site of the well by local residents who were joined by a number of activists who had been involved at Balcombe. The camp remained in place along the approach road to the drilling site for the duration of the exploratory drilling until April 2014.

Over the period of protest, the camp gathered momentum and established itself as a community-led protection camp, sustained by local support and donations. Its residents, referring to themselves in many cases as “protectors” rather than protesters, adopted several protest techniques, including the use of ‘lock-ons’² and blockades, but relied most heavily on slow walking, or marching, in front of IGas convoys in order to disrupt and delay the drilling operation and to provide a visible and constant opposition to fracking in Salford. More broadly, the camp aimed to make the above interventions to highlight the universal hazards associated with fracking and the impact these could have on future generations, as well as drawing attention to the rapid development of the fracking industry in the UK.

These actions elicited a tough response from Greater Manchester Police (hereafter GMP), who met the protest with a substantial police presence at almost every march and an increasing number of Tactical Aid Unit (public order) officers. There were nearly 200 arrests – including the detention of children, pregnant, and elderly protesters, and the violent arrest of women – alongside many additional reports of police misconduct related to GMP’s management of the protest.

The camp underwent a broadening of its focus following the intensification of the police presence and apparent shift in policing tactics, and the right to protest became a major concern that underpinned many of the actions and experiences of camp members and local protectors. In some ways this two-fold argument – in defence of the environment and in defence of the right to protest – increased the local communities’ interaction with the camp, with support for the camp appearing to increase in some forms as information about the nature of the policing response was made public (Salford Star, 2014a). This also altered the role of the protectors who began to undertake additional duties such as waiting for long periods of time at various local police stations for their fellow protectors to be released, co-ordinating accommodation for those prevented from visiting Barton Moss due to strict bail conditions, and offering support to each other when the inevitable physical, psychological and emotional fatigue set in. Indeed, the articulation of their role as primarily ‘protectors’ began to take on a double meaning. The residents of the camp endured the harsh winter conditions in order to protect the land and the future prospects of the environment, but their status as ‘protectors’ took on a broader meaning as they sought both to protect one another from police violence.

Command and Control

The protectors entered into an ongoing discursive struggle with GMP over the representation of the protest and the policing response. This took place on social media as well as through the local and limited national media coverage that the Barton Moss protest received. Peter Fahy, Chief Constable of GMP, defined the role of the police as balancing the rights of protesters with those of IGas and publicly expressed his frustration at being “stuck in the middle” (in Greater Manchester Police, 2014). The Chief Constable and other senior spokespeople at GMP sought

2 For full explanation of lock-ons see, Road Alert! (1997) Chapter 12.

at all times to explain their approach through the language of human rights, reiterating their commitment to the right to ‘peaceful, legal protest’ and consistently described their intervention at Barton Moss as purely reactive in response to the protesters’ actions. However, throughout the duration of the protest those involved, alongside numerous legal observers and journalists, described violent and intimidating policing tactics that were decried as disproportionate and unlawful and for many brought into question GMP’s professed independence.

While Fahy complained on many occasions about the costs of the policing operation he was willing and able to deploy Tactical Aid Unit (TAU) officers to the protest site and these officers played an increasingly central role in policing the daily slow marches. In Fahy’s words the TAU officers are available resources who were able to provide “additional help to local officers with *unusual incidents*” (Fahy, 2014, emphasis added). However, these ‘unusual incidents’ very quickly became a daily occurrence at Barton Moss and the use of TAU officers was clearly planned and quickly normalised in the police response to the camp.

Much of the violence experienced by protectors was a result of TAU interventions. The central role for TAU officers was to speed up the daily slow marches and reduce the time taken to get trucks into and out of the drilling site. Most days the policing operation would begin being conducted by regular officers and in some cases these officers were left to police the march, standing between the protesters and trucks, to its conclusion. However, as the protest developed the use of TAU officers became more frequent and they regularly took the place of regular officers when the pace of the march was deemed too slow. The running battle between protesters and police revolved around the length of these marches and depending on who had the upper hand the time taken to get trucks along the 800 metre long entry road could range from as little as fifteen minutes to several hours.

The reports of police violence for the most part related to the behaviour of TAU officers on the daily marches and the tactics used to speed up the protesters. Protesters reported that the interventions by TAU officers were characterised not simply by the use of physical force but by the routine use of violence in response to peaceful, non-violent protest actions (Salford Star, 2014b; 2014c). The response of TAU officers to those involved in the protest, as well as to legal observers documenting the policing (and regularly live streaming the events online), led many to suggest that the policing at Barton Moss was exceptional both in terms of it being different in character to normal policing, and in its apparent departure from any noticeable framework of legal regulation. Both of these apparent departures however must be considered in relation to the general function of the police.

Of course the use of violence in the policing of protest is nothing new in itself. What is arguably both novel and disturbing is GMP officers’ apparent lack of restraint even in the face of live streaming by camp residents and others involved in the marches, as well as close local media attention, and some national and international coverage. The Barton Moss camp did not attract the same level of media interest or public exposure as the anti-fracking camp at Balcolme, West Sussex in the summer of 2013, yet the conduct of GMP officers suggested that even if they had, their ability to act with impunity would have been supported by the conditions of the policing operation.

The GMP’s tactics were met with concern by legal observers, journalists, campaign groups and local residents, but continued unabated. Towards the end of the drilling operation the number of arrests and the reports of police brutality increased, leading the solicitor representing most of those arrested to state that the Tactical Aid Unit officers appeared “out of control”. While the various reports and videos shared online of police violence at Barton Moss did suggest that there has been a departure from “normal” policing, it is necessary to consider this type of protest

policing in relation to the general function of police.

‘Law and Order’ Policing

The dominant image of police in the contemporary liberal democracy portrays the institution as primarily a crime fighting force engaged in upholding the law. Liberal histories of the police have consolidated this image through their account of the birth of the police institution, and most contemporary accounts of the police (including those provided by the police themselves) seek to sustain this view of what the police are and what they do (but see Jeffery et al, 2015 for a dissenting account). We have a seemingly hegemonic vision of police in which there appears to have been from the outset a directly proportional relationship between the amount of crime and the proliferation of police numbers and police powers; the police institution, so this vision would have it, arose because of a growth in crime and they continue to expand in size and scope in direct response to ‘the crime problem’. In the neoliberal context this representation is continually reinforced by the seemingly universal acceptance of the need for ‘law and order’ through which governments of all colours demonstrate their toughness in responding to crime and reaffirming their commitment to the police.

However, the idea that the police are exclusively or even primarily employed in responding to crime is not borne out by either the history of the police or its contemporary operation. The history of police demonstrates instead that the central concern has always been with *order* and the (re)production of social order has been at the heart of the police project from its inception. From the 17th century the concept of police has referred to the means by which the state ensures good order (Foucault, 2007) and the range of institutions that assumed the function of policing were always concerned with far more than crime. While police as an idea was institutionalised in different ways in different European countries, from the advent of modernity the meaning of the concept remained constant denoting the ‘legislative and administrative regulation of the internal life of a community to promote the general welfare and the condition of good order’ (Neocleous, 2000: 1). Throughout its stages of development there has remained a consistency to the police function that for Neocleous resides in the centrality of police to ‘not just the *maintenance* or *reproduction* of order but to its *fabrication*’ (Neocleous, 2000: 5, original emphases).

Police must be understood therefore as central in the construction of social order, as having a *productive* capacity, an awareness of which is lost in many critiques of police repression and in much work found in critical policing studies. The police concern with disorder needs to be understood therefore in context; in a capitalist society policing takes a ‘general form that expresses the class dynamics of capitalist accumulation’ (Gordon, 2006: 30). Eradicating disorder has thus always involved the policing of those who refuse their own situation in the current order and bring into question the legitimacy of the status quo and practices of immobilisation are always aligned with, or part of, mobilising practices concerned with the production of order. For Neocleous at the heart of the police project is the administration of a class of poverty and the response to disorder in this sense is part of the broader project of fashioning an active workforce; the exercise of police power in this context involves the creation of a working class and not simply its administration (Neocleous, 2000).

This historical understanding of the function of policing is essential as a starting point for understanding contemporary policing. A confrontation with ‘out of control’, ‘exceptional’ or ‘corrupt’ policing must be informed by a clear grasp of what normal policing has been and continues to be. Liberal representations of the police as an objective, apolitical force distort analyses of policing and the violence inherent in the fabrication of liberal order. To make sense of

police violence and ‘political policing’ – as though it could be anything but – we must be aware of what the exercise of police power involves.

Policing as Pacification

It is here that the concept of *pacification* becomes useful as a critical tool for understanding police power. Recent work (Neocleous, 2010, 2011, 2013; Neocleous and Rigakos, 2011; Rigakos and Ergul, 2013) has suggested that rather than being a concept restricted to imperial conquests conducted in bygone times, pacification can be usefully reclaimed as a tool for critical theory ‘for analysing the broad vision of police and capital’ (Rigakos, 2011: 78) in the contemporary context. The history of pacification demonstrates that it is a productive process, never solely involved in simply suppressing resistance in both imperial and domestic settings, but instead consciously employed in the construction of a new social order. Pacification does not simply prohibit what is undesirable but also creates the desired end.

In employing the concept of pacification to analyses of policing we are able to consider more clearly its productive dimension and understand that the production of liberal order has been, and continues to be, facilitated through the creation of the conditions for capitalist accumulation. In this sense, pacification involves the production of ‘docile bodies’ ripe for economic exploitation (Rigakos, 2011: 79), and the policing of both colony and metropolis have always involved this ‘creative’ application of power. Pacification is thus best understood as a ‘political technology for organizing everyday life through the production and re-organization of the ideal citizen-subjects of capitalism’ (Neocleous, 2011: 198).

Yet the ideal citizen-subject is just that, an *ideal*, a goal never fully achieved. The pacification process is always met with struggle in some shape or form; those who resist the violence of capitalist social relations *are* the disorder that must be eradicated. The conditions for capitalist accumulation neither appeared organically nor are they maintained through universal consent; the exercise of state power, of police power, has been, and continues to be, essential to produce and sustain the inequality inherent in a capitalist social order. The response to struggle, defined inevitably as disorder, is central to policing and in turn effects the form that policing takes; pacification is never a finished project, it is confronted by, shaped by and ultimately limited by, struggle. In Rigakos and Ergul’s terms ‘pacification is the continuum of police violence upon which the fabrication of capitalist order is planned, enforced and resisted’ (2013: 169).

From this perspective policing must be understood as a project involving the confrontation with ‘disorderly’ and ‘disruptive’ subjects and the creation of orderly, disciplined subjects conducive to the maintenance of a capitalist social order. The ideal citizen-subject is orderly in the sense that they comply with, and do not question, the current state of things; to be orderly in this sense is to be sufficiently docile to accept the world as it is and one’s place within it. The historic and contemporary experience of working class, racialized and gendered populations demonstrates that police practices are designed to conform to and prioritise order and that in the pursuit of order the exercise of police power is defined by extreme violence. The violence that defined the original production of capitalist social relations is mirrored by the violence required to sustain them and police violence needs to be understood as part of the normal exercise of police power in the interests of the state and capital.

Policing Protest; Pacifying Struggle

From this perspective, protest policing needs to be seen as a pacification project in which the policing of political and social movements must be understood as central to, as opposed to an aberration from, the general operation of police. Collective resistance and political struggle have been the focus of the police from the beginning and to suggest that the violent suppression of struggles for economic, political and social justice is evidence of exceptional policing is to ignore the history of the police – including its local history in Greater Manchester (Gilmore and Tufail, 2013; Jeffery et al, 2015; McLaughlin, 1996; Walker, 1986). Policing of protest is a pacification process par excellence in which both the productive and destructive dimensions of policing are made clear. The police response is aimed at both the protest/movement's centre and its peripheries and the immediate suppression of a disruptive event is only part of the process. It also aims to produce the ideal protester, one that is suitably disciplined, docile and non-disruptive.

This process is illustrated in the police response to anti-fracking protests and laid bare in GMP's response to the Barton Moss camp. The police response to the camp clearly aimed, through the use of arrests and restrictive bail conditions, to disrupt the protest, to limit its disruptive potential and ensure that IGas got its daily shipment of trucks. The police, referred to by many protectors as 'IGas's private army' appeared to those involved, and to many observers, to be facilitating the drilling operation but not the legal, peaceful protest. When we consider that at Barton Moss, much like at Balcombe, the majority of cases have subsequently resulted in charges being dropped, cases discontinued or defendants found not guilty (Salford Star, 2014g; Laville, 2014), the policing operation appears to have been aimed at preventing the protest from being effective rather than responding to breaches of the law.

Yet, such overt police violence in the face of media attention (social media or otherwise) also sends a clear signal to those on the peripheries of the opposition – in this case in the local community in Salford or those concerned about fracking elsewhere – that any protest against the operation of fracking is both illegitimate and dangerous. The overwhelming police presence, the regular, 'normalised' use of TAU officers, and the well-publicised number of arrests, suggested that the protest was inherently dangerous and in need of heavy policing. The careful PR management of the policing operation by GMP served to reinforce the idea that the style of policing was in direct response to the nature of the protest, reinforcing the well-rehearsed idea that violence is used by police in exceptional circumstances and only in response to violence. GMP consistently misrepresented the number of complaints against police officers³ and where the very physical style of policing was acknowledged, GMP spokespeople, including the Chief Constable, sought to blame protesters for provoking and antagonising officers, reiterating the idea of a reactive policing operation and a reluctant use of force (Fahy in Greater Manchester Police, 2014).

This narrative was regurgitated by the majority of media sources, and underneath the repeated lines about balancing competing human rights claims the attempt to delegitimise the protest was clear. This discourse was reproduced to portray the camp and its supporters as unreasonable in their demands (of the council, the landowners, IGas and the police) and this accorded with the dominant representation of protesters who challenge the current status quo as being outside of reason. In the words of one of the protesters, the "violence, brutality, bullying and general intimidation" used by GMP have "created a climate of fear such that the British people feel unsafe to come forth and air their views" (Salford Star, 2014f). Police violence in this form, helped by its framing in a largely sympathetic media, arguably has a productive function;

3 A fact confirmed through Freedom of Information requests following the end of the camp (see, Salford Star, 2014h; NetPol, 2014).

the violence that has historically defined public order policing, and continues to do so, enforces the compliance of protest movements and fuels the public's fear of protesters (Fernandez, 2008).

In this sense the exercise of police power in response to protest, and its seemingly inherent violence, must be understood as having both destructive and productive dimensions. The suppression of a protest march for example is not incidental but in the policing of protest – against fracking, war, austerity, educational policies, etc – the drive is to *produce* the 'responsible', 'peaceful', and ultimately disciplined political subject whose approach to political activism is non-disruptive (Jackson, 2013). This process is attempted within and beyond the specific protest and the policing of protest, characterised by physical violence and intensive surveillance of protesters well documented in recent years, seeks to enforce compliance within protest movements. The policing techniques that now define protest policing also instil in the public a fear of protesters, especially for those whose only experience of protest comes through the police PR machine and the media outlets that repeat the official line largely verbatim. Ultimately, the effect is to further narrow the confines of acceptable political activism.

Direct action of any form is in this sense considered beyond the pale and the ideal protester produced, or at least envisaged through this process, is one that quietly raises a concern about a given issue but is unable and unwilling to substantively challenge the existing order. Those on the peripheries, physically or ideologically, of a protest or movement are arguably as much a target as those already involved. Spectacular displays of police brutality, kettling protesters, arresting children, women and the elderly all seek to demonstrate to those on the peripheries (or their parents) that protest is inherently illegitimate and dangerous. The acceptable response to injustice is reduced to signing an online petition and staying at home and putting one's faith squarely and solely in the parliamentary process.

At Barton Moss there was evidence of the success of the pacification strategy as people often declared their support on and offline but added the caveat that they could not risk visiting the camp due to their concerns for the safety of themselves, their children or their jobs. The numbers of people visiting the camp significantly increased when events did not involve direct action or direct engagement with the police (Salford Star, 2014d). In addition, it is possible to suggest that the time and resources devoted to managing the police, and in managing arrest and bail conditions, has a debilitating effect on a protest movement as they, out of necessity, divert limited resources and shift focus to some degree away from their main concern.

Alternatively, it is important to note that there is evidence to suggest that in some sense the police violence at Barton Moss was limited in its effectiveness and possibly even proved to be counterproductive in its effects on some individuals. There was evidence that while the policing response did dissuade many from attending the camp it also served to galvanise the protest and widen its focus beyond fracking. Rather than this broadening of concerns leading to a dilution of the groups' focus, it enabled many to start to consider links between the state and corporations in the exploitation of the natural environment as well as in the curtailment of the rights to free expression and protest. Several of the protectors from the Barton Moss camp established a second camp outside the headquarters of GMP (Scheerhout, 2014) and the focus of the primary camp, as well as daily marches, notably shifted to concentrate on the policing as well as the fracking. Camp residents and supporters established the Justice for Barton Moss campaign in response to 'aggressive, intimidating and violent policing by Greater Manchester Police' (Salford Star, 2014b) and this facilitated the development of links with a number of other justice campaigns focussing on policing and specifically deaths in police custody (Salford Star, 2014e). As information was coming to light at the national level about undercover policing (see Evans and Dodd, 2014) the protesters at Barton Moss began to publically make connections between this and the policing of

justice campaigns and the police response to protest at the local level.

The policing was successful to the extent that it allowed IGas to complete their exploratory drilling operation, but its wider success in effecting the local and national anti-fracking movement is still to be fully evaluated. It is possible to suggest that in relation to those on the peripheries who restricted their intervention to ‘clicktivism’ – versions of online activism that fail to make it beyond the cyber-sphere – the policing had its desired effect of keeping people off the streets and swelling the ranks of non-disruptive citizen-subjects. However, it is important to note that it failed to end the camp early or to keep away those in the local community who kept the camp supplied with food and fuel through the winter. Additionally, the policing at Barton Moss arguably had a politicising effect for many for whom the links between state violence and the violence of capital accumulation had previously been outside of their understanding of fracking and environmental justice.

The Right to (non-disruptive) Protest

The continuous reiteration of the acceptance of ‘peaceful’ protest by police, politicians and media commentators draws a line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of protest. What we see regularly in the UK is that the acceptable forms of protest, those defined as ‘peaceful’, include only those that do not threaten the status quo. Any real attempt to disrupt or even bring into question the fundamental features of the current social order will fall outside of the incredibly narrow definition of ‘peaceful’ protest and thus will be defined as unacceptable and responded to as such. The emphasis on respecting the right to peaceful, lawful protest enables the police to justify the repression of protests that they can designate as outside of the accepted parameters. Heidi Rimke’s (2011) analysis of the policing of protests against the G20 in Canada in 2010 suggests that this emphasis is neither unique to Barton Moss nor an incidental component of police discourse. In her terms “the fetish for the ‘peaceful protester’ should be understood as a technique of pacification that conceals and fortifies the class violence of capitalism” (2011: 206). The PR strategy so central to contemporary policing, and central to the competing discursive framings of the Barton Moss camp, is employed to position protests outside of the accepted limits of political engagement and thus legitimise policing (including its inherent violence).

In confronting the exploitation of natural resources (and highlighting the dangers involved therein) through direct action, fracking protesters are stepping outside of the incredibly narrow official understanding of legitimate ‘peaceful’ protest and in doing so seek to disrupt the wider social order, in which capitalism, sustained through a dependence on fossil fuels, is sealed off from any real alternatives. Anti-fracking activists have sought to question the immediate use of specific sites for drilling as well as the broader energy policies that sustain a carbon intensive capitalism; at Barton Moss the camp residents and visitors in their various ways (and from a range of ideological starting points) questioned the use of the Green Belt land for an industrial process as potentially hazardous as fracking, as well as questioning the issue of national and global fossil fuel dependency. The local authority and national government were subjected to very public criticism for their management of the local environment and protestors consistently suggested that the collusion between state and corporations that has been demonstrated in relation to fracking policy at the national level (Carrington, 2014a) was evident in the local context at Barton Moss. The release, through Freedom Of Information requests, of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by GMP and IGas, as well as landowners Peel Holdings and the local council, substantiated the protesters’ claims of collusion between GMP and IGas. The MoU demonstrated that IGas had “insider access to [Gold and Silver senior police command](#) meetings, daily briefings or video conferences with GMP’s Silver Commander and shared police and local

council information and intelligence” (Netpol, 2014).

In fact the camp itself at Barton Moss was a clear sign of ‘disorder’, symbolising an opposition to state-corporate collusion in the economic exploitation of the natural environment. The very nature of activists, experienced and inexperienced, choosing to live in a makeshift camp by the side of a minor road, disturbed the usual state of things in the local context but also demonstrated the seriousness of the issue at hand. It is this very disorderly nature of the camp – not to be confused with a suggestion that the camp was run in a disorderly fashion – that gave rise to the policing response. The very public nature of protest and the immediate effects of direct action explicitly challenge the monopoly of legitimacy afforded to the parliamentary process and both demand and enact a form of politics that refuses the compromise inherent in parliamentary democracy. As Rimke suggests, we need to understand the policing of protest as precisely a response to this challenge:

Policing of public protest reifies the highly controlled and restrictive processes of parliamentary democracy as the preferred form of political engagement and expression. Alternative forms of politics that challenge the pacifying politics of parliamentarianism are thus represented through the dominant security doxa as irrelevant, absurd, pathological or even criminal (2011: 209)

In relation to fracking, the activists’ approach challenges the very foundation of the official presentation of the natural environment and its relationship to the current order. In their dominant framing climate change and environmental issues more generally are comprehensively depoliticised. Climate change is defined in current policy primarily as a security issue and as a result it is closed to substantive political debate and any intervention that seeks to consider it in relation to the current political and economic order (Jackson, 2013). As Neocleous notes “securitising’ an issue does not mean dealing with it politically, but bracketing it out and handing it to the state’ (2008: 186). Anti-fracking activists are, then, in many cases consciously seeking to reclaim the issue from the state and redefine its causes and solutions. By doing so they demand and impose a (re)politicisation of the issue that challenges the state definition and in fact places the state and its corporate allies at the heart of the problem. In refusing the logic of security as it frames environmental issues these activists are by definition a sign of disorder and their refusal of political docility can only be met by the state with a (re)turn to police power. Given the track record of police responses to populations designated as disorderly, the police operation at Barton Moss was in line with what the history of policing (including its recent developments) should have us expect.

Understanding the Function of Police Violence

Broadly speaking, most representations of police violence reduce it to the work of ‘bad apples’, acknowledging only that individual officers may have over-stepped the mark. The institutional and systemic violence that is, and has always been, at the core of the police project remains obscured. Additionally, a growing number of academics in recent years have been keen to identify the successful transformation of protest policing to a new consensus led model in which the police oppression all too familiar in previous decades has been replaced by negotiation and facilitation (Gorringe and Rosie, 2013; Gorringe, Stott and Rosie, 2013; Waddington, 2013). Yet at Barton Moss, as well as at numerous other protest events in the UK in recent history, there

is still more than enough evidence to suggest that in response to political protest very little has changed.

Anti-fracking protests are an attempt to confront what Rob Nixon (2011) calls the slow violence of environmental damage; this attempt is in turn being countered by the violence of the state. We must not however be lured into thinking this project is new, that the use of police violence in response to dissent is evidence of a radical shift in the role of police. The policing of protest, of disruptive subjects, is vital to the pacification process that has always defined the role of police in the interests of capital and state. Instead we need to confront police violence with a broader critical approach to understanding both the destructive and productive effects of the structural and systematic violence through which the current social order is reproduced. Protests that challenge the current social order and try to disrupt it will arguably always be dealt with in this violent way. Calls for police restraint, or for accountability through official channels, will continue to fall on deaf ears. As David Cameron has said, “We’re going all out for shale.”

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