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Anger in the City.
Negative Solidarities and the Pursuit of the Common Bad in the Context of the 2011 English Riots

Abstract: Starting from Hannah Arendt's concept of negative solidarities, the thrust of this paper is to determine whether the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, in the aftermath of the 2011 English riots, manufactured a moral panic with the help of the mass media, presumably in order to distract British people from the damaging social effects of neoliberal capitalism and to be in a position to legitimise and impose its Big Society ideology. I shall demonstrate that angered 'gang' members and rioters, beyond appearances, may be understood as irregular participants in a democratic process exercising some measure of positive solidarity against the state. In addition, I shall contend that on the contrary, the coalition deliberately rejected the social dimension of riots and endeavoured to escape political responsibility, instrumentalising 'gangs' and adopting the recurring blame-it-on-the Blacks/poor approach to keep its alibi intact, thereby practising negative solidarity.

Keywords: *culture*, *democracy*, *exclusion*, *gang*, *riot*, *neoliberalism*

1. Introduction

The 'gang' phenomenon was no new feature of British society when the August 2011 English riots erupted. In spite of the existence of an official definition,[1] the term 'gang' refers to a very American construct which is pregnant with racial and social connotations. Owing to the mass media's long-standing distortions and extensive sensationalist coverage of postcode rivalries involving the use of guns or knives,[2] and owing to conservative and labour governmental declarations,[3] British 'gangs' had been essentially portrayed as dangerous Black entities inhabiting impoverished urban settings on a regular basis.

Yet, the unprecedented violence displayed by the protesters during the 2011 riots had 'gangs' gain in credibility, with Prime Minister Cameron declaring "an all-out war on gangs and gang culture".[4] In the eyes of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, 'gangs' encapsulated the moral, social, and populist crises linked with immigration, terrorism, and drugs,[5] hence they became the epitome of what was wrong in British society. The inflated statistics provided by the coalition were expected to prove that 'gangs' had orchestrated the events,[6] hence that they were cabals.[7] The

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[1] The definition was introduced in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, section 34 (The National Archives, *Policing and Crime Act, c.26* (2009), *www.legislation.gov.uk*) and revised by the Serious Crime Act 2015, section 51 (The National Archives, *Serious Crime Act, c.9* (2015), *www.legislation.gov.uk*). A gang is defined as a group of at least three people using (a) characteristic(s) enabling its identification as a group, and engaging in gang-related violence or getting involved in the illegal drug market. I shall use quotation marks to remind the reader that the term, when used by the mass media, politicians or the public, not necessarily refers to bona fide gangs.

[2] Postcode rivalry is a conflict between 'gangs' over territory.

[3] For instance, "Straw Blames Absent Dads for Gang Violence", *The Daily Mail* (2007), *www.dailymail.co.uk*.

[4] James Tapsfield et al., "PM Vows War on Gangs After Riots", *The Independent* (2011), *www.independent.co.uk*.

[5] Simon Hallsworth and David Brotherton, eds., *Urban Disorder and Gangs: A Critique and A Warning* (London: Runnymede, 2011), 16.

[6] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of disorder* (London: Guardian Books, 2011), 21.

disturbances were undisputedly interpreted as a crime and not as a protest movement from below against a "capitalist revolution from above".[8] Concomitantly, 'gangs' conjured up a form of negative solidarity based on anger producing the common bad, which a government angered by mindless violence and animated by positive solidarity should annihilate, for the common good. But should it indeed?

Starting from Hannah Arendt's concept of solidarities and drawing on the theses developed by researchers such as Hallsworth and Wacquant,[9] as well as on a thorough review of scientific publications, official reports, press articles, grey literature,[10] and on two field studies carried out by the author,[11] the thrust of the paper shall be to determine whether in the context of political scandals and protests against austerity measures the coalition was served with both the most appropriate circumstances and folk devils, so that it was in a position to implement its Big Society ideology to the greatest possible extent.[12] Invented criminality has been a feature of British society since the 18th century, when concern over crime grew and broad-circulation press developed.[13] Instrumentalising 'gangs', the alibi, manufacturing a moral panic with the help of the mass media may have enabled Cameron to distract people from the damaging social effects of neoliberal capitalism – deep-seated structural problems. Firstly, I will contend that in spite of appearances and since young people tend to inform of what democracy requires, 'gangs' and rioting may be understood as unwonted democratic processes arising from the hardest needs – i.e., deprivation, racism, alienation, unequal opportunities, police harassment, discrimination and hopelessness, that is the common bad. Thus, my point is that 'gang' members and rioters somewhat unconsciously aimed at pursuing some measure of common good – positive solidarity. Secondly, I shall posit that on the contrary, a negative mode of solidarity may in fact have been practised by the government itself as it purposely overlooked the social dimension of the riots and implemented a "culture of fear",[14] therefore endeavouring to escape political responsibility. As a consequence, the coalition seemingly privileged the pursuit of the common bad as it ended up repressing, through 'gangs', the victims of poverty, on cultural and moral grounds,[15] rather than tackling poverty itself. Actually, poverty was to ensure the survival of harsh neoliberalism and thereby that of the coalition itself.

2. Reading Democratic Participation into Gang Membership and Rioting

Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old Black man who had been under surveillance within the framework of the fight against gun violence in London, was killed by the police on August 4, 2011 in Haringey,[16] North London, officially because he had threatened them. Revolts followed a couple of days later, spreading

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[7] Stanley Cohen, *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community: A Study of Social Reaction to Juvenile Delinquency*, PhD thesis (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1969), 63.

[8] Loïc Wacquant, *Bourdieu, Foucault and the Penal State in the Neoliberal Era* (Duke: Duke U.P., 2009), 127.

[9] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban*; Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Duke: Duke U.P., 2009).

[10] Meaning information produced outside of traditional publishing and distribution channels – governmental reports, white papers, studies run by non-governmental organisations for instance.

[11] The study, which was carried out in the summers of 2012 and 2013 in Tottenham, Hackney, Packham, and Brixton as part of a research project devoted to contemporary British 'gangs', enabled the author to conduct about fifty interviews with inhabitants, former and current gang members, social workers, and community workers.

[12] The Big Society neoliberal project implied devolving political power and social responsibility to local communities.

[13] David Philips, "Three 'Moral Entrepreneurs' and the Creation of a 'Criminal Class' in England, c. 1790s-1840s", *Crime, History & Societies*, 7.1 (2003).

[14] Jonathan Simon, *Governing through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009).

[15] A euphemism for race used among politicians for decades.

[16] Betsy Barkas, "Framing the Death of Mark Duggan", *Institute of Race Relations* (2014), *www.irr.org.uk*.

to 66 English local authorities until August 11. Most of these areas featured amongst the poorest and most crime-ridden,[17] and 30% of the underage rioters inhabited them.[18] 5,112 offences were committed, between 13,000 and 15,000 individuals participated in the disturbances, and 4,000 people were arrested (90% were acquainted with the police).[19] The arrestees were mainly men (89%), aged 18-24 (46%), and 10-17 (26%). 40% were White, 39% Black, 11% mixed, 8% Asian, and 2% belonged to other ethnic categories.[20] This most recent wave of urban riots was characterized by what was sometimes referred to as consumerist hooliganism since looting made up 50% of crime.[21] Altogether, the riots cost over £500 million and caused 5 deaths.[22] Prime minister David Cameron, home secretary Theresa May,[23] and the mayor of London, Boris Johnson,[24] blatantly condemned these criminal acts led by 'gangs'.[25] Consequently, they offered a neo-security analysis of the riots,[26] which reduced the social explanation to a minimum as they clearly subscribed to the gangland thesis.[27] In fact, commentators on all sides of the political spectrum agreed that the 1980s riots may have originated in deprivation, racism, and inequalities, but that this time the situation was different.[28] The common denominator to all urban riots seemed to be the participants' profile.

Once again, the usual culprits emerged as urban lower-class youths, especially Black youths. The Black community had been stigmatised, pathologised, essentialised, and criminalised on cultural grounds for decades so that its members had become perennial criminals.[29] Incidentally, ideas of criminality and policing in the UK originated in colonialism.[30] Father hunger,[31] dysfunctional family structure, hostility to authority,[32] violence, nihilism,[33] hedonism, materialism, indiscipline, lack of respect, immorality,[34] and gangsta culture – these traits have long been commonly associated with Black families, whose culture is said to be defective, un-British, and even criminogenic.[35] Interestingly enough, the August 2011 looters were highly criticized by the authorities, the media, and the public for their expensive tastes, when one may argue that first, 18% of the businesses targeted were food retailers and restaurants;[36] second, that they proved they were attracted to designer clothes

[17] Home Office, *An Overview of Recorded Crimes and Arrests Resulting from Disorder Events in August 2011* (London, 2011), 3.

[18] The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots: The Final Report* (2012), 7.

[19] Ibid., 16-17.

[20] Home Office, *Overview*, 28-29.

[21] Ibid., 4.

[22] John Drury et al., eds., *Re-Reading the 2011 English Riots: ESRC 'Beyond Contagion' Interim Report* (Sussex: University of Sussex, 2019), 6; The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots*, 17.

[23] "Riots: Theresa May's Speech on 11 August 2011", *Home Office* (2011), *www.gov.uk*.

[24] Ben Glaze and Ellen Branagh, "Residents Vent Anger at Boris Johnson", *The Independent* (2011)*, www.independent.co.uk*.

[25] "PM's Speech on the Fightback After the Riots", *Cabinet Office* (2011), *www.gov.uk*.

[26] Meaning they considered the riots were criminal and should be solved by a tightening of security.

[27] This means that most urban violence is gang-related and that gangs mushroom apace. Simon Hallsworth, *Understanding Violent Street Worlds,* PhD Thesis (2019), 10.

[28] See for instance "Riots are not a genuine outlet of political angst", *The Evening Standard* (2011), *www.standard.co.uk*; "Politicians Condemn Tottenham Riots", *The Guardian* (2011), *www.theguardian.com*.

[29] Stephen Cushion et al., eds., *Media Representations of Black Young Men and Boys Report of the REACH Media Monitoring Project* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), 12.

[30] Jasbinder S. Nijjar, "Echoes of Empire: Excavating the Colonial Roots of Britain's 'War on Gangs'", *Social Justice*, 45.2-3 (2018).

[31] Home Affairs Committee, *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System: Second Report of Session 2006-07*, vol. 2: Oral and Written Evidence (2007), 87.

[32] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 8.

[33] Ibid., 4.

[34] Charlie Cooper, "Understanding the English Riots of 2011: 'Mindless Criminality' or Youth 'Mekin Histri' in Austerity Britain?", *Youth & Policy,* 109 (September 2012), 7.

[35] See Monia O'Brien Castro "L'atavisme des Noirs comme pierre angulaire d'un discours raciste et propagandiste à l'encontre des 'gangs' britanniques contemporains", in Michel Prum and Florence Binard, eds., *Minorités et société* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020).

[36] Home Office, *Overview*, 14.

and high-tech products and thus shared a mainstream culture celebrated by the media, that of wealth as life goal. As a matter of fact, beyond the criminal other,[37] an entire section of the community was labelled as criminal, as articulated by historian and broadcaster David Starkey. On *Newsnight* (BBC2), the latter controversially asserted that young working-class Whites, 'Chavs',[38] had been contaminated by criminogenic Black culture and therefore "become Black",[39] that is criminals. Hence, those at the bottom of the social ladder, irrespective of their race, purportedly formed a homogenous dangerous and immoral section of the community that should be remoralised.[40] This vision of the poor echoes through the ages.[41]

Yet, as suggested earlier, the inquiries into the 1980s riots such as the Scarman report,[42] highlighted multiple forms of urban grievance, especially among Blacks. As averred by Solomos, the national anomie then had not resulted from race and alien cultural values, but race had been central to the eruption of riots given that young Blacks were confronted with a greater number of obstacles such as racism and discrimination.[43] Many a study has, likewise, laid stress on the socio-economic impulse behind riots, namely a genuine structural process which has produced aggressive social personalities among the poor urban youth.[44] In *Men in Dark Times,* Hannah Arendt distinguishes between negative and positive solidarity. The former form draws individuals from selfishness into a group sharing an experience of suffering, injustice, or oppression. The philosopher deems it deficient since such fearful identification with a common bad doesn't lead to the pursuit of a common good. The latter form refers to empowered individuals gathering to resist oppression or injustice thereby pursuing the common good, as they are in a position to exercise their rights and duties and make sure their freedom and equality are inextricably linked with other people's – positive solidarity and political responsibility go hand in hand.[45] In the light of Hannah Arendt's analysis, one may posit that 'gang' membership and rioting may actually be interpreted as forms of democratic participation based on the anger generated by socio-economic deprivation as a driving force, for the benefit of an entire class.

Four decades of neoliberal restructuring and erosion of the welfare state have undoubtedly had political, economic, and social impacts. These decades have reshaped the perspectives and experience of young people who belong to the urban precariat. In fine the process manufactured serially angered young men. Indeed, violence collectives are generated by the redistribution of a progressively privatised space which excludes them from resources according to Hagedorn.[46] Research has shown that 'gangs', beyond appearances, have a social function – transitioning members into adulthood. 'Gangs' help these youths overcome structural powerlessness;[47] provide them with a sort of refuge founded on territorial attachment within disorganised communities deprived of social links;[48] solve the

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[37] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 8.

[38] 'Chavs'/'Charvers' refers to those anti-social young people inhabiting deprived areas who have adopted Black culture. The mass media in particular have extensively used this pejorative term from the early 2000s.

[39] "UK Riots: It's Not About Criminality and Cuts, It's About Culture… And This is Only the Beginning", *The Telegraph* (2011), *www.telegraph.co.uk*.

[40] "PM's Speech".

[41] One may refer to the philosophy behind the 1834 Poor Law.

[42] The Thatcher years were marked by waves of urban riots. Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981: Report of an Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

[43] John Solomos, "Riots, Urban Protest and Social Policy: The Interplay of Reform and Social Control in Ethnic Relations", *Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations,* 7 (December 1986), 10.

[44] Cyprien Avenel, *Sociologie des "Quartiers Sensibles"* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 85-86 ; Gareth Morrell et al., eds, *The August Riots in England: Understanding the Involvement of Young People* (London: NatCen, 2011).

[45] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 82-83.

[46] John Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis U.P., 2008).

[47] Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie", *American Sociological Review,* 3.5 (October 1938).

[48] Keith Kintrea et al., eds., *Young People and Territoriality in British Cities* (Glasgow: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008), 4-5.

male identity crisis attributable to a matriarchal family model;[49] restore a self-esteem undermined by the way non-discredited populations perceive them[50] or by failure at school,[51] especially as many carry the heritage of colonialism within them.[52] Finally, gang-related activities such as drug trafficking enable them to win power as well as respect.[53] But belonging to a 'gang' also gives the opportunity to challenge authority in order to compensate for the incapacity to participate in society in a traditional way.[54] 'Gangs' are not organised structures or sustained political organisations,[55] since they have no clearly-stated demands. Yet, they may be considered to be subcultural, alternative, radical protest movements intervening in the political debate. They manage to bring the issues of people cast away to the very margins of society to the forefront and make them visible. Therefore, 'gangs', as they are not paralysed by fear, represent those margins, both unofficially and symbolically.[56] Voter alienation acted as a catalyst to "a silent revolution" in the politically marginalized working classes.[57] The fact that 'gangs' agreed to stop their postcode war for four days during the 2011 riots proves that what matters to them is to unite against their oppressors,[58] namely the police, and by extension the government. As a consequence, having recourse to unorthodox methods to express political views might be regarded as inseparable from the pursuit of social change.

Likewise, one may say participants in riots, whether 'gang' members or not, and with the exception of elements like hardened criminals or middle/upper class looters,[59] speak for their community. In the neoliberal age, the educational system fails to provide young people with an education, thereby preventing them from developing their critical sense.[60] Rioting amounts to refusing the political language,[61] to a political vacuum.[62] Freire explains that alienated and oppressed individuals in colonised territories, which include distressed areas which have tended to undergo a regeneration or rather gentrification process in highly developed countries,[63] internalise negative images of themselves. As a consequence, their "culture of silence" allows neither dialogue nor self-government.[64] They confront an "enemy without a face" who ignore them on a daily basis, condemn them to social worthlessness, and lead them to a deadlock,[65] even if fighting on one's territory gives the illusion there is a chance to win.[66] The message rioters conveyed in a community spirit was

[49] Roger Hopkins Burke, *An Introduction to Criminological Theory* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005), 105.

[50] Detlef Baum, "Can Integration Succeed? Research into Urban Childhood and Youth in a Deprived Area in Koblenz", *Social Work in Europe* 2.3 (1996).

[51] John Pitts, *Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest* (Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2007), Chapter 9.

[52] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 20.

[53] Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (US: Basic Books, 1988).

[54] Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall, *Dangerous Disorder: Riots and Violent Disturbances in 13 Areas of Britain 1991-1992* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997), 2.

[55] Steve Hall et al., eds., *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture: Crime, Exclusion and the New Culture of Narcissism* (Oxon: Willan, 2008).

[56] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 6.

[57] Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2003), 3.

[58] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading,* 22.

[59] Youngsters from comfortable backgrounds participated in the 2011 riots too. "The Middle Class 'Rioters' Revealed: The Millionaire's Daughter, the Aspiring Musician and the Organic Chef All in the Dock", *The Daily Mail* (2011), *www.dailymail.co.uk.*

[60] Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Youth: Racialized Memories and the Culture of Cruelty* (New York: Routledge, 2012), xiv.

[61] John Gaffney, "L'Interprétation de la violence, une analyse du discours sur les troubles sociaux au Royaume-Uni: le cas de Handsworth, Birmingham, 1985", *Langage et société,* 40 (1987), 54.

[62] Avenel, *Sociologie,* 86-87.

[63] The areas hit by the 2011 riots were amongst them.

[64] Tom Heaney, *Issues in Freirean Pedagogy* (Thresholds in Education, 1995), *lust-for-life.org.*

[65] Christian Bachman and Nicole Leguennec, *Violences urbaines. Ascension et chute des classes moyennes à travers cinquante ans de politique de la ville* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 355-356.

[66] Gaffney, "L'Interprétation", 54.

ultimately political,[67] but they were not fully aware of it and did not present it as such either. This is "zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing". Riots obviously conveyed a subjective statement on an objective condition.[68] Oppressed populations, who do have a political conscience, know they are constantly refused self-determination and the status of active citizen.[69] Yet, they lack organisation and union to reverse the situation.[70] One may regard rioting as an illustration of instantaneous attempt at pursuing positive solidarity.

In August 2011, "the rioters were seen as militant, but not disciplined; impulsive rather than organized; expressive but not articulate; targeted but not strategic. Their actions involved group collaboration, but not collective mobilisation. Overall, their actions were messy, incoherent and chaotic, their motives inconsistent and mixed. The mode, expression and targets of their dissent generated discomfort, unease and tension".[71] As mentioned earlier, fear prevented a section of the precariat, incarnating negative solidarity from both revolting and supporting 'gangs' and rioters. In point of fact, 'gang' activity and rioting have been repressed by successive governments over the years, thereby leading to a vicious circle. Police suspicion towards young people in depressed zones has been reinforced and harassment has worsened indeed.[72] Blacks were eight times more likely to be arrested and searched than Whites and Asians two times.[73] Also, people inhabiting neighbourhoods subject to near-permanent recession have increasingly been stigmatized and criminalized.[74] Hence, reasons for rebelling have constantly multiplied. Even though 'gangs' and rioters are produced by common bad, they achieve some measure of positive solidarity. In fact, on the one hand, one may claim that they resist social abandonment and that their voice was unintentionally carried by the coalition and the mass media in a way. On the other hand, the *Guardian*, whose covering of urban disorders was as damaging as that of the gutter press,[75] published a joint study with the LSE for instance.[76] The work looked into the causes of the 2011 riots and stressed the protesters' circumstances. Even Scarman argued that "violence, though wrong, is a very effective means of protest".[77] Indeed, one may analyse the two forms of subcultural protest movement under study in terms of the self-empowerment of powerless citizens blighted by galloping marginalisation; stigmatisation along racial, class, and territorial lines; the correlation between material poverty and the denial of social dignity;[78] the provoking absence of judiciary reaction to crime where the rich and powerful were concerned.[79] 'Gang' members and rioters are not only synonymous with the pursuit of

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[67] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 10; Sadiya Akram, "Recognizing the 2011 United Kingdom Riots as Political Protest: A Theoretical Framework Based on Agency, Habitus and the Preconscious", *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54.3 (March 2014).

[68] Slavoj Zizek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite", London Review of Books (2011), *www.lrb.co.uk*.

[69] Henry A. Giroux, *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism (Popular Culture and Everyday Life)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), xiv.

[70] David Moxton, "Consumer Culture and the 2011 Riots", *Sociological Research Online*, 16.4 (2011), *www.socresonline.org.uk*.

[71] Sarah Lamble, "Unpalatable Dissent and the Political Distribution of Solidarity", *Law Culture and the Humanities,* 16.2 (November 2018), 9.

[72] Douglas Sharp and Susie Atherton, "To Serve and Protect?: The Experiences of Policing in the Community of Young People from Black and Other Ethnic Minority Groups", *British Journal of Criminology*, 47.5 (September 2007).

[73] Mark Smith, "Young People and the 2011 'Riots' in England: Experiences, Explanations and Implications for Youth Work", *Infed.org*, (2011), *www.infed.org*.

[74] Simon Hallsworth and Daniel Silverstone, eds., "'That's Life Innit', A British Perspective on Guns, Crime and Social Order", *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 3.9 (2009), 373.

[75] The gutter press specialises in shocking stories about crime for instance, and shows no interest in the ins and outs of an issue. Violence is constantly presented as the product of deviance. Gaffney, "L'Interprétation", 34-35.

[76] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading*.

[77] Scarman, *Brixton*, 36.

[78] Zygmunt Bauman, "The London Riots-On Consumerism Coming Home to Roost", *Social Europe* (2011), *www.socialeurope.eu*.

[79] Daniel P. O'Donoghue, *Urban Transformations: Centres, Peripheries and Systems* (London: Routledge, 2014), 91.

common bad as averred by the coalition. On the contrary, one may consider the crackdown on 'gangs' and riots implemented following the August disturbances as the product of negative solidarity, as the government has seemingly acted against the interests of a whole section of the community, infringing upon its rights and freedom.

3. Negative Solidarity in Disguise

The position of the coalition as to why the riots had erupted was clear from the beginning, consequently it commissioned no public inquiry on the Scarman model. A mere panel was formed, which published a report riddled with Victorian-like, Thatcherite references to deserving and undeserving poor.[80] The opportunity of thrusting 'gangs' into the limelight and in some measure indirectly branding them "domestic terrorists" to quote US gang buster Bratton,[81] came as a boon and was not to be lost. Cameron set about confronting violence allegedly to protect citizens, for the common good. Still, since the process involved installing a 'culture of fear' and repression with the help of the mass media and the so-called gang industry through the instrumentalisation of 'gangs',[82] one may express doubts as to his genuine purpose. In actual fact, the authorities manipulated the figures – 28% of the people arrested during the riots were initially announced to be 'gang' members. Next, the rate was revised downwards to 19%, then to 13%, this time for the whole country. This forced the government to downplay the role of 'gangs' in the unrest, all the more as, on the one hand, the figures corresponded to individuals who had been caught red-handed, as they were known to the police, and not to participants.[83] On the other hand, regional police services relied on different definitions of 'gang'.[84] Hence, one may affirm that the authorities lied to the population as to the nature of the real threat society was faced with. Undoubtedly, they bore in mind that in today's "risk society", where security has taken over employment security,[85] electors' fears define government policy.[86]

Logically, the coalition also lied when claiming it retaliated against protesters and 'gang' members to protect society, all the more so the measures it implemented didn't aim to definitely annihilate 'gangs'. Firstly, the government's myth-driven policy agenda was directly inspired by an expensive American experience of gang suppression which has failed because it hasn't tackled poverty.[87] Yet, in 2009, an influential group had already urged the authorities to adopt the successful (American) Kennedy method,[88] like 77 other cities around the globe, but the advice was not taken.[89] Other more progressive programmes such as Slutkin's public health approach, implemented by Scotland, were

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[80] The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots*, 16.

[81] Terry McCarthy, "The Gang Buster", *Time Magazine* (2014), *www.time.com*.

[82] Liberal commentators, politicians or academics who deal with the 'gang' issue and who, sometimes involuntarily, give the impression the nation is under the influence of 'gangs'. Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young, "Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: A Critique", *Crime, Media, Culture,* 4.2 (August 2008).

[83] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading,* 21.

[84] Home Office, *Overview*, 34.

[85] John Pitts, "Americanisation, the Third Way, and the Racialisation of Youth Crime and Disorder", in John M. Hagedorn, ed., *Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminology* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois, 2007), 274.

[86] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1992), 49.

[87] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 14.

[88] Criminologist Kennedy's method entails having gang members enter training schemes or take a job under penalty of punishment. The Centre for Social Justice, *Dying to Belong: An In-Depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain: A Policy Report by the Gangs Working Group* (London, 2009).

[89] The Centre for Social Justice, *It Can Be Stopped: A Proven Blueprint to Stop Violence and Tackle Gang and Related Offending in London and Beyond* (London: CJS thinktank, 2018), 7.

overlooked as well.[90] Secondly, the post-riot zero-tolerance stance thus adopted by the coalition combined disproportionate penal sanctions and welfare benefit restrictions.[91] The coalition strengthened the legislative framework governing 'gangs', with the creation of a gang-mapping database by the Metropolitan Police among other measures. Intelligence collected for this Gangs Matrix, through doubtful means such as social media monitoring and sometimes in breach of the law, stigmatised young Blacks and their culture, and was shared with other agencies such as housing associations.[92] Noteworthy is the fact that social services indeed played a crucial role in the criminalisation process, as they were in a position to closely watch the poorest and as they were encouraged to collaborate with the police and the judiciary. Thirdly, Cameron sought to tackle the issue of troubled families, injecting morals, parental discipline, and individual responsibility (for people to go back to work for example) into so-called problem populations.[93] In substance, his management of insecurity came down to criminalising social problems. Instead of punishing criminals, he penalised the precariat in its entirety, thereby also lying as to who was to be repressed. Criminalisation is a way for apparently weak governments not only to maintain control, but also to distance themselves from a social or political interpretation in order to weaken the link between deprivation and dissent.[94] The whole dynamic constituted a provocation for the underclass who was given superfluous further reasons to join 'gangs' or to riot, therefore to be repressed. As it were, the government badly needed 'gangs' because they embodied its alibi, so that the anger it expressed in August 2011 was presumably faked. Hence, poverty was needed too and shouldn't be fought, all the more so as neoliberalism depends on it to function. It appears that the population, electors, were deceived by the coalition to neoliberal ideological ends – legitimising and imposing its Big Society project, in other words, feral capitalism as the solution to its own crisis.[95]

It should be added that the field work undertaken by the author has revealed a very different process the authorities allegedly use in order to sustain gang culture. Some conspiracy theory concerning the circulation of firearms in those areas hit by cycles of riots is at stake here. Social workers, active or former 'gang' members, and inhabitants seem to be firmly convinced that gun culture is sustained by the government, who purportedly lets firearms be stolen from military bases or circulates them. Guns are not expensive and easy to find in so-called 'gang' hotspots. The same respondents believe the government sees to it that the zones are resupplied with drugs. Needless to say one should be very careful in the face of such accusations. Nevertheless, however fanciful they may sound, they speak volumes in terms of how the people concerned feel they are perceived and treated. In their view, the authorities in fact not only try and demographically regulate a population who cannot adapt to neoliberalism and who is regarded as a burden on society, especially when it rebels. But the authorities also try and keep their alibi, the demonised 'gang' culture, alive and kicking.

Concomitantly, citizens were evidently manipulated by the influential (right-wing) mass media,[96] which embarked on an umpteenth scapegoating campaign, publishing pictures from CCTV footage

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[90] To the epidemiologist, gangs are to be tackled as one would tackle an epidemic – violence should not be considered as a simple law-and-order issue. See Monia O'Brien Castro, "Pornographie idéologique: l'américanisation de la croisade contre les 'gangs' britanniques", in Monia O'Brien Castro and Alexis Chommeloux, eds., *Américanis/zation* (Paris: Le Manuscrit-Savoirs, 2021).

[91] LSE Public Policy Group, *The 2011 London Riots* (London: British Politics and Policy, 2011).

[92] Amnesty International, "Met Police Using 'Racially Discriminatory' Gangs Matrix Database, Trapped in the Matrix: Secrecy, Stigma, and Bias in the Met's Gangs Database" (2018), *www.amnesty.org.uk*.

[93] Department for Communities and Local Government, *Government Response to the Riots, Community and Victims Panel's Final Report* (London, 2013), 16.

[94] Gaffney, "L'interprétation", 90.

[95] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 14.

[96] James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018).

and calling the public to "shop a moron" or "name and shame a rioter".[97] They demanded zero-tolerance policy to be implemented against the rioters, even backing the idea of having Bratton appointed as top adviser on 'gang' warfare,[98] as well as the remoralisation of the nation.[99] When most urban youth violence had nothing to do with 'gangs' in Britain,[100] the mass media supported the gang-based narrative emanating from Whitehall.[101] The media have the ideological duty to support the State, playing on citizens' apprehensions and orchestrating moral panics about crime in times of crisis,[102] laying down a dumbing down culture,[103] in order to deflect concerns away from capitalism-engendered problems.[104] Biased narratives sustaining racial prejudice[105] account for the fact that the public came down in favour of the punitive measures implemented by the State. A poll was released from a sample of 2,019 individuals over 18, which revealed 88% agreed with the sanctions implemented against rioters and considered they seemed light; 69% held 'gangs' responsible for the riots; 75% supported the police.[106] Neither the correlation between the ecology of marginalized zones and the proportion of Black youths in such groups, nor the fact that research shows 'gangs' are the corollary to structural determinants was underlined.[107] One also has to emphasize the fact that as a rule the mass media pay no attention to White 'gangs', even though they do exist, especially in areas like Northern Ireland, where immigration is not a strong feature. If they did, then they would have to precisely focus on structural similarities rather than on cultural and racial differences.[108] In addition, criminologists' and sociologists' views were not welcome to the debate around the issue for fear they would suggest the causes might be more complex. Such specialists hadn't sufficiently insisted on this reality upstream, thereby creating a vacuum[109] generously and dangerously filled by self-styled (right-wing) experts.[110] Much general effort was then put into providing a narrative which hid the fact that the coalition shirked its responsibility towards a specific category of citizens.[111]

As stated earlier, Hannah Arendt's concept of positive solidarity highlights the centrality of political responsibility and entails empowering citizens to exercise their rights and duties, irrespective of where they live. Positive solidarity should strengthen and sustain a common world.[112] Yet, the combination of a pervasive 'culture of fear' with collective social and penal repression in response to the English riots – based on the use of a bespoke ideological instrument, 'gangs' – are proof the coalition did not practice this form of solidarity. In substance, the Welfare State gave way to the Punitive State, a Janus State which, on the one hand, showed itself liberal and permissive (i.e., the reassuring face) towards middle and upper classes and firms. Indeed, one should remember the

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[97] Christian Fuchs, "Behind the News: Social Media, Riots, and Revolutions", *Capital and Class,* 36.3 (2012), 384.

[98] Chris Greer and Eugene McLaughlin, "Trial by Media: Riots, Looting, Gangs and Mediatised Police Chiefs", in Tim Newburn and Jill Peay, eds., *Policing: Politics, Culture and Control* (Oxford: Hart, 2011), Chapter 7.

[99] Jasbinder S. Nijjar, "'Menacing Youth' and 'Broken Families': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Reporting of the 2011 English Riots in the *Daily Express* Using Moral Panic Theory", *Sociological Research Online,* 20.4 (2015).

[100] Ian Joseph and Anthony Gunter, eds., *Gangs Revisited: What's a Gang and What's Race Got to Do with It? Politics and Policy into Practice* (London: Runnymede Perspectives, 2011), 12.

[101] The site of main government offices.

[102] Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1998), 7.

[103] Yvonne Jewkes, *Theorizing Media and Crime* (London: Sage Publishing, 2015), 19.

[104] Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), 31.

[105] Sarah Neal, "The Scarman Report, the Macpherson Report and the Media: How Newspapers Respond to Race Centered Social Policy Interventions", *Journal of Social Policy*, 32.1 (2003), 59.

[106] Daniel Briggs, *The English Riots of 2011*: *A Summer of Discontent* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2012), 10.

[107] Joseph and Gunter, *Gangs,* 4.

[108] See Monia O'Brien Castro, "White Niggers' Street Corner Society: les 'gangs' de rue dans l'Irlande du Nord post-conflit", *Observatoire de la Société Britannique*, 22 (September 2018).

[109] Joseph and Gunter, *Gangs,* 3.

[110] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 3.

[111] Pitts, "Americanisation", 275.

[112] Arendt, *Men*, 82-83.

political scandals which made the news at the time.[113] On the other hand, it showed itself paternalistic and punishing towards the poorest (i.e., the frightening face).[114] Then their rights and opportunities were denied along class and race lines, while they were forced to behave under the aegis of a cultural trope and put under surveillance.[115] Implementing such policy of "social insecurity" intrinsic to neoliberal democracy,[116] even if it took infringing upon equality and freedom, the neo-Darwinism government not only evaded its responsibility,[117] but also devolved it to the people. Incidentally, the idea of the Big Society was only materialised in pragmatic local initiatives set up by an empowered civil society.[118] The overall result was collective and political irresponsibility on the part of the coalition – the regime was seemingly undemocratic.

The point is that one may argue that the state has a criminogenic function – labelling, criminalizing, and punishing the deviants in the interest of the ruling class, while it may violate the law with impunity.[119] The concept of "Thug State" seems to perfectly apply in the British case, as, motivated by the interests of the elite, it claims to be democratic while perpetrating criminal acts against its citizens or allowing/encouraging criminal acts to be perpetrated against them. Furthermore, the Thug State resorts to arrests, prison, surveillance, informers and armed forces do dominate, discipline, and punish a non-elite population. The latter includes the poor and minority community members, all selected to be repressed, and whose fundamental democratic rights and opportunities are denied. Additionally, it builds a maximum security society in order to deter rebellions generated by its lack of investment in education and social protection. What's more, the Thug State can be characterised by corruption, deficiency of responsibility, and activities which, albeit not illegal, exploit individuals or betray their trust.[120] The victims of the Thug State need to get organised so as to gain political power. Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, the coalition persisted in maintaining divisions to prevent effective mobilisation.

Division is a key tool enabling the state to rule more easily, as only a united, organised oppressed class could oppose authoritarianism effectively. The coalition certainly deepened divisions at two levels. Firstly, just like Thatcher at the time, it intensified the struggle between two nations – the productive (i.e., of unsubsidized goods and services) and the parasitic (i.e., the various pauper classes and those whose work is "unprofitable to capitalist forms of accounting").[121] Secondly, the government reinforced the struggle within the poorest section of the community, with some members considering 'gang' members and rioters as mere direct or indirect vectors of degrading living conditions on a daily basis and in the aftermath of riots. An almost entire population paralysed by fear, namely the fear of 'gangs' and rioters, and the fear of government, was tamed by a coalition who, as its representatives, had a free hand as far as implementing its ideology and pursuing the common bad was concerned. There cannot be democracy without conflict, but the deliberate and constant persecution of the poor culture somewhat hushed the opponents to the state. As a result, the genuine pursuit of the common good by 'gang' members and rioters against a contemptuous, morally corrupt,

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[113] For instance, see Patrick Hennessy et al., "David Laws Resigns over Expenses Claim", *The Guardian* (2010), *www.theguardian.com*.

[114] Wacquant, *Punishing*, 312.

[115] Joseph Wresinski, "Le pauvre est en liberté surveillée", *France Culture* (1976), *www.franceculture.fr*.

[116] Loïc Wacquant, "Ordering Insecurity: Social Polarization and the Punitive Upsurge", *Radical Philosophy Review*, 11.1 (2008), 12.

[117] Meaning the government favoured some type of natural selection and the survival of the socially fittest in the population. Wacquant, *Punishing*, 312.

[118] Monia O'Brien Castro, "Entre gestion sécuritaire et mobilisations citoyennes: les émeutes londoniennes de 2011 comme révélateur d'une gouvernance déficiente" (to be published).

[119] Ian R. Taylor, *The New Criminology for a Social Theory of Deviance* (London: Routledge, 1973).

[120] Stephen Richards and Michael Avey, "Controlling State Crime in the United States of America: What Can We Do About the Thug State?", in Jeffrey Ian Ross, *Varieties of State Crime and Its Control* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 31-33.

[121] Bob Jessop et al., eds., *Thatcherism. A Tale of Two Nations* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 87-88.

authoritarian, repressive, and irresponsible state in a "legitimacy crisis",[122] namely a state perceived as illegitimate as it privileged profit over Keynesian redistributive policies, was certainly hindered.[123]

The time when Cameron advocated to understand "the background, the reasons, the causes" of crime had definitely been long gone when he declared war on 'gangs'. The latest study published on the 2011 English riots stated that indeed, blame could not be put on "the bad", "the mad" and "the bad leading the mad",[124] as claimed by Murray-inspired authorities endeavouring to escape responsibility and hide structural problems.[125] Ultimately, 'gangs' as well as rioters, epitomised an ideological force rather than an explanation to the disturbances.[126] While they were both the symptoms of the failure of Big Society, that had been announced as the antidote to "broken society", they ironically appeared to be the emblems of cohesion, solidarity, and sense of community.[127] 'Gang' members and rioters pursued the common good, when the government stood for the archetype of division. All in all, the crux of the issue lay in a "broken state" in pursuit of the common bad.[128]

Assuredly, the coalition terrorised British citizens as a whole and the disintegrated working class that had become socially and politically invisible even more, pretending to tackle the "disease" it had identified.[129] Refusing to remedy poverty, the absolute disease blighting society, and criminalising the poor guaranteed the perpetuation of 'gangs', undoubtedly the triggering of riots in the future, and a healthy neoliberal capitalism. The coalition depended on all these factors. The use of Thatcherite 2.0 coercive power amounted to democratic regression as "the injustice machine accelerated in the cause of law and order and the safeguarding of people's rights and civic entitlements were considered an almost obscene concern".[130] On the contrary, scratching the surface there was evidence that continuously angered 'gang' members and rioters tried and negotiated the position of their community within mainstream society, thereby empowering themselves and acting as legitimate citizens taking part in the democratic process, however controversially.

Their chaotic pursuit of the common good may seem to be doomed as history has tended to repeat itself. Still, the *Guardian* as previously alluded to, cared to give the rebels a voice, teaming up with LSE to look into the causes of the 2011 riots. In addition, a young man the author met in Tottenham was one of those who explained that the media had not paid attention to the peaceful march to Scotland Yard he and 2,000 Blacks had participated in prior to the riots, in reaction to Smiley Culture's death. The 1980s reggae star had died while police officers searched his home. Many a rioter had been able to detail their difficulties on a daily basis thanks to the August disorders though. Was this the beginning of a slow yet virtuous process that would modify the media's portrayal of the younger elements of the underclass, have public opinion break free from the manipulation it had been subjected to via the 'culture of fear', thus restricting the authorities' leeway, and allow dissenters to get together in traditional structures and achieve bona fide common good?

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[122] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

[123] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

[124] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 16.

[125] The American political scientist avers the Welfare State maintains the poor in poverty as they are not encouraged to get out of it. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[126] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 16.

[127] Scottish Centre for Crime Justice Research, *Gangs and Global Exchange: Confronting the Glasgow Gang Complex-Conference Report* (University of Glasgow, 2011), 10.

[128] Tom Slater, "From 'Criminality' to Marginality: Rioting Against a Broken State", *Human Geography*, 3.4 (2011),1.

[129] Tapsfield et al., "PM".

[130] Gus John, "Oh Dear! That Criminal Minority Again! – Handsworth, Brixton, Tottenham", *Race Today*, 16.6 (January 1986).