

# *FROM 'CRIMINALITY' TO MARGINALITY: RIOTING AGAINST A BROKEN STATE*

*Tom Slater*

*Institute of Geography,  
University of Edinburgh*

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## **Abstract**

This article offers an analysis and critique of the political response to the 2011 urban riots in England. A brief account of the riots is advanced, where I connect the eruptions to the rise of advanced marginality and class/territorial stigmatisation in English cities, not only in terms of material deprivation but to the denial of dignity it implies. The article then re-places the swift deployment of punitive action and the 'broken society' discourse in response to the riots within the broader re-engineering of the state according to a neoliberal blueprint that articulates (inter alia) social welfare reduction and penal expansion at the bottom of the class structure, in contrast to a laissez-faire attitude at the top. By paying closer attention to the changing relationship between information and power (and in particular, the role of conservative think tanks), what Paul Gilroy calls a "poverty of the imagination" in addressing urban problems is exposed and challenged, revealing that the main issue to be addressed is not a broken society but a broken state.

**Key Words:** England riots, broken society, marginality, neoliberalism, think tanks.

*Desde la 'Criminalidad' hacia la 'Marginalidad' -protestando en contra de un estado descompuesto*

## **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza y critica la respuesta política a los disturbios de 2011 en Inglaterra. Primero, se presenta un resumen breve de los acontecimientos donde se relacionan las protestas con el aumento de la marginalidad y la estigmatización territorial y de clase en las ciudades Inglesas en términos de las privaciones materiales y la negación de la dignidad. Posteriormente el artículo se enfoca en el rápido despliegue de la acción represiva y en el discurso de la "sociedad descompuesta" como respuesta a los disturbios. Estos hechos se analizan en el contexto de la amplia re-estructuración del estado de acuerdo a la directiva neoliberal que articula la reducción del bienestar social y la expansión de del sistema penal en la base de la pirámide social en contraste con la posición permisiva "laissez-faire" con las comunidades pudientes. Mediante el análisis cuidadoso de la relación cambiante entre la información y el poder (especialmente el papel de las organizaciones no gubernamentales "ONGs" conservadoras), se expone lo que Paul Gilroy denomina "la pobreza de la imaginación" en el examen de los problemas urbanos. De esta manera se revela que el problema no es una sociedad descompuesta, el problema es un estado descompuesto.

**Palabras clave:** 2011-disturbios en Inglaterra, sociedad descompuesta, marginalidad, neoliberalismo, organizaciones no gubernamentales.

On 11th August 2011, in Camberwell Green magistrates court, a 23-year-old student with no criminal record was sentenced to a prison term of six months for stealing bottled water worth £3.50. This extraordinarily harsh sentence would normally be cause for widespread denunciation of judicial abuse but, following five nights of fiery rioting across a dozen English cities from 6 to 10 August, the extraordinary turned ordinary for the courts. Whereas the rampant financial criminality at the top of the class structure leading to the near-collapse of the banking system in the autumn of 2008 saw no reactions from criminal justice even as it sent the UK economy into a tailspin, overturning millions of lives and causing hundreds of billions of pounds in damage<sup>1</sup>, street fracas at the bottom estimated to have cost under 150 million pounds triggered a lightning-fast and brutal response from the penal wing of the state. Those convicted of burglary during these nocturnal disturbances (that is, looting, however minor) have been sentenced with stunning celerity to an average of 14.1 months in prison, nearly double the usual rate of 8.8 months; culprits of violent disorder reaped 10.4 months compared with the standard fare of 5.3 months while those nabbed for theft received sentences three times as long (7.1 months as against 2.4 months).<sup>2</sup> After the riots stopped, the police deployed munificent resources and manifold schemes to track down and round up the looters, mining television footage and web postings, setting up phone lines for snitching, running “Shop A Looter” posters on buses, while politicians promised to cut welfare and housing benefits to the families of the culprits.

Set against the political backdrop of steep state retrenchment and relentless invocation of personal responsibility, dramatic scenes of burning buildings, of bands of hooded and masked youths pillaging stores, and of thousands of police patrolling major streets in riot gear were bound to trigger rash statements and kneejerk government reaction. At the height of the riots as well as in their immediate aftermath, anyone attempting to formulate an explanation of the disorders other than a behavioural one was stridently denounced as effectively condoning or supporting rioting<sup>3</sup>. Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, embodied this posture when, upon being heckled by angry shopkeepers and frightened residents on the streets of Clapham, he responded: “It’s time we heard a little bit less about the sociological justifications for what is in my view nothing less than wanton criminality.” As incidents spread to several London districts, and then to other cities of England, “criminality,” of either the “pure” or the “copycat” variety, quickly became the commonsense reason given for their occurrence, one that circulated freely amongst police chiefs, politicians across party divides, and the mainstream media.

This commentary starts from the opposite premise, that we need not less but *more social science* to shed light on the latest wave of urban rioting, and elucidate its political import. To do this we must trace a double nexus. First, it is necessary to connect these eruptions to urban marginality in British society and pay attention not only to material deprivation but to the *denial of dignity* it implies. Second, we must re-place the swift deployment of punitive action and discourses in response to the riots within *the broader reengineering of the state* according to a neoliberal blueprint that articulates (inter alia) social welfare reduction and penal expansion.

### Structural Violence

Some facts on the riots are necessary before proceeding to the political response. They began on 6<sup>th</sup>

1 A damning account of the contribution of systematic illegal behavior to the financial bubble burst of 2008 is Charles H. Ferguson’s award-winning documentary, *The Inside Job* (2010). The main reaction of the British government was to roll out a rescue package topping 500 billion pounds, lest the banking system disintegrate.

2 These figures come from court data painstakingly assembled by the reporters of *The Guardian*, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/sep/15/riot-defendants-court-sentencing>

3 One illustration: the BBC was forced to issue an apology following its 9<sup>th</sup> August interrogation of the veteran broadcaster Darcus Howe. When Howe stated that he was not shocked by the riots, which in his view were an “insurrection” reflecting “the nature of the historical moment”, the interviewer accused him of being a rioter with a criminal past.

August, following a peaceful evening protest outside a police station on Tottenham High Road at the 4<sup>th</sup> August police killing of Mark Duggan, a father-of-four aged 29<sup>4</sup>. Not long after the protest concluded, a 16 year-old girl approached police officers to voice her anger, and was allegedly beaten back with batons (Eddo-Lodge, 2011). Two police cars, a bus and several shops were then attacked, looted and set ablaze in Tottenham, and the anger soon spread to nearby Wood Green. In the three nights that followed, rioting occurred across Greater London, in (inter alia) Enfield, Brixton, Hackney, Peckham, Clapham, Ealing and Croydon. Outside the capital, rioting occurred first in Birmingham (8<sup>th</sup> August), and later in Bristol, Manchester, Salford, Nottingham, Gloucester and Liverpool, with smaller disturbances in several other cities. At the time of writing, well over 3000 people have been arrested, and 1715 people have been brought before the courts, of which 315 have been convicted and sentenced.<sup>5</sup> The rather paltry court data available show that a majority of the 1715 are young (over half aged between 18 and 24), male (90%), with a previous caution/conviction (73%). A majority live in areas classified in government databases as ‘multiply deprived’ (and 66% of those areas became even more deprived between 2007 and 2010).<sup>6</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this commentary to offer an elaborate analysis of the motives of the rioters. Nonetheless, a few initial observations are worth making. In addition to the urgent need to dispel the shameful myth that *BlackBerry Messenger* was somehow *responsible* for what happened, the rioters’ focus on looting the stores rather than targeting any

4 The exact circumstances of his death remain unclear, but on 12<sup>th</sup> August the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), with customary obliquity, announced that it ‘may’ have given misleading information to journalists that shots were fired between Duggan and the police. Although a bullet was found lodged in a police radio, there is no evidence that it came from the gun in Duggan’s possession. Inquiries into Duggan’s death by the IPCC and the coroner continue, and a public hearing has been scheduled for 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

5 That 1400 young people are still awaiting the outcome of criminal proceedings brought against them – and over half of those are remanded in custody – reveals the sheer scale of the criminal justice operation, and the agony their families continue to endure as they await verdicts.

6 Data from <http://www.alex-singleton.com/>

direct symbols of the state (with the exception of a few police cars) is helpfully interpreted by amplifying and extending Bauman’s (2011) characterization of “defective and disqualified consumers” seeking prized items (electrical goods, smartphones, trainers) to avoid “the wrath, humiliation, spite and grudge aroused by not having them”.<sup>7</sup> As Bauman notes, social dignity is the most prized possession of all, and “non-shopping is the jarring and festering stigma of a life unfulfilled.” But taking this issue of dignity further, it is prudent to look beyond ‘non-shopping’ to understand why indignity is visited upon the dispossessed youth of English cities. According to an interpretation of interview data gathered by sociologists embedded in communities affected by rioting, the looting was not ‘mindless violence’ but rather “a response to repeated stop-and-search, racist policing, deprivation, poverty, unemployment, cuts to the educational maintenance allowance (EMA), anger, and inequalities between the haves and the have-nots.” (James, 2011). Furthermore, these interviews revealed that young people believe that “getting an education was the key to the golden gate, but a year after graduation they were still struggling to find work.” (ibid.) Escalating youth unemployment (especially between ages 16-21, and particularly affecting males) has become a major issue over the last decade, and given the demographic involved it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that angry youths torching and looting their own communities is best understood as an oblique response to the compassion fatigue displayed by the state<sup>8</sup>. Systemic failures of politics and a lack of civic regard amongst senior politicians of all stripes have created turbulence at the bottom of class structure.

The institutional failures that have hammered youth in recent times have produced a response that should have been expected (given youths’ perceived lack of any alternative): direct confrontation with authorities and the disruption of civil life, a response to “massive structural violence unleashed upon them” (Wacquant, 2008, p.24). Recent European history

7 <http://beinghumanthesedays.com/zygmunt-bauman-on-the-london-riotszygmunt-bauman-on-the-london-riots/>

8 Prominent political figures were at pains to show their annoyance at having to cancel their foreign holidays and return to England to deal with the crisis.

from the banlieues of France (Dikec, 2007) to the sidewalks of Athens (Sotiris, 2010) shows that if young people are robbed of a sense that they have a dignified future awaiting them, they will take to the streets in collective rage. When considering the abysmal record of income inequality under the last Labour government (Dorling, 2010a), and now an economic crisis being addressed by a brutal series of budget cuts affecting public services (rather than the redistributive path: increasing taxation of corporations and the wealthy), one can begin to grasp the feelings of shared indignity and dishonour among a generation that feels abandoned and betrayed. What is more, many youth involved reside in pockets of deep poverty surrounded by highly gentrified enclaves, particularly in London (Watt, 2006); their families have been relegated to stigmatised neighbourhoods<sup>9</sup> “in which public and private resources diminish just as the social fall of working-class households and the settlement of immigrant populations intensify competition for access to scarce public goods” (Wacquant, 2008, p.25).

On 15<sup>th</sup> August, Paul Gilroy spoke with poignant eloquence about the riots at a community meeting in Tottenham.<sup>10</sup> He reflected upon the 1981 riots in several British cities, and identified several parallels and contrasts in respect of the situation three decades later. Arguably his most useful analytical assertions were, first, that “the difference between 1981 and now is that the relationship between *information* and *power* has been changed, and our tactics for understanding our defence of our communities have to take those changes into account.” Second, he stated that “one of

9 The protest at the killing of Mark Duggan drew most of its participants from the intensely stigmatized housing estate of Broadwater Farm in north London. It is not by happenstance that many of the ensuing riots occurred in city districts frequently labeled as ‘no-go areas’; the potency of the stigma attached to certain districts such as Handsworth (Birmingham), St. Paul’s (Bristol) and Toxteth (Liverpool) should not be underestimated in any analysis of these events. As Wacquant (2007) has pointed out, the sense of personal indignity territorial stigmatization carries is a highly salient dimension of everyday life that negatively affects opportunities in social circles, education, and the labour market. Furthermore, such stigmatization encourages amongst residents strategies of mutual avoidance and distancing which exacerbate processes of social fission, feed interpersonal trust, and undermine the sense of collectivity necessary to engage in community-building and collective action.

10 <http://dreamofsafety.blogspot.com/2011/08/paul-gilroy-speaks-on-riots-august-2011.html>

the worst forms of poverty that’s shaped our situation is *poverty of the imagination*” in how social issues are addressed by politicians, particularly when considering the contexts to which they look for inspiration. These assertions provide a helpful framework to interpret the political import of the riots.

### **On Information and Power: The Myth of the ‘Broken Society’**

On the same day that Gilroy spoke in Tottenham, David Cameron visited a youth centre in his rural Witney constituency to deliver a speech outlining his Coalition government’s response to the riots<sup>11</sup>. He began by arguing that “these riots were not about poverty” but rather “about behaviour. People showing indifference to right and wrong. People with a twisted moral code. People with a complete absence of self-restraint.” To confront what he sees as a “slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations”, he outlined his “personal priority” in politics: “to mend our broken society”. Particular emphasis was placed on “turning around the lives of the 120,000<sup>12</sup> most troubled families in the country”:

“I don’t doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it’s standard for children to have a mum and not a dad, where it’s normal for young men to grow up without a male role model, looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger.”

He went on to outline that a “social fightback” should be centered around fixing a welfare system that “encourages the worst in people”:

“[There] is a moral hazard in our welfare system - people thinking they can be as irresponsible as they like because the state will always bail them out. ... I want us to look at toughening up the conditions for those who are out of work and receiving benefits and

11 <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/>

12 Quite where this figure came from is thus far a mystery.

speeding up our efforts to get all those who can work back to work. Work is at the heart of a responsible society.”

The story behind the rhetoric of a ‘broken society’ full of troubled families is a pure exemplar of the truncation and distortion of public understanding in respect of the ongoing articulation of poverty, social class and space in British society. The rhetoric did not begin with Cameron, but rather with the publications of a right-wing think tank, the *Centre for Social Justice* (CSJ), the brainchild of his Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: the self-proclaimed ‘quiet man’, Iain Duncan-Smith.

During his tortured tenure (2001-2003) as Conservative Party leader, Duncan-Smith visited one of the poorest urban areas of the UK: Easterhouse in Glasgow, which he described as “a wrecked and dreadful set up...with families locked into generational breakdown” (quoted in Derbyshire, 2010)<sup>13</sup>. In 2004, in an effort to get the ‘modernising’ Conservatives to enter the electorally significant *terra incognita* of poverty and welfare, Duncan-Smith established the CSJ with this mission statement:

“To put social justice at the heart of British politics and to build an alliance of poverty fighting organisations in order to see a reversal of social breakdown in the UK.”<sup>14</sup>

Whilst a brief visit to its website leaves one bombarded by two words: “breakdown” and “broken”, nowhere on it or in any of its publications can a definition of ‘social justice’ be found. Only in a 2010 interview in the *New Statesman* does Duncan-Smith attempt to define it: “I mean to improve the quality of people’s lives, which gives people the opportunity to improve their lives. In other words, so people’s quality of life is improved.” (quoted in Derbyshire, 2010).

13 He has on many occasions spoken of this visit a life-changing experience, “a sort of Damascene point” (ibid.).

14 <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/default.asp?pageRef=44>

In 2006 the CSJ produced a voluminous document entitled *Breakdown Britain*<sup>15</sup>, the end-product of Duncan-Smith being invited by Cameron “to consider how an incoming Conservative Government could tackle Britain’s most acute social problems.” (p.13) Duncan-Smith convened five working groups to conduct surveys and report back on five “pathways to poverty”: “family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependence, indebtedness and addiction,” for “if the drivers of poverty are not addressed an ever-growing underclass will be created” (ibid.) Considerable attention was given to “family breakdown” in particular, and the central tenets of the infamous ‘underclass’ thesis lie in the CSJ’s definition of familial strife:

“We have adopted an inclusive use of the term ‘family breakdown’ which can be summed up in three key words: dissolution, dysfunction, and ‘dadlessness’.” (p.29)

Peck (2006) notes how think tank conservatives “portray themselves as lonely voices of reason, as principled outsiders in a corrupt, distracted, and wrongheaded world” (p.682). This captures precisely the tenor of the *Breakdown Britain* report, especially on “family breakdown”:

“The policy-making community (which includes politicians, policy-makers and academics) has been markedly reluctant to grasp the nettle of family breakdown by being clear about the benefits of marriage and committed relationships, and the merits of supporting and encouraging them. (p.29)

In a series of papers, Gerry Mooney and colleagues (Mooney, 2009; Mooney and Neal, 2010; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Gray and Mooney, 2011) have provided an insightful interrogation of ‘Broken Britain’ rhetoric, from its roots in stigmatised eastern Glasgow,

15 It was later followed by a package of ‘policy recommendations’ entitled “Breakthrough Britain”, with numerous sub-reports focusing on particular cities: Breakthrough Manchester, Breakthrough Glasgow, Breakthrough Birmingham, etc.

to its electoral significance ('Broken Britain' was pivotal to the Conservatives' 2010 General Election campaign, propped up by the Rupert Murdoch tabloids), and now to its contemporary public policy undercurrent where "marriage and a stable two-parent family life are key to mending Broken Britain and thereby reducing levels of poverty." (Mooney and Neal, 2010: 145) For the CSJ, there is no social problem for which promoting marriage is not the solution. It is desperate to guard against any views to the contrary; for example, when a distinguished welfare historian argued that the CSJ present a misleading and empirically inaccurate portrait of a British past filled with "happy families" (Thane, 2010), the CSJ responded quickly with an aggrieved 24-page rebuttal written by two legal scholars (Probert and Callan, 2010). Over two decades ago, Charles Murray (1990, p.41) visited London and recommended to policy elites, journalists and think tank officials that the "civilising force of marriage" be the treatment for the "spreading disease" of an "underclass" of single mothers (for whom "sex is fun and [having] babies is endearing") and absent fathers ("essentially barbarians") (see Wacquant, 2009a, p.7-54). The CSJ has revived this much-derided perspective, which influenced David Cameron's choice of Father's Day to write a column in *The Sunday Telegraph* that made the following argument:

"I also think we need to make Britain a genuinely hostile place for fathers who go AWOL. It's high time runaway dads were stigmatised, and the full force of shame was heaped upon them. They should be looked at like drink drivers, people who are beyond the pale." (Cameron, 2011).

The notions of a broken society full of dysfunctional families heavily influenced Duncan-Smith's Welfare Reform Bill currently working its way through Parliament, the hallmark of which is conditionality: punitive sanctions applied to claimants<sup>16</sup>. If the Bill

16 In one of the more depressing outcomes of the riots, an e-petition calling for convicted rioters to have their benefits permanently removed attracted well over 100,000 signatures, meaning that the topic will now be subject to a Parliamentary debate. Nobody seems to have made the point that plans to

is passed, from 2013 unemployed people will lose benefits for three months if they refuse the offer of a job for the first time, six months if they refuse an offer twice, and three years if they refuse an offer three times. Given that the CSJ "Economic Dependency" working group "went to the United States to talk to the architects of American welfare reform", and that Lawrence Mead<sup>17</sup> was invited to Downing Street to advise the Coalition government on work policies immediately after it was formed in May 2010, it is unsurprising that Duncan-Smith commented thus on the launch of the Bill: "play ball or it's going to be difficult." (quoted in Porter and Riddell, 2010).

Think tanks have mastered the craft of *decision-based evidence making*, tailored to the needs of policy elites and politicians on the lookout for accessible catchphrases to woo a jaded electorate. Politicians rarely consult published social science research unless it supports the policies they want to pursue (not a single social scientist was a member of any of the CSJ working groups studying the five "pathways to poverty"). Instead, they depend on neat sound bites from surveys that measure little more than the worldview of the institute that commissions them, where policy 'researchers' set out to resolve false problems (even though they have been settled in the way survey questions were formulated). Paul Gilroy is correct that the relationship between information and power has changed since the 1980s: think tanks are now critically important in how state power is mobilized in the extension of conservative, market-rule dogma (Peck and Tickell, 2007); they have "irrevocably altered the institutional matrix through which policy knowledge percolates" (Wacquant, 2010, p.442). Think tanks actively manufacture ignorance to appease their funders (Monbiot, 2011), buffering politicians and their audiences from viable alternatives and inoculating them against the critique of autonomous scholarship.

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remove benefits are already underway for those living at the bottom of the class structure.

17 Mead was arguably the most influential scholarly voice behind 1990s welfare-to-work legislation in the United States, consistently arguing that paid employment is an obligation of citizenship.

### Super-Cop: the 'Poverty of the Imagination'

Gilroy's observation that there is a "poverty of the imagination" in dealing with social issues derives from his critique of politicians reaching for what they think is the future: the supposed lessons to be learned from the US. Gilroy was particularly troubled by something in Cameron's 11<sup>th</sup> August emergency statement to Parliament:

"I also believe we should be looking beyond our shores to learn the lessons from others who have faced similar problems. That is why I will be discussing how we can go further in getting to grips with gangs with people like Bill Bratton, former Commissioner of Police in New York and Los Angeles."

That organized street gangs were not a major factor in the riots did not seem to matter: Bill Bratton immediately found himself being touted by journalists as a Dick Tracy figure, a 'super-cop' who could come and sort out the problem of English street crime once and for all<sup>18</sup> because of his apparent successes in New York and Los Angeles.

Although Bratton arguably helped rebuild police morale in both New York and Los Angeles, the drop in crime in both those cities had nothing to do with his stewardship. In New York, where he was in charge for only two years, he applied 'zero tolerance' in a city where crime was already dropping for several other reasons (Bowling, 1999; Harcourt, 2001); in Los Angeles he applied 'community policing' (the exact opposite tactic) and crime dipped for other reasons (Goldberger and Rosenfeld, 2009). Proof of Bratton's ineffectiveness is that he failed miserably in impacting crime in Latin America, where he sold his 'expertise' through his private security firm (Swanson, 2007; Mountz and Curran, 2009). The irony is that UK policy elites want Bratton to come to England and deliver 'zero tolerance' when Bratton saw the

<sup>18</sup> Bratton was attracted to the vacant post of Chief Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police until it was realized that, as a non-UK citizen, he could not apply.

failure of that model and switched to 'community policing' - which is patterned after UK policing. In the US, Bratton's expertise is with cleaning up police department corruption at the bottom and facing lethal street violence. In urban England, the problem is police corruption at the top (as evidenced by the phone-hacking scandal) and low-level predominantly non-lethal street disorders. These are very different issues, and Bratton as consultant will add nothing progressive to the debate about how to address the issue of street crime sensitively and humanely.

The structural reasons for the English riots are not issues that a US police chief can resolve, yet the climate of 'fast' international policy transfer that has become so embedded in the institutional apparatus of neoliberal statecraft (Ward and McCann, 2011) ensures that the causes of advanced urban marginality (state retrenchment, economic deregulation, wage labour fragmentation) are ignored in favour of expanding the penal wing of the state (Wacquant, 2009b). Again the role of think tanks is critically important: Bratton's status as a 'super-cop' is less a media construct and more a think-tank fabrication: the Manhattan Institute in New York City played a pivotal role in (re)packaging and validating the 'broken windows theory' in the US (even as it was repeatedly refuted by that country's respected criminologists) and in the international dissemination (via like-minded think tanks in London) of the strategy of 'zero tolerance' policing which was allegedly derived from it (Mitchell, 2010). If we are to challenge the poverty of the imagination that shields the public from examples of progressive policies in countries other than the US, it is essential to expose the practices and funding of think tanks, to scrutinize their glossy and authoritative pseudo-scientific publications, and dispel the myths propagated by their speechwriters and backroom 'researchers'.

### A Class Primer?

"What I think we shouldn't do is say, as some seem to on the left: 'Well, we can't really do anything about the problem of the riots and criminality that we saw until we have dealt with

selfishness and greed elsewhere.’ Some people almost say that until we deal with the problem of inequality in our society, there is nothing you can do to deal with rioting.”

David Cameron, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011

‘Inequality’ is always a word that makes conservative politicians feel uncomfortable. This is partly because addressing and arresting inequality invokes what they see as the fearsome spectre of ‘equality’, which has redistributive and socialist connotations offensive to free market ideology. Although the *Centre for Social Justice* has tried to change the very meaning of social justice, conservatives in the UK are most concerned with avoiding social (family) breakdown, not achieving an abstraction like “justice”, and this has always underpinned their view of the welfare state. Conservative politicians, historically, only take an interest in such matters only in so far as it assists social cohesion to do so, and doesn’t ferment revolt where the wealthy might be required to relinquish their private property rights. One of the more fascinating debates to have emerged in the UK over the past two years has been around Wilkinson and Pickett’s (2010) best-selling *The Spirit Level*, which presents remarkably wide-ranging evidence to demonstrate that more equal societies are better for everyone, *including the wealthy*<sup>19</sup>. However, though this work is foundational, and important for policy remediation vis-à-vis inequality, not to mention when combined with similar contributions that demonstrate the extent and damaging implications of inequality in the UK (Dorling, 2010b), such volumes require the support of analyses that focus on the role of the *broken state* as the major determinant of the intensity and forms assumed by advanced marginality.

Cabinet ministers and leading police officers are highly authoritarian and punitive when it comes to dealing with the destructive consequences of economic deregulation for those at the lower end of the class

19 Their conclusions scared the right so deeply that *Policy Exchange*, another think tank described as David Cameron’s “favourite”, commissioned a formerly leftist urban scholar, Peter Saunders (2010), to interrogate their data and the methodology under a declamatory response entitled “Beware False Prophets”.

and status spectrum. The state is responding to the marginality *it has created* (manifested in the existence of unemployment, homelessness, ‘criminality’, drugs, idle and apoplectic “feral underclass”<sup>20</sup> youths, school exclusion, ‘family breakdown’) by *containing* it and inducing the expanding precariat (Standing, 2011) to accept the unstable and underpaid jobs of the deregulated service economy via workfarist reforms. But at the same time, those ministers and police officers exhibit a strikingly laissez-faire ethos toward the causal agents of inequality at the top end: powerful corporations and the ‘overclass’ (for example, media tycoons and heads of financial and banking corporations, but also at parliamentarians who stole from the public coffers with illegal reimbursements). It speaks volumes of the civic unaccountability and personal immorality of ruling elites over the past decade that the phrase “copycat criminality” has not been applied to the financial institutions of the London square mile (and the politicians that count on donations from those institutions), and that the massive crime and commotion that triggered the 2007-8 financial collapse has still gone unpunished whilst the state reacts with diligence and virulence against street crime. The fact that all political parties appear to dance to the same (neo)liberal-paternalist anthem not only reveals the evaporation of legitimacy they have inflicted upon themselves; it reveals the prescience of Colin Leys’ (1990) warning that “for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it have no serious rival.” (p.127) The rival ideology, however, will not be found in Westminster. Paul Gilroy concluded his contribution to the Tottenham community meeting by pointing out that the reaction to the riots is a valuable “primer” in class solidarity, where ruling elites are “telling us something”:

“[T]hey think and act and conduct themselves like a class. They chat to each other, they marry each other, they go to the same places... And if we want to act as a body, if we want to act in concert, we have to learn

20 This was the description of the rioters made by Kenneth Clarke, the Justice Secretary.



something from the way they conduct themselves, even as we challenge what they do.”

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