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Re-reading the England Riots

A Psychoanalytic Study of the Explanations of
the Riots

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Abstract

The explanations of what caused the England riots in 2011 are many. Numerous commentators, politicians and reports tried to make sense of the four days in August 2011 that caused widespread disorder in London and other cities. Although there are both insightful and some less insightful descriptions of its causes, the problem this study identifies and addresses is the more or less absence of a politicisation of the riots in the common explanations. Whilst the study asks how they function in order to appear apolitical, the task of examining this is undertaken with psychoanalytic theory. In order to conduct such a study the ideas of Slavoj Žižek are drawn upon to develop a theoretical framework and method. Herein the explanations pointing out criminality, moral decline, dysfunctional families and inequality as the causes are analysed to show what must be suppressed in order to steer the causes away from politics. It is illustrated how the explanations shifts emphasise from collective problems to instead impute them to groups.

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1 Introduction

On August 4 2011, Mark Duggan, allegedly a drug dealer, is shot dead by police in Tottenham, London. What unfolded was the worst riots in three decades, approximately 15 000 people were involved in rioting, arsons, burglary and looting with the result of five dead and around half a billion pounds worth of damage. 24-hour media coverage did not make it less dramatic. As everyone tried to make sense of what was happening, identify causes; also the media was made into a cause. In fact, it seemed as if anything could be made into a cause. BBC initially referred to the people involved as protesters, which quickly was criticised, this was a riot not protests. While disorder spread in London and to other cities, the tread that runs through the riots was looting of high value consumer goods. A reflection of the consumerism culture or the evidence for why there were no socio-political motives remains an open question.

The problem with pinning down the causes related to the fact that the rioters did not seem to share any background such as race or class and neither did they make any demands. The fatal shooting of a black man by the police was a reminder of the riots in England in the 1980s, but here, everyone seemed to agree this was just the spark. That, however, did not stop Professor David Starkey on BBC's *newsnight* from suggesting that the 'whites had become black'. In the same programme sat Owen Jones, writer of *Chavs*, a term referring to the underclass. While Professor Starkey's statement created anger, Jones asks how it has become so widespread and acceptable to demonize the poor in Britain. Among all the explanations of the riots, the major ones seem to involve the less well off. In many ways, these correspond to the Conservatives' 'Broken Britain' narrative, which holds crime, welfare dependence and dysfunctional families as endemic in Britain. Although these are highly political explanations, what strikes me is how the major explanations even so present the causes of and solutions to the riots as apolitical. This is most easily detected in the change of meaning when focus is shifted from protesters to rioters. I hope this brief presentation of the riots has led the reader to sense that the subject matter of this study is not the riots as such but the explanations of them.

1.2 Research Objectives

In relation to the different explanations referred to above, this study will scrutinise how the riots are presented as largely divorced from politics, both in its causes, responses and in their solutions. Put differently, the study seeks to problematise the ways in which the riots have been explained, largely because each report of the riots recognise the same causes. Against this background the study is guided by the following research question: How do the explanations function in order to present an essentially apolitical understanding of the riots?

Crucial in this respect is how this is accomplished and the answer to this question is not obvious. As a result, the objective of this thesis remains not only with the explanations of the riots but also in the creation of a theoretical framework wherein these can be analysed. The aim of this study is thus twofold. First, it seeks to develop a theoretical framework, second, apply this on the four major explanations of the riots.

While the study takes as its task to examine how the explanations circle around an apolitical kernel, I do so by a turn to psychoanalytic theory. I do so simply because the theory and method provides a rich vocabulary of addressing today's post-political situation and offer a method for problematising the ways problems are posed. The psychoanalytic vocabulary applied in this study is never far away from a discourse analysis. However, in contrast with a solely linguistic approach, psychoanalysis emerges with a theorisation of both affect and the linguistic, enabling a thicker theorisation of society. While this has been shown in numerous articles and books, to the best of my knowledge there is little concrete analysis of subject matter. Therefore, I hope to show how psychoanalytic theory can cast new light on contemporary phenomenon. There is, however, no ready-made psychoanalytic socio-political theory, only parts presented in the works of Slavoj Žižek. His concepts stems from Jacques Lacan, who, in his 'return to Freud' read Freud through linguistics. I myself had to return to Lacan in order to thoroughly understand Žižek.

Although the explanations of the riots emphasise real problems in the British society, I intend to show how the basic function of the explanations obscures their political dimension. By function, I refer to two senses of the term. Firstly, the study explore what and how political dimensions of the explanations are disavowed, thereafter I delineate how the explanations shift the focus from political explanations to apolitical explanations.

1.3 Disposition

To take issue with the explanations of the riots the study is organised in the following way. The next section presents a brief overview of the post-structural developments in the social sciences. I begin the second chapter by delineating the theoretical framework which informs the study. As stated above, my entrance to psychoanalytic theory was through Žižek and I had to return to its origins in Lacan in order to understand him properly. After a brief review of my understanding of Lacan, the chapter turn to describe and develop the concepts utilised in this study. This accounts for an extensive part of the study. In the third chapter the theoretical frameworks' possibilities and limitations are considered before turning to how data was collected. At the end of that chapter, I will have bridged the theoretical framework with the method. The fourth chapter presents the explanations of the riots in the framework.

1.4 Literature Review

Given the central role of the psychoanalytic framework in this study I believe it is crucial to situate it in relation with other critical approaches. In this brief and selective overview, I am however forced to exclude prominent intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, but I hope it sets the contour of this study.

Where, then, should a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to socio-political analysis be located in the field of critical theory? The question should perhaps be reformulated simply because there is no coherent Lacanian theory for social analysis. While this is dealt with by developing a theoretical framework which relies heavily on Žižek's ideas, this framework is at once unavoidably located in relation to broader themes in the social sciences. I want, however, to begin by present the motivation of the theoretical approach to the riots. In the beginnings of 1990s, David Campbell in his *Writing Security* (1998) presented an analysis of the foreign policy of the United States. In it, he developed the idea that 'the other', which has taken many forms throughout the years, is constitutive

of the very identity of the United States. Put simply, foreign policy, he argued, is not the response to a threat, but the condition of the identity of 'us'. In psychoanalytic theory I find a similar theorisation, yet a much more profound understanding of the conditions of 'them' contra 'us'. Campbell thus asserted the constitutive character of language. This is also known as performativity, a concept perhaps most commonly associated with Judith Butler. In short, it refers to that language has the ability to create what it names. An illustrative example is immigration policies, which, on the one hand defines immigrants, on the other hand, constructs a sense of 'us'.

No longer, then, can language be defined as simply referring to what it represent. This is part of what commonly is termed the linguistic turn in the social sciences, which dates back to Ferdinand de Saussure who, in the twentieth century, argued that the meaning of a word is given due to its difference from other words, not what it refers to. This, however, does not mean objects cease to exist outside of language; rather, what such approach holds is that meaning of objects is only available through language (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:161). These ideas are commonly gathered under the heading post-modern theory or post-structuralism. Although the terms envelop a diverse group of 20th- and 21st century intellectuals they share, I believe, some characteristics. Anti-essentialism is such a position. It stresses that the social world and thus identities are not pre-given or fixed (Jørgensen & Phillips 2010:5). This has been especially valuable for the analysis of identities, dismantling identities such as gender and race. Such theorisation cannot proceed from a binary logic; I am this because I am not that. Rather it stress that identities can be constituted through an unlimited number of other identities (Butler 2000:30-31). It has thus made possible the politicisation of disadvantaged groups.

Yet, the impact of the linguistic turn is not bound to the theorisation of subjects. A reference point is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2008). Since identities always can be constructed differently, meaning is in constant negotiation among people. Therefore, they argued, this logic applies to society at large. This means that systems of meaning, discourses, never can fix the meaning of, say democracy. In effect, then, even if everyone agreed on what democracy is and how it should function there is always a possibility to create a different meaning. The failure of finally settle the meaning of for instance democracy leads them to assert that society is essentially characterised by antagonism. However, the correlation between theory and politics can also be seen as problematic. The development of these anti-foundationalist perspectives can be understood in relation to the decline in socialism. Two catchphrases here is Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'the end of great narratives' which corresponds to the later 'the end of history', which Francis Fukuyama proposed by the fall of communism with liberal-democracy and capitalism as the system remaining (Boucher

& Sharpe 2010:32; Malpas 2006:27-28). Now, what can this have to do with this study?

The position of Žižek and those working in the Žižekian tradition and also Laclau and Mouffe is that precisely because today is presented as a post-ideological age analysis of this seemingly neutral order is more needed than ever. Versions of Fredric Jameson's question 'why is it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' guides much of the analysis of those working in the Žižekian tradition. Any strict distinction between economy, society and theory is in this view not possible.

2 Theoretical Approach

The writings of Jacques Lacan, born in 1901, died in 1981, have been described as thick, dense, theoretical on the verge of being incomprehensible. As his theories draws on ideas from among other things mathematics and mythology, the best way to describe him is perhaps with his reading of Freud through linguistics. It was, however, not until Žižek developed his Lacanian framework illustrated with examples from popular culture and politics, ranging from toilet design to anti-Semitism, Lacan was made accessible. And it is Žižek's Lacan that is of interest here. Yet, even the reader without knowledge in psychoanalysis probably associates it with therapy. The initial objection is therefore how a theory of individual processes can be transferred to society. In fact, psychoanalysis never made a strict distinction. To illustrate this, one of Lacan's more famous statements 'the unconscious is structured like a language' means the language people use and the discourses people exist in flows through people both consciously and unconsciously. This is in many ways different from the Cartesian subject, 'I think therefore I am', and the autonomous rational individual. Another way of putting this is with neurobiology. Today depression, for instance, is explained by processes in the brain but what such perspective fails to acknowledge is that its causes and its meaning are always social and have social effects (Žižek 2006b:175). In sum, the focus of psychoanalysis involves not the subject but its place in society. In Lacanian terms, the social world is referred to as the Symbolic. When this study use the Symbolic it names what usually is thought off as reality, the world of language and culture, of subjects and discourses, in short, the network of social relations (Žižek 2006a:9).

2.1 The Subject in Lacanian Psychoanalysis

To comprehend the concepts and thinking below, to grasp the foundations of the theoretical framework, I would like to begin in an end which might seem far-fetched: the infant in psychoanalysis. The chapter starts with this because it is in the development from infant to subject that processes vital to the theoretical framework takes place. By outlining the child's

development, the aim is not to recite Lacan but to bridge Lacan's theorisation of the subject to a theorisation of society. Imperative of both approaches is desire and language.

The child is born into the world because of someone's desire; the vast amount of reasons for bringing a child into the world is as such not important (Fink 1997:50). The same is also true of language. A central locus for the child is at birth reserved in language; the child is born into language, a language that is not of his or her own making (Fink 1997:5). These arguments treat desire and language as something beyond oneself, they are so to speak the other's desire and the other's language. In terms of language, what is said will always be interpreted by others (Fink 1999:235). This is both the gift and curse of language. As speaking subjects people are accustomed to say 'that's not what I meant', implying that interpretation remains crucial and that people do not fully master the language they speak (Fink 1999:43). One example is indicative of this. Scholars at London School of Economics and journalists at the Guardian conducted interviews with people involved in the riots to gain understanding of its causes. The implication of such research is captured in the feeling that oneself or others sometimes speak merely as transmitters of a discourse.

In terms of desire, for the infant to become a subject a crucial process need to take place. In general, the mother will have other desires independently of the child, and it is the realisation of this, when the child comes to understand it is not the sole desire of the mother, that it is possible to speak of subjectivity. There is no notion of self and other before this.

Being a crucial stage, the presumed unity between child and mother is lost with the entry into language and with the advent of desire. It is this unity, the mother-child symbiosis, which the father interrupts. This is what Freud called the Oedipus complex. It is referred to as the 'Name of the father' by Lacan, but in this study, its metaphorical meaning is the same. As the child recognise that the mother's desire cannot be satisfied by him or her it comes with the inevitable realisation that one is lacking something (Fink 1997:59). In this sense, the subject will always be rifted by lack because what he or she is missing is something that will never be known. This gives rise to, both in Lacanian psychoanalysis and in Žižek's social analysis, the question 'Che Vuoi?' – 'what does the other want'. Because the rioters desires cannot be known, at least not with certainty, I will simply theorise this question to be what each explanation asks and tries to answer. On the other hand, this something is for the child presumed to be possessed by the father. The father's function is therefore merely the name of the entry into the Symbolic, the world of language that is reality, and the birth of desire. It takes the form of a prohibition, prohibiting desire for the mother, in the end banning something which is already always lost. He is thus the third term in the Oedipus triangle. He is the reason the mother's desire is directed elsewhere, responsible for

ending the harmonious unity.

How then does this correspond to this study? I take what above was termed the Oedipus complex to be also the foundation of discourses. It is with the advent of desire and even more important, how desire is structured against an obstacle, that the study can begin to theorise the explanations. Imperative of this study will be to theorise the explanations as the interplay between lack and wholeness. To do so I will introduce the riots.

2.2 The Discursive Oedipus Complex

The example outlined below will show how discourses are more than purely linguistic; it draws attention to what lies in the borderland between what can be put into words and that which cannot - enjoyment and desire. The identity of Englishness, or any discourse for that matter, is not only a source of identification but it also provides people with a sense of enjoyment. There are, however, always inconsistencies in this discourse. The riots of 2011 are one such inconsistency which never would be acknowledged to be a problem internal to the identity. Instead, the riots are given a cause outside of national identification, as something alien to the imaginary of England as seen in the explanations. It is externalised, for example as a problem of black culture or moral decline on parts of Britain. Given that a harmonious identity of Englishness is impossible, that there will always be some failures, the rioter, the welfare recipient or whatever form this takes is not only an obstacle but also necessary to explain the continuously failure of the identity (McMillan 2008:10). An obstacle such as the rioter thus sustains the desire for a complete identity. This is equivalent to the desire for a lost unity in the Oedipus complex. For the subject the never-ending search for completeness is at once impossible because people are internally split, but this void is at the same time necessarily what sustains people as subjects of desire. Whilst the father is how the already impossible wholeness is explained away in the Oedipus complex, the rioter for example fills that function with respect to Englishness. Therefore, most important is not that each explanation is incomplete but that it always appears as if it can be whole, harmonic, or whatever term used to describe the good society (Daly 1999a:224-225). To analyse the explanations of the riots the study proceeds from the understanding that these explanations are driven by desire, constituted by lack and an Other. This is the socio-political meaning of the Oedipus complex, explaining the basic function of any discourse.

I take this understanding to give rise to four problems or

characteristics for any discourse. Because these parts form only a small amount of the theoretical complex of Lacan, I will throughout this chapter and the next outline why I apply these.

2.3 Transgression and Law, the Other and Enjoyment

The notion that transgression is dependent on the law and more importantly that the law gives rise to its own transgression is the logic behind the Oedipus complex. For Žižek there is nothing spontaneous in obeying the law, it is a constant battle against ourselves since everyone desire in relation to the law (2006b:90). He suggests that transgressing the law collectively is what holds together a group when for example holding racist prejudices which are forbidden by the written law (*ibid.*:369). I, however, take this logic to mean that the concept law-transgression theorise how a problem appearing to be opposite or external to something can be internal. This allows the study to look at the relationship between what each explanation presents as the good society and the obstacle to this as interdependent. In other words, law stands for the impossible wholeness and transgression is the metaphor for the necessary obstacle to that wholeness. In the example above Englishness is that wholeness. What stain this imaginary are the causes of the urban riots, riots that cannot be acknowledged to result from the contemporary socio-political situation of England. What I intend to show with this concept is how causes of the riots are internal to Englishness.

Central in this respect is the Other. As a crucial concept in the social sciences, Žižek however uses the term the Other in many different, and sometimes confusing, ways. Here I limit its use to one meaning. The Other can so to speak be ascribed the role of committing the original sin, taking away an desired unity. The paradox involved is, necessarily, that the Other may very well be what sustains desire. In anti-Semitic discourses, the Jew is that Other while the Other in neo-liberal discourse may be a heavy-handed state. Put simply, any one blocking access to wholeness can be positioned as Other. This postulation of an Other always involves an amount of misrecognition. In relation to this study, Žižek would claim that even if the absence of father figures is a cause for the riots, the motivation behind this argument is nevertheless false because the Other is always a post-construction (Žižek 2009:85). The Other can so function as a way to organise a range of problems into a coherent story (Žižek 2008:18). There is, however, no necessity for the Other to be an

enemy. I believe that the state, for example, can hold this position. It functions as something people can complain about, blame for its misfortunes, but which nevertheless plays an important role for people. How do these insights help this study forward? Foremost it allows a theorisation of how the explanations function by introducing one or several Others.

It is, however, not enough to theorise the Other merely as an obstacle. In the context of the Oedipus complex, the father is the presumed perpetrator of the lost unity, he is the Other who prohibits or takes away enjoyment. Žižek brought forward the idea that racism always builds on ideas of our and others enjoyment. This came to be known as the ‘theft of enjoyment’ thesis and it is the third concept introduced here. It will not be bound to racism but used here because it allows a theorisation of what gives the explanations substance. Enjoyment, or in its original terminology *jouissance*, meaning a combination of pleasure and pain, is a major concept in Lacan’s thinking. It is what each and everyone have to give up when the father is introduced in the Oedipus complex. Although enjoyment is a simplification of both the concept and Lacan’s ideas, the best way to explain Žižek’s enjoyment-thesis is to again emphasise the assumption from where this study departed. The driving force of discourses always relates to why enjoyment is inadequate and how this can be fixed (Fink 2004:155). This means all political communities or political discourses explicate a lack of enjoyment and in what this enjoyment consist (Sharpe & Boucher 2010:19). For the purposes of this study the question how enjoyment was lost should also be added (Daly & Žižek 2004:110). Although the concept enjoyment may at first seem out of place in socio-political analysis Mouffe suggests this to be significant in examining the role of affect in politics:

For Žižek, nationalist hatred emerges when another nation is perceived as threatening our enjoyment. It has its origins therefore in the way social groups deal with their lack of enjoyment by attributing it to the presence of an enemy which is ‘stealing’ it. (2005:28)

This is how for example immigrants can be presented as stealing ‘our’ jobs while simultaneously be lazy and living on benefits (Žižek 2006b:300). In this case, the way Others’ seem to enjoy working or how they illicitly enjoy our social security system is what is bothering. The implication of Other’s enjoyment, and closely bound to enjoyment, is envy. Therefore, employment or money is not the concern in the example above, what Žižek proposes is that envy always is envy of enjoyment, of Others’ excessive enjoyment (1997:54).

Before introducing the concept the Real and the last of the four concepts, decline in Symbolic authority, the discussion of lack, wholeness and a variety of other concepts leaves one question open, exactly in what does this wholeness consist in the context of this study? Because there are

four explanations of the riots of interest in this study, I theorise this notion of wholeness as enveloping them all. The study proposes Englishness to be that common notion, an open concept that these explanations invest with meaning. Such a concept is by Laclau named an empty signifier because any concept "...which, in a certain political context becomes the signifier of the lack, plays the same role. Politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers" (2003:312). At the level of identification, it is an impossible wholeness because the image of Englishmen never fully overlaps with the subject. It is an ideal image. This is what Lacan meant be alienation in language; there is always a gap between myself and language, between my symbolic role and myself (Fink 1997:52). Yet, there is a more important aspect of the impossibility of Englishness. Following the concept law-transgression the study will treat the riots as internal to, caused by, Englishness rather than the exception they are implied to be. Why, then, not stop there, why use concepts such as the Other and enjoyment? It is precisely because these internal failures are transformed into Others it is possible to show the explanations function (Glynos 2008:681).

2.4 The Real

The Real is the Lacanian name of that which cannot or has not yet been symbolised, put into words and given meaning. This difficult sentence in a way illustrates its meaning because trying to describe something resisting to be put into language would be logically unattainable. Therefore, its existence per se can be challenged since existence depends on language, that is, because meaning and reality is mediated through language (Fink 1997:25). In clinical sessions, the analyst would want the analysand to try to put into words what he or she has been unable to capture in words. The traumatic encounter for a child with something that escapes understanding, something potentially gaining meaning later on in life, is another example of the Real. As such, the Real is not reality stripped of different discourses; rather, cancelling out the Real creates reality (*ibid.*). However, no discourse can say it all, it always has to exclude something in order to say something.

Another way of describing it is with Fink's example of physics. Research in physics does not intend to change the Real, but rather bring the unknown into symbolisation (1997:144). Thus, the difference between natural science and social science can be described as a difference in relations with the Real. The focus of psychoanalysis is not so much the

event as such but the way it is dealt with, given meaning. Put differently, the issue of this study is not representations of the riots in relation to the riots as such, but representations of the riots and the failure of representation (Glynos 2001a:197). The theorisation of the riots as Real, before given meaning, means it is precisely this failure of representation, impossibility of wholeness, which allows multiple accounts of the riots to exist.

The Real can also be understood as part of the research-problem. In *On the Political* (2005) Chantal Mouffe argues that an increased centrism in national politics is the cause of symptoms such as far-right parties. This is another example of when the Real erupts in the Symbolic, when consensus characterise politics, political antagonism and alternatives is excluded, pushed into the Real, and returns in the form of for example extremism. If, then, politics is driven by desire the situation described by Mouffe is one where politics lacks passion. The cause of any political ideology and party is a desire constituted by the obstacle, that is, a competing political view. The increased shared views among parties thus kills desire, what in psychoanalysis is called a lack of lack. Here, Žižek makes an important point. In a political landscape of de-politicisation, expert administration and the end of great causes the only way to add passion into politics is through fear (Žižek 2009:34). Given the lack of political causes and solutions of the riots found in the material of this study it is not only my assumption that that can be theorised as Real but also why the focus on the rioting Other is important. Others add passion when political antagonism is lacking.

Having come this far in the theoretical framework, I have argued that the explanations of the riots as well as the notion of Englishness is characterised by lack, an impossibility of what here is referred to as wholeness. What makes this interesting and crucial in the function of the explanations is when impossibility is translated into prohibition; not only does lack create desire, the result must necessarily be that the obstacle also is constitutive of wholeness. What then if this logic does not function so smoothly as described up until Mouffe's thesis? The concept I believe can account for such a situation is decline in Symbolic authority.

2.5 Symbolic Authority or Generalised Perversion

In order to outline the concept Symbolic Authority I begin by referring to what Lacanian term perversion. In the clinical context perversion entails

provocative acts, against conventions or laws. The first thing to note is not the enjoyment the pervert gets from the transgression, which perhaps is what most people associate with a pervert. Instead, the important part refers back to others rather than the pervert him or herself. Lacan theorised it as attempts to bring the law into being, attempts to force an Other to say enough, to draw the line (Fink 1999:181). This means the acts are means towards an end, to re-establish what is allegedly violated. In psychoanalytic terms, it involves a partial failure of the Oedipus complex, that is, it does not function as described above with the law as that which I always take into consideration. Here that law is missing or vague. Against the background of this being an individual diagnoses Žižek has theorised it on the societal level. I will briefly explain what he means by perversion before discussing its value for this study. Žižek uses generalised perversion to characterise contemporary society. Due in large part, he believes this to be the consequence of capitalism and neo-liberalism, rendered visible in most aspects of everyday life. Most easily explained he turns contemporary notions such as individual choice, increased freedom and frictionless politics around to show how it instead of freeing people from traditional forms of authority rather leads to new types of problems. On the other hand, one consequence is for example an increased focus on gender, ethnicity and race (Glynos 2001b:81). But in the larger perspective Glynos says the "... disintegration of traditional forms of authority coincides with the decline of our faith in the symbolic Other (the symbolic order)." (2001b: 79). Basically, what Glynos means is a general decline in trust but also waning economic, existential, as well as physical security, in short: increased uncertainty. Thematically this notion overlaps with Zygmunt Bauman's (2008) characterisation of contemporary society. If the state previously guaranteed security, its influence is today increasingly seen as oppressive. Instead, in the market-based society where people are consumers, people are encouraged to seek individual solutions to socio-political problems. If these obstacles previously involved political opponents, the state bureaucracy and the alike, the absence of these Others' takes the form of for example immigrants, criminals or religious groups. This bleak picture of today leads Žižek to assert that all these small Others' is fetishes replacing and obscuring the true cause of today's problems - capitalism.

Whilst this forms the understanding of perversion, I intend to use the concept slightly differently. Firstly, instead of understanding perversion as an essentially negative concept it can account for how people in general by no means are blind to their environment. They are rather in a situation where knowing something does not involve acting accordingly. The Lacanian formula, which Žižek uses for this, is 'I know very well but I do it anyway' (2006b:58). Given the explanations' focus on lacking boundaries as a problem behind the riots I believe perversion can provide a productive theorisation of the problems proposed. Essentially, what perversion asks the explanations is whether the proposed problem, for

example lack of moral, is that very group specific or if it actually concerns society and politics.

3 Research Strategy

This chapter is divided into three parts. I begin by discussing the ontological aspects of the theoretical framework. Crucial in this respect is what it means to theorise the explanations of the riots as discourses. The overall aim also includes a discussion on the theoretical frameworks' implications for the knowledge produced in this study. The second section summarises how data was collected. Lastly, the third section outlines the method used to organise and analyse the explanations. It will consequently treat question concerning research, what tools to be used to analyse the aspect of society relevant for this study and how material was collected in order to conduct such study. As the distance between the theory and methodology is minimal, this chapter will be somewhat repetitive, yet in a constructive way.

3.1 Methodological Approach

Patrick Jackson's taxonomy of what he terms philosophical wagers is a good starting point in this section. His book *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (2011) outlines broadly four methodological positions all relating to what kind of knowledge research can access and what the researchers relation to this is. Two parts of his work merit further consideration because these make up the foundation of the positions. Scientific ontology and philosophical ontology name two premises for any methodology. The first relates to what I can know, that is, can I gain knowledge of only observable phenomenon's or is it also possible to gain knowledge about unobservable things (Jackson 2011:27)? The brief answer here is that this study is concerned with discourses, which goes beyond the observable. Secondly, philosophical ontology refers to if there is a mind-world split, which means, do I compare research with an independently existing world, as in falsification, or are researchers and what is studied already entwined to a degree where this split is nonexistent (*ibid.*:31)? The premise in this study is that in rejecting a meta-language, a neutral place, my research can never attain a position outside discourses. It is these two positions that make this study able to locate processes which make the explanations of the riots possible in the first place. With

this established the study now turns to how this relates to this study.

3.1.1 Epistemology and Ontology in Psychoanalytic Theory

A question sometimes raised when discourses are discussed is ‘what about reality’, implying there is something more: a reality beyond discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2010:177). This raises an important point as this section seeks to situate discourses in general and conclude by outlining how the concept is used. While it is debated to what extent reality is made up of discourses, theories put forward different views of what influence discourses while others argues that discourses encompass all social aspects (*ibid.*:19-20). This is worth stressing because, as Jørgensen and Phillips argues, if discourses are more or less determined by social processes outside of the discursive it would make little sense to conduct analysis of discourses (2010:19).

As discourses in this study are treated as systems encompassing all societal aspects, there is no outside of discourses, no privileged point from where they can be accessed in a neutral fashion (Fink 1997:137). What does it mean for this study? Ideology is traditionally thought of as misperceptions of reality, it is an epistemological problem. Put simply, it involves true knowledge on the one hand, false knowledge on the other (Glynos 2001a:196-197). Contrary to this and given the theoretical approach outlined above, reality as such is lived through discourses. Without discourses, there would be no reality. The theoretical framework thus shifts the focus from epistemology to ontology. Put differently, the aim with this study is not to find out which discourse represents reality precisely because the discourses analysed here and discourses in general are what make up reality (Jackson 2011:173). A second and related point is that even if a discourse points out the true conditions of a subject matter, the motive of doing so is in psychoanalysis to cover up the fundamental lack of every discourse (Glynos 2001b:95). This leads back to the possibilities with the theory applied here. What I can do is to show how the conception of the riots is neither neutral nor natural and what is necessary for a particular explanation to function. I shall return to this topic when outlining the method but it is worth to note Laclau and Žižek’s additional criterion for analysis, research should also show how discourses grips people (Glynos 2001a:195).

Throughout the rest of the study, the explanations of the riots will be treated as discourses. Discourse is a widely used and misused concept in the social sciences and precisely because of that, there is a need to dismantle its meaning, flesh out how it is going to be used in this study. In her discussion on discourses Carol Bacchi points out the ambiguous meaning when discourse are not carefully used throughout the social sciences. As a response to this she emphasise that the answer lies less in finding the correct definition and more in the fact that its usage has to be

developed in relation to a study (2005:198-199). Her last point merit further consideration because, as Jørgensen and Phillips suggests, a discourse is an analytic construct (2010:147). This means the explanations under inquiry here will be organised and treated as discourses allowing them to be seen as separate fixations of meaning for analytical purposes.

What can be said, done and thought, and equally, what cannot be said, done and thought within a specific realm brings about an initial understanding of discourses (Bacchi 2005:207). What follows is that this study must pay as much attention to what is not said, what is implied, as to what is said. Each discourse analysed here thus fixes the meaning of the riots and by so doing exclude other meanings. For example, to not condemn the riots or to not acknowledge their violent character appears almost unthinkable in each discourse.

After these brief notes on how this study relate to discourses it now can turn to the question of how discourses relates to the discussion above and to society at large.

3.1.2 My Role as Researcher

Given the discursive basis of social life, of reality, and that this study utilises one discourse to examine others, it means my role as researcher is not unproblematic. A common critique of this position is relativism, if it is just one discourse among many, what is the value of the knowledge produced. I rely on Fink's answer; psychoanalytic theory provides a unique way of analysing discourses (1997:129). What it means in practise based on Jackson's argument is that this study has the power to support or contest the views brought forward in the discourses on the riots (2010:159). Jørgensen and Phillips bring forward the question if science besides criticism also should offer better alternatives (2010:187). Whilst this thesis argues that the way problems are perceived is exactly what is problematic, proposing solutions would yet again fix the meaning of the riots. Put differently, analyse a problem as it is presented risk reproducing it (*idib.*:193).

It is in its place to repeat the function of psychoanalysis here; most easily described it helps understand how reality can be experienced as reality. That the researcher is internal to what is studied opens up for critique also because if I am constituted by the discourses being analysed, how then is it possible to analyse many of the taken-for-granted understandings in those discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips 2010:22)? The brief and probably best answer is with the help of theory, and for this thesis in particular the theoretical discourse of psychoanalysis. This research, however, does not take place in isolation. Since the authors utilised in study, whom sometimes are labelled the 'Lacanian Left', largely influence this study it necessarily mean I cannot exempt these influences, but what I can do is to be clear about it here.

3.2 Material and Data Collection Method

The aim in this section is to present how data was collected and where from. The initial question to be answered here is what kind of data is needed to answer the research question. What the study intends to examine is discourses, discourses which are common to everyone and therefore mean they are everywhere. Precisely because discourses on the riots are not bound to a specific media, and it is the widely accepted ones which are of interest, it should matter less what kind of media is representing the discourses. In the light of this, the study takes British newspapers available online to represent a cross selection of the discourses including different political stances. The second and related point is its accessibility, for the population as a whole and for me as researcher. In order to get a representative selection I began by setting two parameters, the papers should represent different political allegiances and they should belong to the major ones. I ended up with the following ones: The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph, The Mirror, The Guardian and lastly, BBC news online.

As the purpose of the data collecting has been to establish what the general explanations of the riots are, it is by no means possible to collect it all. Therefore, I selected four specific dates in August and repeated it for the months September and December. Given that the riots occurred between 6 and 10 August I wanted the data to depict explanations both during and after the riots resulting in the 9th, 11th, 18th and 25th of each month being selected. When accessing these sources online the search word *riot** was used for each of these dates.

The next step involves some kind of mapping of the texts. This does not take place in isolation. Rather, the texts were approached with the theoretical framework by asking certain questions. Alexander George and Andrew Bennett suggest the constructing of such questions should involve questions of general nature applicable to each case in the study and that these reflect the theoretical framework (2005:86). These questions include, what potential wholeness is presented in each of the discourses and what obstacles to this wholeness is present. From the findings, broadly four explanations dominate. These include criminality, moral decline, dysfunctional families and lastly, inequality.

3.3 Research Method

Below the study will approach the method to show how the explanations will be analysed. Given the theoretical foundation of the interplay between lack and wholeness in discourses the method follows that and engages in ways to cope with this contradiction. While Chris McMillan and Glyn Daly are the foremost sources of the method in this study, they are both indebted to and rely on Žižek's work. Albeit McMillan suggests Žižek's work to be sometimes too abstract, also McMillan's work on capitalism and poverty where he applies this method appears rather abstract (2008:4). It does however not exclude the method's value for analysing the explanations of the riots. The basic premise for using this method is its rejection of analysing problems as they are presented. It exploits the theoretical framework by arranging the discourses in a way that makes it possible to describe how the problem each discourse presents is a secondary construction rather than the cause of the riots.

3.3.1 The Abstract and Concrete Universal

Žižek and McMillan's approach starts with what they call the concrete universal and the abstract universal (McMillan 2008:5-6). To illustrate these concepts the best way of doing so is with the subject of this study. The abstract universal is the positive sides of Englishness; those that make Englishness to an ideal for people, economic prosperity, order, merit and so on. The concrete universal is the underside of Englishness, for example poverty, market failures or riots. The abstract is thus the imaginary of Englishness, in short, how a discourse appears. What is interesting for this study is not so much what they term the abstract and concrete universal but how the interplay between the two is dealt with. In psychoanalytic terms, poverty is the symptom of capitalism. The point, which bears repeating, is how the symptom is dealt with within a discourse given that a discourse cannot acknowledge its flaws as intrinsic. This gives rise to what McMillan calls discursive strategies; ways of acknowledging a problem but at the same time give it an external cause. What does it mean for this study? While this study takes the explanations to be such discursive strategies, Englishness is theorised as the abstract universal. Its content in this study becomes what the discourses present as good, as the good society. As a result, the concrete universal is the causes the explanations suggest.

With the method utilised here the riots becomes something more and something less than riots, the riots before being put into words is Real in the sense of not having any meaning prior to their symbolisation. This means the explanations are not merely explanations but carry the power to define the riots and the rioters. So far, I have argued that there is no inherent meaning or single cause of the riots, but they are nevertheless a symptom of something. This something is the abstract universal. Since the study deals with several explanations, the abstract universal common to all of them is Englishness. The psychoanalytic idea is that an event such as riots is not so much important as the way an event is interpreted, explained, hence the focus on the explanations. They are however a symptom and the study will continuously treat them so. Being a symptom, it can be defined as something which appears to threaten Englishness, but without it, the notion of Englishness would disintegrate (McMillan 2008:7). Dramatic as it sounds the riots constitute something that appears to disharmonise Britain, but which simultaneously allows social problems to be explained.

I believe this study now can return to the question how the material can be approached. As this method owes its approach to the method outlined by McMillan in his article *Symptomatic Reading: Žižekian theory as a discursive strategy* (2008) it is as discursive strategies the explanations will be treated. First of all, what is a discursive strategy? As discussed in the previous chapter, any given discourse is inherently lacking, it will never regain its presumed lost or desired wholeness. This means when for example Englishness shows signs of inconsistencies, here in the form of riots, these deviances must always be explained away. Although there will never be any complete English identity Englishness is never presented as the source of problems, these can always be attributed something else. In this study a discursive strategy involve how to cope with the fact that harmony is impossible. More concretely, the discursive strategies domesticate the riots or externalise their cause and it is in this process political implications are obscured.

A simple yet valuable formula is of help when analysing the material. The central insight of a psychoanalytic approach to discourses is how problems or failures are internal to discourses. A conventional understanding is that non-A (for example, market failures) cannot be A (capitalism); it is caused by B (external factor). The analysis of the explanations here starts from the premise that non-A is internal to A which opens up for an analysis of the allegedly cause. To put it more concretely Glynos argues for example that today's fundamentalism is not reminders of a past as often postulated but directly caused by contemporary conditions (2001b:89). Each explanation identifies causes of the riots, be it criminality, moral decline, inequalities or lack of fathers, and what becomes possible with this symptomatic thinking is to reveal the constitutive underside of them. These are important aspects because the impossibility of wholeness in discourses vis-à-vis the promise of

wholeness is the locus for the symptom: the riots.

3.3.2 Discursive Strategies

Having established how the abstract universal and concrete universal arranges Englishness and the problems articulated in the discourses respectively and the riots as the symptom the study next turns to the discursive strategies. In order to answer how the discourses uphold largely apolitical explanations of the riots I suggest they do so by discursive strategies. McMillan outlines several strategies through which a discourse function to explain away its internal failures and inconsistencies. I will therefore draw heavily on his ideas below.

The first strategy involves the promise of wholeness and disavowal. Each discourse represses the fact that social harmony is impossible so normality or reality appears coherent. Put differently, there is always inconsistencies which does not fit the imaginary of any given discourse. The problem thus relates less to the impossibility of the harmony presented in discourses on society; the potential problem lies in the notion that such a harmony is possible (Daly 1999a:224). What I propose to do here is utilise the concept law-transgression (see chapter 2) in order to describe how the problem brought forward by each discourse are not caused by some external factor but largely stems from the abstract universal, in this case, Englishness.

The second and related point of this strategy is disavowal. There is a paradox in the operation of disavowal, by Žižek often formulated as ‘I know very well, but nevertheless’. What it means is that two conflicting interest may coexist. For example, I know very well that these shoes are made under terrible working conditions but I desire them, or, they are a source of enjoyment to me. Disavowal names the acknowledgement of a problem which simultaneously is ignored. For instance, Žižek explains this as a matter of knowing and acting. I may know that immigrants are not the cause of social problems but in my everyday speech and hence actions, I act as if they are. The theoretical concept most closely associated with disavowal is what in the previous chapter is named decline in Symbolic faith.

Taken together the purpose of arranging and scrutinise the discourses this way is twofold. The study will explain how the problems articulated in the discourses are internal rather than an external contingent problem and in what way these problems can be understood as political. To explain away these problems by merely disavowing them is however not enough. It is problematic because the obstacle to the good society or whatever good a discourse aims at risk turning into an enemy Other.

The second strategy engages in the externalisation of problems, what McMillan calls external antagonism (2008:12). What informs this strategy is Daly’s argument “...a central paradox of ideology is that it can only

attempt closure through simultaneously producing the 'threat' to that closure.” (1999a:220) In short, it is the continuation of the previous strategy albeit it involves the construction of antagonism, of an Other, to explain away why enjoyment is lacking. Daly emphasise that this threat is a post construction. It is not because of an Other wholeness cannot be achieved, lack of harmony comes first, the construction of a threatening Other second (1999a:225). It, however, does not exclude the obstacle, the Other, to be presented as something which can be dealt with, a problem that can be fixed. Rather, it is against the background that unity can be fixed or restored this strategy functions. Welfare fraudsters would be such an Other, which in discourses on downsizing the state can be dealt with. The function when identifying the problem, which hinders the wholeness, is that it gives the inherent impossibility a cause (McMillan 2008:12). An example of an antagonistic strategy is anti-Semitism in Nazi-Germany. There, a plethora of problems were attributed the same cause – the Jew. The Jew thus functioned as the obstacle to the social harmony of Germany. In this study the role of an antagonistic Other tends to be ascribed the rioters and it is the concept the Other which is crucial in this sense. In order to understand the function of the Other the concepts enjoyment and envy will complement this strategy.

To summarise this section, the symptomatic reading, as McMillan defines this method, have its greatest strength in that it not becomes trapped in analysing a problem as it is presented. Contrary to analysing the problems as they are offered in the explanations below, the method allows the study to examine their function. While the study aims at showing how the explanations not are neutral, the method of doing so is to treat them as discursive strategies. The riots are thus the agonising example which cannot be acknowledged as an internal feature of British society, which is why they are domesticated. The riots are both a possibility and a problem. On the one hand, they upset normality; on the other, they allow problems to be explained away. Arranged in the way outlined above each discourse will be dealt with in two steps. Firstly, however, the study provides a brief presentation of the given problem, thereafter the first strategy seek to locate how the problem can understood to be internally generated which leads to the third strategy, externalisation of the problem.

4 Discussion

4.1 Criminality

The focus of this section is the discourse advocating criminality as the main cause of the riots. In a poll that ran in the Guardian 45 percent recognised criminality to be the main cause behind the events. When polls allowed multiple answers polls showed significant higher percentages claiming criminality to be a major cause (ICM 2011:1; YouGov 2011:1). The criminal labelling carry much weight throughout the political spectra as well as with the public and, consequently, no one in politics want to be one the side of the criminals. To avoid misunderstandings the discourses' assertion is not mainly that the riots were criminal but that criminals were the perpetrators and cause behind them. During its course the riots were indeed criminal acts, hundreds of millions pounds worth of damage was the result of these five days in August (RCVP 2012:3). It does not mean, on the other hand, that crime statistics has not been creatively used on both sides of the political spectra. As an endemic feature of the Broken Britain narrative, crime has been portrayed as a major problem to society. What not should be forgotten, Owen Jones argues, is how the Labour government initially vowed to tackle the causes of crime but ended up criminalising anti-social behaviour leading the number of people in prison to grow significantly. While Jones is overtly critical, suggesting this to be part of the war against the underclass, he points out how Labour misperceived the reasons for decreasing crime rates (2012:213-214). At the same time the Conservatives tended to exaggerate the statistics that were used to back the Broken Britain narrative, violent crime, anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy being among them, when in opposition. In their discussion of crime and inequality Polly Toynbee and David Walker suggest that crime has fallen since the 1990s, but, what should be pointed out in general terms is that fear and anxiety has grown (2008:10-11). There is necessarily another side alongside statistics. There is obviously a discrepancy between what figures says and the discourse that make up much of Englishness. It is to this latter notion the study now turns.

4.1.1 The Promise of Wholeness and Disavowal

The shooting of Mark Duggan gathered family and a couple of hundred concerned people outside Tottenham police station on August 6 seeking answers to the fatal shooting. There is no clear account on whether questions asked by Duggan's family were answered and neither if the police was informed about the potential of a riot in the aftermath of the shooting. The shooting in itself seem to have involved a gun carrying drug dealer and two police officers and the initial concern most likely relates to the fact that Duggan was black, echoing the problems between black communities and the police and especially echoing the riots in the 1980s (Owen 2012:xvii). Soon it was acknowledged that Duggan was not armed. When police cars later were set alit, the situation over the days to come spiralled out of control. The trigger of the Broadwater Farm riots in 1985 was also the death of a black civilian prompting protest at the local police station in Tottenham. The riots that followed were inevitably embedded in wider social processes. Writing on 9/11 attacks and the financial crises of 2008, Žižek adopt Hegel's statement that history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce. Turning to the explanations of the 2011 riots, it seems to some degree to be correct here as well. If generalised, the ways in which the 2011 riots have been portrayed evoke narcissistic explanations of consumerism, lack of fathers and meaningless violence compared to the riots of the eighties. As Lindsay Johns in the Daily Mail says: "Then, there were justified grievances about social exclusion and police heavy-handedness. But none of that applies today" (Johns 2011).

When Theresa May, the home secretary, displays her reservations to the Guardian report *Reading the Riots* on December 18 it mirror David Cameron's statement to the parliament on August 11: "It is criminality pure and simple. And there is absolutely no excuse for it." (Cameron 2011) May writes:

By their own account, the rioters were protesting. This wasn't mindless violence but a way of making their voices heard... So we know that, actually, they weren't trying to make any political or social statement; they were thieving, pure and simple. (May 2011)

Given that it was a minority of the public involved in rioting and looting, the fact the majority was not has given weight to the argument about criminality. Because the majority of the poor, of the youth, did not participate in the riots, this is largely seen as proof of why the riots were problems of criminality and not something else. For instance, if the rioters sought to rebel against consumerism or raised tuition fees why loot consumer goods and burn down local shops. In view of that, Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, reminded the public of his view: "It is time that people who are engaged in looting and violence stopped hearing economic and social justification for what happened." (Johnson 2011)

The first thing to do here is to flesh out in what ways violence and

disorder is internal to the notion order and I do so with the concept law and transgression. I believe the best way to proceed is with the help of Žižek. In *Violence* (2009) he suggests that an unordinary event always is measured against a normal state. What constitute normal, and thus order, in this discourse is a situation where youth unemployment is as much problem now that it was in the 1980s, as of December 2011, 22.5 percent (RCVP 2012:59). Žižek's thesis is that systemic violence, that is, the kind of violence intrinsic to how societies and markets function today appears as its opposite; systemic violence returns as irrational violence (2009:31). Youth unemployment would be only one feature of systemic violence; racism, social exclusions or poverty could all be included into what is everyday reality, thus normal. For instance, the use of 'stop and search' by the police effect black individuals to a considerably higher extent compared to white individuals in England (Jones 2012:xvii, RR 2011:19). It should certainly not be thought off as acceptable, most people would never agree to such idea; merely that it is part of the normal situation, part of the order that disorder is measured against. There is a basic psychoanalytic insight here. It is when a symptom stop working a crisis occurs. Following this psychoanalytic logic, there is a distance and relation established when a group is named criminals. Were this criminal label to be removed, it would mean having to face a large group of mainly youths in their precarious situation of systemic violence. This is the potential violence in language, the other side of the physical violence manifested in the riots. Therefore, contrary to what Lindsay Johns is suggesting when claiming that feral mob rule do not have a place in Britain, it is precisely what obscures other societal problems (Johns 2011). As a result, criminality and violence obscures or influence other possible underlying tensions of the riots. Translated into this study, Žižek means that questions of exclusions, unemployment and the alike cannot be properly articulated and solved within political institutions. The lack of alternative solutions to pressing problems thus excludes the problems. As the repressed problems reappear in the form of seemingly meaningless violence, this would reflect the inability to deal with the problems. And consequently, that interpretation of the riots is a reflection of the inability to deal with these problems to begin with. In this way, the riots never presented any radical threat. Treated as criminality and riots they were articulated within the system, they were so to speak easily incorporated into existing thinking on criminality and law and could accordingly be meet by various measures by the police, by the courts. The transgression of the law thus legitimises it.

Turning to the concept decline of Symbolic authority, the riots present a more disturbing element which is disavowed. That the riots was caused by criminals, with gangs orchestrating them, cover up the fragility of the Symbolic authority, that is, the rioters ranging around 15 000 actually showed little fear of the police, the courts or sentences. At the same time, this discourse highlights the impotence of authority other than the police,

suggesting there is a void between the public and the government. Simon Jenkins writes:

There may be municipal councils and in London an elected mayor, but they are nowhere to be seen to be in control. They have no real power and therefore little or no public status as civic leaders. At the front line are the police, and behind them only the central power of the state. (Jenkins 2011)

These two parts would be what a decline in Symbolic authority refers to in this discourse, above described as perversion. For what is problematic is not the rioters or the riots as such but rather how they revealed the lack of belief in and fear of Symbolic authority. The system of trust that is Symbolic authority is fragile precisely because its existence depends upon that people act as if it exists, and that this belief is shared with others. What then is disavowed in this discourse? It is this structure of Symbolic faith, which concerns society as a hole. Instead, the problem is externalised and in its place to give cause to this lack stand the rioter-criminal.

4.1.2 External Antagonism

Far from representing a political act, it was nothing more than a mixture of mindless criminality and opportunistic materialism... Those hand-wringing over today's riots would have us believe the explosion of savage behaviour represents the modern cry of a disaffected people, struggling in the inner city under the yoke of economic and state oppression.

But such a narrative of victimhood is absurd. There was no 'legitimate grievance' behind the mass thuggery, only feral mob rule which should have no place in a civilised society. (Johns 2011)

The first thing to note here is the market-economy thinking permeating the way a demand is required for a need to be present. Thus, because the rioters spoke of no demands, it is easy to suggest no needs are present. This should be read from the psychoanalytic premise that anxiety is intrinsic to the unarticulated desires of the Other; it is easier to jump to conclusions than face uncertainty (Fink 1999:61). Underlying this is the fundamental Lacanian question, essential of each discourse, what does the other want. What can be fleshed out here is that the naming of the rioters' desires into concrete demands for brand commodities are a response to the unnamed desires, and on a first approach establish the rioters as criminals.

I've also learnt that the law-abiding majority want justice that is fast as well as firm. After the riots, when 4,000 people were arrested, that is exactly what they got. I

believe these tougher sentences really will work. I doubt many of the rioters will repeat their behaviour knowing, as they do now, that it could mean potentially four years in prison. I hope they'll certainly think twice about it. (May 2011)

Following the discussion above, the study now turns to develop the statement that the rioters do have a place in Britain. It does not seek to discuss whether the rioters as subjects have a place in society but from the perspective of the discursive strategies. The idea behind the following discussion is that the workings of discourses are to explain why enjoyment is lacking and how this can be changed (Fink 2004:155). While criminality and violence is the answer to the first part of this question, punishment is the how this can be changed. A very brief background is here valuable because rising incarceration rates hints towards a de-politicisation of other ways of dealing with pre-emptive projects. This is what Jones (2012) and Walker and Toynbee (2008) claim the Labour government did, using incarceration as the solution of criminality, being tough on criminals rather than the causes. And its effects, against the background that falling numbers on reported crimes in Britain has more to do with economic improvements than incarceration, is a high percentage relapsing into crime (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010:163). Basic mathematics gives a hint about the societal costs of the proposed harshness on sentences as it for example may create a group of unemployable individuals. How can this be explained?

Laclau uses Thomas Hobbes to describe that the presence of disorder, of negativity, makes the desired order a secondary concern (2003:312). The predetermined problem of disorder thus already colour the solution to that problem. However, restoring order to the streets has less to do with order and safety but more to embody an obstacle to an orderly and safe Britain, and, in effect, provide a cause of why a harmonious society is lacking. This becomes more evident when the function of gangs in this discourse is considered. As Cameron stated, "At the heart of all the violence sits the issue of the street gangs." (Cameron 2011) While this quote of David Cameron will represent the initial emphasise on gangs, social network was simultaneously charged with being the means by which the riots were orchestrated:

The revelation about the tactics used by the rioters came as David Cameron vowed there would be a crackdown on gang culture in the UK. And he suggested social networks used as part of the bid to incite and coordinate violence could be targeted in a bid to curtail disorder.

He told MPs in an emergency statement to the Commons: 'Everyone watching these horrific actions will be stuck by how they were organised via social media. (The Daily Mail 2011)

The two quotes perhaps appear divorced but they will below represent

how an Other besides the rioters is present in this discourse. What turned out to be organised by using social media were according to the Guardian's analysis rather street cleanups than riots. Two weeks after the riots, several people had however appeared in courts accused for attempting to organise riots via social media, some sentenced to four years in prison. By the end of August the idea of restricting or shutting down social networks in the case of future disorders had been dropped (BBC 2011). In retrospective, holding technology responsible is not uncommon in riots: "During the LA riots, rolling TV coverage was the scapegoat, while riots in France in 2005 were partly explained by reference to young people communicating via text message, email and blogs. Even in 1981 there were scare stories that, in Manchester and London, rioters were communicating using "£10 radios"." (Newburn *et al* 2011).

There is something more profound with this discourse besides its function, a desire beyond explaining the riots. Whilst the restrictions on social media in itself is an area of concern, what it have in common with gangs is the fact they both represent an Other. That the riots were orchestrated by gangs ultimately proved rather wrong. Inquiries showed that there was no substantial orchestrating by gangs. What remains crucial with that knowledge at hand is nevertheless the existence of such arguments. What this gang explanation tells is that such a disorder in the British society must be the deeds of something more profound, something or someone behind the individual acts, a powerful Other of the Other as rioters. In order to grasp this it is necessary to unpack the notion of an Other of the Other.

In Lacanian terms, this statement is structurally impossible. What Lacan had in mind when he stated that there is no Other of the Other was the idea that there is no meta language and thus no ultimate guarantee of the Symbolic order (Fink 1999:253). In societal terms, the meaning of the Other of the Other is for Žižek illustrated in contemporary films, books and theories of organisations pulling the strings behind the scene (Boucher & Sharpe 2010:149). If God once were the Other of the Other, perhaps the ultimate notion and example of this concept, the Other of the Other is today not only related but caused by the unbearable idea that there is none in charge, what has been referred to as a decline in Symbolic authority. The logical consequence is that there is no authority beyond the Other that legitimises it. Whilst the riots at first were proposed to be inflicted by gangs, this Other of the Other reveals something. The need to propose an Other of the Other gives a clue of the ineffectiveness of authority and beliefs in the state of Britain. That roughly 15 000 people could cause such widespread disorder revealed the fragility of the state. In this sense, the problem in maintaining order on the one hand and the seemingly disintegration of what is acceptable behaviour on the other could be explained away with an Other of the Other.

4.2 Moral Decline

This section sets out to investigate the discourse taking the riots to be a problem of declining moral and lacking responsibility in parts of the British society. This very last part echoes Cameron's statement, quoted in *The Daily Mail*: "There are pockets of our society that are not only broken, but frankly sick", he continues: "For me it is clear that the root cause of this mindless selfishness is the same thing that I've spoken about for years. It is a complete lack of responsibility in our society. It is as much a moral problem as a political problem." (*The Daily Mail* 2011a). This discourse suggests a lacking or stagnating moral undercut the fabric of society. It takes the rioters as well as bankers, Members of Parliament (MPs) and not least, the journalists involved in the phone hacking scandal to be part of and responsible for the increasing moral failings of Britain. The discourse is firmly established among the public, a poll in the *Guardian* shows that 82 percent agree that moral decline was an important cause of the riots (RR: 2011:11). In comparison, a YouGov poll shows 85 percent agrees with Cameron's quote above (YouGov 2011a:1). The discourse should be situated against the background of MPs' expenses scandal. The story erupted in 2009; members of the parliament for years misused the expense system leading to large repayments and in some cases, criminal charges (Jones 2012:xxi). Against the backdrop of the financial crises and bankers' bonuses, these parts are sometimes even more prominent than the moral concerns of the rioters in this discourse. Birch and Allen defines such a way of making sense of the riots as a normative explanation, popular with the public yet unable to account for why the riots occurred that very August. As they proceed from their predefined problem lawbreaking by asking what causes this, they nevertheless conclude that moral deprivation has relevance (2012:35, 41).

As the riots continued and spread in London, not only high value stores was looted, smaller neighbourhood stores, buildings and cars were looted and burned. What many people could not understand was how people could do so in their own neighbourhoods. Part of the moral failings is explained as lack of responsibility and an entitlement culture whose responsible lies with an inefficient state. A culture, in Cameron's words, that "...says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities." (Cameron 2011) Two broad themes can be identified, the entitlement culture and moral failings characterising the rioters on the one hand and the states' responsibility for it on the other. Consequently, the obstacles are located in both rioters and government policies in what here is referred to as welfare dependence. While it is suggested the welfare system and schools being the institutions fostering this culture, the more pressing question concern what the entitlement culture is. The basic line of reasoning suggests the welfare system encouraged people to live on

benefits rather than work and that that has been spreading a sense of entitlement, a sense that the state owes me something, without requiring any responsibilities in return. However, this entitlement culture is not confined to rioters.

4.2.1 The Promise of Wholeness and Disavowal

... the criminality in our streets cannot be dissociated from the moral disintegration in the highest ranks of modern British society. The last two decades have seen a terrifying decline in standards among the British governing elite. It has become acceptable for our politicians to lie and to cheat. An almost universal culture of selfishness and greed has grown up.

It is not just the feral youth of Tottenham who have forgotten they have duties as well as rights. So have the feral rich of Chelsea and Kensington. (Oborne 2011)

To gain a productive understanding of this discourse the first thing to note is that morality is what is lacking and consequently, the potential wholeness to be restored is moral rules which encompass everyone. The promise consists of an apolitical notion of the good society and in this sense also an apolitical explanation of the riots. Instead of externalise the problem, as the discourse on criminality did, it is here partly acknowledged as a problem internal to British society. A casual link is established between the whole of society and the riots; yet, the discourse is not limited to the riots. I will return to this topic in the next subsection but suffice to say for now is that it points out rather different groups as responsible for society's moral deprivation. While questions of moral and responsibility envelops the rioters and society, the state is also indicted with responsibility. The years of Labour-government are, in this discourse, generally pointed out as the source of the entitlement culture, a culture, to repeat Cameron's words, that says nothing about responsibility. The question is responsibility towards whom. This question stems from Judith Butler's notion of responsabilization. The background logic of responsabilization is the call that people should rely on themselves, not the state and she consequently asks how far responsibility goes. Does it apply to myself only or does it include those like me, or even society as a whole (2010:35-36). It seems as if the state is cancelled out in this equation. This leads to the intriguing question how lack of moral and responsibility is a direct effect of Englishness. I believe a seemingly far-fetched example can be of help. Mark Fisher writes apropos recycling, in being a responsibility for every one, it obscures the responsibility of capitalism (2009:66). While responsibility is not a bad thing, it disavows the problematic structure which makes it necessary to recycle in the first place. A similar argument can be made here. Indeed, responsibility and morality is not inherently negative but it raises questions about the need for this in the first place. To

rephrase this point, morality seems to be a solution that is part of the problem as it focuses on the moral failings of different groups in British society.

We've been taught to value tolerance and mutual respect and to abhor racism and homophobia – essential conventions if all the different "communities" are to get along – without being asked to believe in anything substantial to anchor those conventions in. (Young 2011)

The quote addresses, in psychoanalytic terms, the disintegration of the Oedipus complex, which means that a common Other unto which everyone relates is deteriorating. Post-Oedipus is something that has been used to define social relations of contemporary society, the dissolution of traditional roles and authority. It is, Glynos suggests, a society which involves more freedom, characterised by a subjectivity which today no longer is bound to traditional gender or class identities and a society characterised by choice rather than prohibitions (2001b:89). From the perspective of the psychoanalytic framework, this is the main problem behind this discourse which is displaced into a question of moral. While ideals common to everyone are what this discourse identifies as missing, my main interest here relates to the fact that it nevertheless describes the problem as inherently group-specific. It is here necessary to go back to the theoretical premises of this study to discern why lack of responsibility involves not a lack of moral but a lack of politicisation. From the theoretical perspective society in general is based on antagonism, it cannot escape this antagonism. This is, as discussed in chapter two with reference to Chantal Mouffe, partly solved in democratic institutions. In the vocabulary of this study, politics allows the 'theft of enjoyment' to be articulated among political parties, attributed to other parties and as such exercised under controlled circumstances. Insofar this internal antagonistic nature of societies is repressed, that is, when conflict cannot be articulated within political institutions, antagonism does not fade away; it is merely displaced. How does this relate to the problem of morality? Moralisation tends, in Mouffe's analysis, not so much replace political struggles as to turn political questions into moral problems (2005:75-76). As a result, the language of morality distorts the political content only to return in the shape of various Others.

To illustrate this it should be understood in relation to the rationale of the Conservatives' 'Big Society' idea, which, in short, seeks to decentralise politics, to empower people and communities. Key to this shift James Sloam argues is young people (2012). Regardless if this is merely a tool for downsizing the state it, in short, presents ideas of how society can be strengthened. This thus builds on a wider notion of politics, what preferably is called the political, which has redefined the narrow notion of politics as a separate system of politicians, elections, citizenship

and institutions (Mouffe 2005:9).

As the 'Big Society' idea acknowledges that the distance between people and politics and in particular the youth and traditional politics is problematic it stumbles upon a paradox. Against the fact that public spending cuts hit the young hardest, the protests against raised tuition fees in 2010 did not result in any change although this is precisely what the political can be taken to mean. This permit the political to be read as the Real, it allows what was previous un-symbolised to be symbolised, put into words, given meaning and articulated as demands. This is why the Big Society idea and riots gets involved in a deadlock because it seems that what qualifies as political problems are predefined.

4.2.2 External Antagonism

My aim so far has been to outline how desire for morality disavows the underlying problematic of a lack of politics. Below I argue that its consequence is seen in the various Others articulated.

In a short piece on the riots, Jamie Bartlett brings up an unexplored motivation behind the riots: fun (2011). While this certainly is an undervalued feature, I propose that this should be read from the perspective of this discourse instead of a motivation behind the riots. The frustration this discourse channels, and what made people upset was the notion of the Other, of the rioters, illicit enjoyment. This is what gives substance to this discourse, enjoyment is thus at the heart of the discourse.

Theorising it this way suggests that what is targeted is the rioters' enjoyment. I base this on the notion that social equality and justice are founded on envy which is a psychoanalytic idea that will be discussed throughout the rest of the study. The basic function concerns others access to enjoyment because there is always a lack of enjoyment articulated within discourses. In psychoanalysis, it is not so much the possession of something that is the source of envy, rather the way someone enjoys this something. And, Žižek says, since it is impossible to regulate the enjoyment of others, prohibitions which are subject to each and every one is preferably how enjoyment can be experienced as equal (2009:76). Žižek's analysis of contemporary society is one where this works reversed, today people are no longer subject to restraints but rather encouraged to enjoy. How does it work in this discourse? Given that both rioters and the wealthy are charged with moral failings, envy of their enjoyment seem to me what can explain both. What becomes apparent in its relation to the wealthy and the rioters is that its function lies in the problem of others' enjoyment. The main contention here is that it actually seems impossible to regulate the enjoyment of the wealthy, which effectively places the rioters in a different situation. This division is what the study next turns to.

Why is it then that the solution to the unrestrained enjoyment of the

rich is presented as morality? Writing about the wealthy, Peter Osborne states:

A few weeks ago, I noticed an item in a newspaper saying that the business tycoon Sir Richard Branson was thinking of moving his headquarters to Switzerland. This move was represented as a potential blow to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, because it meant less tax revenue.

I couldn't help thinking that in a sane and decent world such a move would be a blow to Sir Richard, not the Chancellor. People would note that a prominent and wealthy businessman was avoiding British tax and think less of him. (Osborne 2011)

Osborne goes on with another example of the morality of tax escape: "I know that he employs expensive tax lawyers and that everything he does is legal, but he surely faces ethical and moral questions just as much as does a young thug who breaks into one of Sir Philip's shops and steals from it?" (Osborne 2011) Here it becomes viable to detect how political problems relating to lack of common prohibitions, or essentially the absence of laws regulating capital, is presented as problems of morality. Fisher exemplifies this logic when he writes on the subject of the financial crises of 2008. Then, the blame was put on individual bankers and the government while the systemic causes were disavowed (2009:63). There is, however, another way to read his example. Given the governments' interventions to help financial institutions, it revealed the possibility of the state to actually exercise influence over capital, to act as that which regulates. This, however, is fundamentally disavowed because problems presented in this discourse are in a similar way made into problems intrinsic to various groups.

The Prime Minister showed no sign that he understood that something stank about yesterday's Commons debate. He spoke of morality, but only as something which applies to the very poor: "We will restore a stronger sense of morality and responsibility – in every town, in every street and in every estate." He appeared not to grasp that this should apply to the rich and powerful as well. (Osborne 2011)

One of the ways to read this quote is as an expression of the experienced breach of the social contract. What makes the 'theft of enjoyment' thesis helpful here builds upon the Oedipus complex. This has been outlined above but a brief reminder seems to be in place. It involves that most people give up a certain enjoyment when accepting prohibitions and ideals that applies to everyone, in this context Britain (Sharpe & Boucher 2010:19). While the Other can be the one accused of stealing the enjoyment this Other at societal level can also function as those who do not conform to the same ideals and prohibitions as 'we' do. Put differently, they are experienced as not having given up the enjoyment as 'we' have. While the desire for improved moral on the one hand defies the

division between rioters and the wealthy there is, as shall be seen below, a clear difference in language when the rioters are described.

To illustrate how the discourse articulate the rioters in contrast with the wealthy a quote from the Sun gives an initial idea about the rioters as symptomatic of 'Broken Britain':

We are paying the price for 13 years of Labour cowardice where thugs were indulged, not punished. The sickness starts on welfare addicted estates where feckless parents let children run wild. At school — if they even go — these kids learn nothing. The Sun has warned often of the evils of welfare addiction and education failure. (The Sun 2011)

Two solutions, at the time controversial, reveal how antagonism functions as discursive strategy. The central place of the Other can be seen in the case of e-petition, a policy saying that any petition with over a hundred thousand signatures must be considered for debate in the parliament. The intention when e-petitions were instated by the current government was to transfer power from the government to the people (Seymour 2010:15). It can thus be considered a part of the Big Society idea of decentralising decision-making in contrast to the Big State.

The e-petition received 258 266 signatures wowing for convicted rioters to lose their benefits. The petition reads: "No taxpayer should have to contribute to those who have destroyed property, stolen from their community and shown a disregard for the country that provides for them." (E-Petitions 2011). To what extent rioters also were welfare recipients becomes a secondary question as the link already is made. The second and related measure concerned social housing.

Current rules let town hall chiefs act only against those who are convicted of crimes within their own local authority. But Housing Minister Grant Shapps will bring in tougher regulations allowing them to kick out people guilty of crimes anywhere, in a crackdown on neighbours from hell. (The Daily Mail 2011a)

The e-petition, the claims for evictions and the type of collective punishment this represents effectively links rioters, welfare recipients and social housing together, in other words forming a notion of an underclass. Whilst it may be common to view individuals in need of welfare and social housing as victims, how then did the rioters go from victims to an Other? I believe it is best to start to situate the welfare recipient in the normal run of things which, in Daly's analysis, involves a paradox. While universal rights exists independent of merit, the paradox involved is that the responsibility for your unemployment for instance becomes your own as soon as you use them (1999b:85-86). Another way of putting this welfare logic would be, universal rights are there to be enjoyed, but as soon as you use them, it entails a certain amount of embarrassment, the

rights prescribe that you do not use them. The explicit rules are complemented by unwritten rules. This therefore confines the enjoyment of welfare recipients. The 'theft of enjoyment' thesis is thus the chief theoretical insight here. Enjoyment is that mutual problem, always social and thus relational. And it is the attribution of enjoyment to the Other that is of concern here. Lacan's view of *jouissance* (enjoyment) is derived from surplus value. To illustrate this, Karl Marx idea about surplus value refers to profit, that which the capitalist takes for him or herself instead of paying the employees. In Fink's words, it means a loss for the employee, in effect; the employee is working for the Other's enjoyment (1997:96). It is upon this argument it is possible to understand how benefit recipients can be a source of anger in terms of stealing enjoyment, that is, what the taxpayer loses, the Other enjoys. I would like to conclude by returning to the question posed about victims and Otherness. Jason Glynos proposes a controversial reading of the victim as someone evoking compassion at one level but simultaneously reminds oneself of the potential of being the victim. Therefore, it gives rise to the desire to distance oneself from the victim (2001b:94). This shift takes place when the victim stops being the victim and for example organise the victimhood politically, then, the victim easily turns into a threatening Other. In this context, when the link could be made between welfare recipients and rioters, a change of perspective occurred. This shifts the focus from unemployment and other reasons for the need of welfare to the disturbing enjoyment of welfare recipients materialised in the riots. As there is a causal link between dependence and social problems, the heritage of the welfare state act as the problem actively sought to be overcome by the current government.

4.3 The Paternal Crises

Questions of moral and responsibility envelop the riots and especially the rioters. In the preceding section, the study showed how moral decline was a dilemma reaching far beyond the riots suggesting MPs expenses scandal and bankers' greed to be the symptomatic point of Britain. In this respect, the longing for moral was theorised as a desire for common prohibitions. In the following section, the families and parents of the rioters are the focus. In a Guardian poll, poor parenting ranked the highest among the causes of the disturbances in August 2011 (RR:11). It cannot explain, as Sarah Birch and Nicholas Allen suggest, why the riots took place that very

August, but it can give a clue to why certain areas were hit (2012:35). The basic line of reasoning seems to revolve around the fact that welfare dependence, single parent homes and poverty conflate with the areas hit and the areas where the rioters came from. While their analysis proceeds by testing the different explanations, this study goes on discussing the function of this discourse. Again, the intention in this study is not to examine the truth-value of this discourse, but its function. And in this function lies how it makes sense of the riots' causes in an apolitical way. As shall be seen throughout this section the desired presence of fathers and the western nuclear family will be understood as the desired wholeness. I will argue that what is disavowed in this discourse is a desire for the symbolic and not parental function of parents. The rioter seems to step back here and a broader group of people come to the fore, due in large part because this discourse allows a generalisation of many families across Britain.

4.3.1 The Promise of Wholeness and Disavowal

While it in fact exist many single parents in Britain this discourse construct it as a parental crises. On the effects of absent fathers, Melanie Phillips writes:

The result is fatherless boys who are consumed by an existential rage and desperate emotional need, and who take out the damage done to them by lashing out from infancy at everyone around them. Such children inhabit what is effectively a different world from the rest of society. It's a world without any boundaries or rules. A world of emotional and physical chaos. (Phillips 2011)

Especially one aspects of this quote is worth drawing attention to. From the perspective put forward in this study mainstream society and the 'rest' should not be understood as external to each other but internal. A second and highly related point is that a number of features of this discourse make it more likely that beneath the family as the site of prohibitions, authority and security lies a message addressed beyond the family.

Multiculturalism emerges here as a problem similar to the reasons behind the moral decline in the previous section. A contributing fact to dysfunctional families, Phillips suggests, is that the multicultural logic of Britain dissolves social bounds, moral and renders an overarching culture impossible (Phillips 2011). As such, it seems logical that multiculturalism not only applies to dysfunctional families but society as a hole. The responses announced in both this and the previous discourse about the

need for moral, responsibility and paternal authority cling to the fact of a lack in Symbolic authority rather than family authority. Why? I base this on two contentions. Firstly, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argues that neo-conservative values are not the longing for the past as it appears to but a response to contemporary subjectivity (Glynos 2011b:91). In other words, the family is a solution to the present lack of a higher authority. Secondly:

A large and increasing number of youngsters are brought up without dads. The majority of rioters are gang members whose only loyalty is to the group and whose only authority figure is the toughest of the bunch. Like the overwhelming majority of youth offenders behind bars, these gang members have one thing in common: no father at home. (Odone 2011)

If, as suggested above and in this discourse, gang leaders are the closest to a role model for many youths it effectively mean there is a large lack in society if these gang leaders are what fulfils the father role. What emerges as the message of this discourse is an acknowledgement of a lack, which stretches beyond the family, a lack that is symptomatic of society. The real father is thus not the answer here. Below I will make extensive use of the Oedipus complex due to its theorisation of the nuclear family, which is precisely the desired wholeness in this discourse.

The causes of this sickness are many and complex. But three things can be said with certainty: every one of them is the fault of the liberal intelligentsia; every one of them was instituted or exacerbated by the Labour government; and at the very heart of these problems lies the breakdown of the family.

For most of these children come from lone-mother households. And the single most crucial factor behind all this mayhem is the willed removal of the most important thing that socialises children and turns them from feral savages into civilised citizens: a father who is a fully committed member of the family unit. (Phillips 2011)

What this explanation does, in theoretical terms, is taking the Oedipus complex literally. Lacan's formulation of the Oedipus complex, and many other of his concepts for that matter, has come under much critique for its gendered formulation. On a first approach, the Oedipus complex neatly supports the logic of this discourse. For the child to become a subject the unity between child and mother, a unity of wholeness and enjoyment, must be intervened by a third term – the father. His role is to say no, to institute prohibitions, act as the law. In order for this to function as an explanation of the riots, it must necessarily involve a partial reading.

I will introduce a seemingly far-fetched and gendered Lacanian phrase to account for why the nuclear family is not the solution to the parental crises this discourse suggest. I do so by reading it through the Oedipus

complex. Lacan's phrase 'Woman is the symptom of man' explains, in my simplified interpretation, the importance of the third term, the father. In terms of identity, it means there is never just woman and men, self and other. The father, in this study theorised as the Other, can take on any form because it is a way to explain away the fact that my identity is already internally lacking. Self (man) and its lost unity is on the same side, the Other emerges to explain why my identity never can be whole, hence why the Other (woman) bears no necessary relation to myself, she is the symptom. What does all of this have to do with the function of this discourse? In general, it sees the father of the family-unit as vital for societal relations, or, as the quote above states, the father is key in order for children to grow up into civilised citizens. To begin with, because there is no natural relation between women and men the father has nothing to do with sex. An actual man, to repeat Bruce Fink's reminder, must not perform the father function and the same is true for the mother (1997:56). The more crucial aspect is that ideals, values and rules must be inherently inter-subjective; go beyond the family, as they from the perspective of this discourse are meant to regulate society as a whole. In the absence of the father-function on societal level, dysfunctional families emerges to address this problem. They are here that third-term, the symptom, which explains why harmony is lacking.

4.3.2 External Antagonism

Melanie Phillips writes "...instead of lone parenthood being regarded as a tragedy for individuals, and a catastrophe for society, it has been redefined as a 'right'." (2011) Žižek often take single black mothers as the prime example of a social symptom around which social ills are attributed. It functions as a knot, tying together reasons for the return to family values and decreased welfare spending (Glynos 2001a:208-209). In this discourse, a similar correlation is made.

And this breaking of the family was further condoned, rewarded and encouraged by the Welfare State, which conceives of need solely in terms of absence of money, and which accordingly subsidises loneparenthood and the destructive behaviour that fatherlessness brings in its train. (Phillips 2011)

This discourse works in a more politically correct way in charging the state with responsibility, but then again, why did this explanation become hegemonic in explaining the riots. It is the ability to link dysfunctional families to the failure of the welfare state, the decline in Symbolic authority, and as such, the dysfunctional family can appear at the centre for several social ills.

When Labour came to power in 1997, it set about systematically destroying not just the traditional family but the very idea that married parents were better for children than any other arrangement.

Instead, it introduced the sexual free-for-all of ‘lifestyle choice’; claimed that the idea of the male breadwinner was a sexist anachronism; and told girls that they could, and should, go it alone as mothers. (Phillips 2011)

In a ensuing inquiry of the riots, *After the Riots* (RCVP 2012), a cross party examination set up by leaders of three major parties, David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband, dysfunctional families are discussed, solutions proposed. Formulating the problem in this way to begin with thus creates an Other which can be dealt with. It is suggested that approximately 500 000 ‘forgotten families’ need attention from the public services (2012:6-7). At the outset, this seems to address the problem, explicate this as a cause of the riots and present a middle way between radical individuality and the big government, the Keynesian welfare state. Given that most rioters came from poor neighbourhoods, many from single-parent homes, what happens, at least implicitly, in the workings of this discourse is that rioters, dysfunctional families and poverty are tied together. In so doing, a rather large group of people are identified, partly becoming responsible for the rioters acts but more importantly constitutes a problem to be fixed, a problem that explains why social harmony is lacking. When comparing dysfunctional families with the moral implications of bankers and politicians outlined in the previous subsection there is thus a clear difference. The problems with bankers and politicians are described as for example instances of greed, temporarily, whereas dysfunctional families appear as an endemic and almost permanent state.

4.4 Inequality

The objective of this section is to delineate the discourse on inequality to explain how inequality not is external but rather internal to Englishness. In order to do so the cause of the riots, inequality, will be discussed throughout this study in relation to envy. At the end of this section the study will have outlined its function and showed how disavowal is

operating in this discourse.

Inequality, in its conceptual sense, is not surprisingly a rather broad and sometimes vague explanation. By most measurements, it can be argued that inequality in terms of income is a widespread permeating problem in contemporary Britain. It has increased drastically during the last years and steadily since the 1980s with problems such as ‘working poverty’, child poverty and high youth unemployment to name a few (Toynbee & Walker 2008:10). Ioanna Vrouva and Louis Dennington writes as many countries throughout Europe seen and announced cuts in public spending as an objective necessity, so to have Britain (2011:342). While increasing inequality by no means conflate only with the current coalition government, estimates show a decline of 38 percent in net income for the poorest since it started changing benefits, taxation and public spending in 2010 (Birch & Allen 2012:35). When Ken Livingstone, the Labour candidate for mayor of London, suggested government cuts to be a reason behind the riots he was met by doubt. Commentators and politicians suggesting that these cuts had not been implemented yet, and consequently, they could therefore not have been a cause. As inequality must be approached with caution, it is not absolute poverty that is of relevance in this discourse. It was not need but desire that drove the riots; that is to say, rioters did not loot food to satisfy need but high value consumer items. Therefore, to dismiss Livingstone’s account because the cuts had not been realised at the time of the riots is problematic. Although its effects had not yet been seen, it can still affect people. As a result, inequality cannot be limited to experienced economic inequality, which is highlighted in for example the Mirror:

But it is the chronic lack of jobs that is the real problem. And youth unemployment costs – not only in the increased benefit payments and lost tax revenues. More importantly, there is the human cost, counted in wasted lives and thwarted ambition. (The Mirror 2011)

A widespread sense of no future, no recognition for one’s situation and nothing to lose are arguments found within this discourse. Put differently, argument such as why the banks are too big to fail but communities not is but one response. However, what will be apparent throughout this section is that although inequality, as that which sustains the desire for equality, is presented as a problem, little emphasise is put on what to do and who should do it.

4.4.1 The Promise of Wholeness and Disavowal

As noted above, in Lacanian terms, a master signifier is a largely empty concept which establish the meaning of other central concepts of one of

many discourses. Equality is certainly one such open concept depending if a communist, a social democrat or a neo-conservative speak of equality. Yet, as described above, the left's traditional call for equality seems like a lost cause in Britain. To detect in what way inequality is intrinsic to equality the study turns to the notion of meritocracy. In short, the idea means equality based on ability and effort and not background or heritage (Seymour 2010:45). In Thatcher's idea of Englishness, Englishmen are not the upper classes but the self-made men from the working class (Žižek 2008:110). However, the centrality of meritocracy is not bound to the Conservatives, Labour under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown as well adhered to it. Interesting to note is, when the term was coined in the 1950s by a Labour activist it was meant to be a warning of the hierarchies in where people on the top and bottom of society were in those positions due in large part because of their ability (Jones 2012:96-97). The occlusion of class has been a parallel development with meritocracy, instead of speaking in terms of class, social exclusion has become the maxim (Seymour 2010:54). This idea of equality is thus thought of as equality of opportunity. It is not difficult to see how inequality is transferred from a political problem to an individual problem, which is a process taking place alongside the left's approval of capitalism. While inequality is a major societal problem, fixing and consequently abolishing it would be harmful for the economy. For instance, while national minimum wage was introduced in 1999 roughly 25 percent remain in low-wage employment (Grimshaw & Rubery 2012:111). Termed 'working poverty', Owen Jones in his critique of contemporary Britain highlights how tax credit renders any alternation of low wages impossible as the state subsidise them (2012:205). From one point of view tax credits allows the continuation of low wages, benefitting employers, benefitting the economy. This has considerable effects on the discourse claiming inequality to be the major cause of the riots since the economy is disavowed.

Put differently, "...in an unequal society that creates exclusion and makes people feel as if they are expendable, the locked shop with the price tagged shoes represents the very violence that later sends the brick through its own window." (Vrouva & Dennington 2011:343) In this case, violence inherent in society, that is, inequality, comes first, the riots secondly. But there is also another aspect of this formulation relating to disavowal.

"No taxation without representation" was the slogan of the American War of Independence and it is a stern reminder that the legitimacy of a taxation system is measured, not just by how fair taxes seem, but also by whether you feel you played any part in setting them. But in the UK, it is no longer clear who represents the poor. It does not seem to be the Labour party, for the left has found that it can only win elections if it focuses primarily on the interest of middle-earners, and it has found it increasingly difficult to keep the interests of them connected to the interests of the poor.

None of this justifies violence, theft and murder. The riots were wrong. If you are angry about injustice then you can get involved in making things better. But if we refuse to face the relationship between injustice and social unrest we will find that riots and many other social problems will continue to haunt us. (Duffy 2011)

At first, it seems that a fundamental problem arises when the discourse blaming inequality for social ills at the same time endorse capitalism, a system where inequalities largely stems from. However, as Friedrich Hayek suggested, it is easier to accept inequalities if they are attributed to impersonal and external forces (Žižek 2009:76). This Other is nowhere to be found in the quote above. Žižek proposes that among the reason why such a system is acceptable is because impersonal forces can be blamed for one's misfortunes (*ibid.*). One of the ways this works, Daly suggest, is that the welfare state require people to act as if they were responsible for their economic situation even if everyone knows their situation due in large parts stems from the economic system (1999b:85-86). The basic function here is disavowal, two contradictory ideas separated by knowing and acting.

Such disavowal also functions through antagonism. The impersonal forces of the market are something which can be dealt with through various measurers. I believe this passage is worth repeating because it provides the very logic behind how reality is acceptable. In its capacity of Other, capitalism explains why equality is difficult to achieve while simultaneously allowing problems to be externalised as the cause of this Other. However, as seen throughout this study, when individual responsibility for one's situation is increasing and state responsibility is diminishing, this function is gradually eroding. What is terrifying, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is the very notion that one's socio-economic position is not dependent on external causes but due in large part because of one's own efforts. What then is disavowed, does it mean this discourse does not function by way of disavowal? On the contrary. What is disavowed in this discourse is no less than the economic system as the Other, which, has been quintessential in criticism on 'Third Way' politics, personified with former Prime Minister Tony Blair (Laclau 2000:306; Mouffe 2005:56).

The needs to explain away the riots so that they become manageable and thus the role of the discursive strategies is to give cause to the fact that people and discourses alike are internally split. Without an Other to do so, the conflict is internalised. What Mark Fisher argues in *Capitalist Realism* seems to give a clue about the impotence of this discourse. He suggest that today the worker is not defined by antagonism with the capitalist, rather the conflict is internalised, being someone concerned both with the identity as worker and someone that owns property, is concerned about the stock market and so on (2009:34-35). Perhaps this is the best way to describe the function of this discourse; it on the one hand sees the cause of the riots as inequality, and on the other, see no way to rid

them from Britain, see no way of articulating them.

4.4.2 External Antagonism

In this subsection, enjoyment and envy will play a significant role in understanding the discourses function. Envy always concerns the Other's access to enjoyment, either enjoying what we legitimately should enjoy or about to steal that enjoyment. Yet, absent in this discourse is an Other. There is no clear externalisation of inequality, no antagonistic Other which can be held accountable for the lack of equality. I believe the occlusion of class as outlined above is key to understand why the discourse, while articulating a problem, end up with nothing.

For many who were involved, said Ros Griffiths, a community leader in Brixton, the 1981 riots "were fundamentally about race". "In Brixton we called the riots an uprising," she said. On the other hand, Griffiths said: "The riots that took place in August [2011] were not about race but about a growing underclass in our inner cities that feels excluded, isolated and locked out of mainstream society." Thomas agrees, arguing that what has really changed in the past 30 years is that, while many young black people continue to feel the same way as his generation had in 1981, "now that feeling is shared by white working-class people". (Newburn *et al* 2011)

Richard Seymour in his *The Meaning of David Cameron*, a critical examination of the politics of Cameron and the heritage from Labour, writes that mentioning class effectively is charged with being a politics of envy (2010:8). Here, the notion of envy is taken literally.

It is also a mistake to reject any relationship between the riots and the welfare system. As Wilkinson and Pickett demonstrated in their book *The Spirit Level*, there is good evidence that criminality and violence tend to increase with income inequality. What's more, the UK is the third most unequal developed country, after the US and Portugal.

The UK's tax system also plays a major role in this injustice. Many people do not realise that the poorest 20% of society pay more as a percentage of their income in taxes than any other group. (Duffy 2011)

As envy is an intrinsic feature in the call for equality, as Žižek takes Freud and Lacan to mean, so to is enjoyment. Given that it is not possible to regulate others enjoyment, what is possible in society is to impose equal prohibition (Žižek 2009:76). If prohibition is thought off as for example taxation, redistribution or equality before the law envy is the background of social equality. Put differently, as desire functions with respect to what is prohibited or what is lacking desire is caught up with what others have. Given the absence of an Other, someone responsible for inequality, it

seems as if this discourse merely can articulate inequality through consumerism. Thus, envy played out on individual level instead of the political.

Overconsumption backfires in every way, from obesity, to debt, to sheer misery. Strangely, all indices of happiness show that reducing rather than expanding consumer choice brings down anxiety. Our identities must be forged out of something other than what we buy.

All the talk of disenfranchisement and lack of belonging are acted out, sometimes murderously, around consumption. The markets are out of control. So are we. We could value each other for something other than what we buy. We could say less is more. We could let shops shut. We could break up the monopolies. Only a deeply troubled society would think retail therapy could cure it. Shopping will not save our souls. We have been consuming that illusion for way too long. (Moore 2011)

It was with their 2011 book *The Spirit Level* Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett brought forward powerful argument linking inequality to a variety of societal problems. One of their arguments deals with the fact that comparison in social status or material resources most often takes place upwards (2010:175). The logic behind this is desire which functions so that it remain unsatisfied, which in effect means no matter how much money, things or enjoyment I experience, there will always be more to acquire, hence why people compare themselves upwards. In addition, there is a risk of downward resentment. This was already in the 1950s explained by Franz Fanon. Michael Azar's preface to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, is helpful here. In the attempts to access the Other's world, access the enjoyment of the Other, one's own origin becomes a reminder of that which one tries to escape. In effect, the desire for what the Other desire, means that I can turn against those who remind me about what I want to leave behind (2011:12-13). This explains, in short, the vulnerability of a society where enjoyment is not played out in politics.

5 Conclusion

This chapter will tie together the main findings of what unites the discourses, what make them differ, and most importantly, how they function to maintain a largely apolitical notion of the riots. What is legitimately viewed as politics and what is not is, in itself, a highly political process (Žižek 2000:234) and therefore, language as such involves violent processes of including and excluding. As seen throughout this study, the avoidance of a politicisation of the riots has mainly been a discursive practise, what has been referred to as discursive strategies. I began this study with the premise that language has the ability to create meaning, however, the centrality of affect was soon introduced and complemented the perspective. In the theoretical framework developed, I started outlining the contours of the way the explanations later were analysed by suggesting that each discourse is driven by desire. Herein lies the psychoanalytic paradox; desire is only sustained by an obstacle. Psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex in this sense gave me three concepts essential in the function of discourses: wholeness, lack and obstacle. From this perspective, a discourse cannot accomplish closure, hence why lack is at the heart of discourses. To make reality acceptable a discourse always presents itself as complete, there is always a promise for wholeness which means that all the inconsistencies and problems that exist within a discourse in some sense must be made manageable. An Other has in this study be theorised as that which embodies this obstacle that makes problems controllable. While I contend that this is how each explanation of the riots function, this theorisation was furthermore put to use in the method. Therein Englishness came to be the signifier for what the four explanations present as lacking, that is, order, morality, the nuclear family and equality. What every discourse defines as the problem behind the riots is theorised as the opposite of Englishness, as external failures, the one thing that connects them are the riots. Halfway through the study I could then theorise the explanation as discursive strategies which function by explaining away or displace the causes of the riots. The short answer to the research question so far is that the discourses appear apolitical by externalising the causes of the riots.

In the first part of the analysis of each discourse, I sought to show how the problems were generated from within Englishness rather than imposed from the outside. Here the given problems could be understood in different terms. Behind the construction of discourses describing criminality, moral decline, dysfunctional families and inequality, their political dimension was shown. The first step was thus to stress how the

discursive strategies disavowed other representations of these problems. In the discourse on criminality the systemic violence that occurs in day-to-day life were identified as the other side of criminality. To name a few, lack of trust, commonness and financial regulations was identified in both the discourse on the nuclear family and morality as the disavowed aspects of these discourses. Lastly, in the discourse on inequality the disavowal of capitalism made a politicisation of inequality difficult. This brings these concluding remarks to the second discursive strategy which explained how each discourse externalised the presumed problems to another cause, in one way or another linked to the rioters. Herein lies also the answer to the research question. In each discourse, save for inequality, one or several groups embody the problems seen as cause of the riots. Linking problems to various groups is thus imperative in explaining the riots as largely apolitical. In this sense, I highlight the problem of jumping to conclusions when an unordinary event occurs as it did in the riots. Equally problematic therefore is to analyse a problem as it is presented and I believe the psychoanalytic framework in this study has been able to do the opposite, to challenge the problematisation of the riots. In so doing, the conclusions put forward do not only show how the riots are better understood as an inherent consequence of Englishness, but also that explanations which at first impression seems to ask for change in fact serve to reinforce status quo.

6 Executive Summary

The England riots erupted in the aftermath of the shooting of Mark Duggan in early August 2011. The incident echoed the tensions between the police and black people in the 1980s, which led to two major riots. However, what followed the death of Duggan was not easily linked to race. In fact, the shooting was only the spark of four days of looting, arsons, burglaries and disorder involving approximately 15 000 people to which no single cause could be easily attributed. Missing was a common denominator of the rioters as well as any concrete demands. In this sense, explanations of the riots are manifold as politicians and commentators tried to pin down the meaning of the riots. This study presented an analysis of the four major explanations used to make sense of the 2011 England riots. The problem it revolves around is that the four major explanations all to varying extents present largely apolitical causes and solutions to the riots. Against this background, the study asked how the explanations function in order to present an essentially apolitical understanding of the riots. To address this question the objective was not only to scrutinise the explanations as such but also to create a theoretical framework wherein these can be addressed. This study did so by applying and developing psychoanalytic theory. While Jacques Lacan's theories constitute the theoretical background, this study has drawn heavily on Slavoj Žižek's work. Whilst there is no readymade psychoanalytic theory for socio-political analysis the main contention of turning to psychoanalysis to address the England riots was due in large part because it contains a rich theorisation of the contemporary condition of de-politicisation and post-politics.

6.1 Theoretical Approach

As the study treats the explanations of the riots as discourses, its overall approach has been a discourse analysis conducted from a psychoanalytic framework. The foundation of discourses, this study argued, is best understood with the Oedipus complex, which is modelled after the nuclear family. For Lacan the Oedipus complex is a metaphor for the process necessary for each child to become a subject. It describes the importance of a third term, the father, whose role is to intervene and interrupt the hypothetical child-mother unity. To make a long story short, the outcome

of this triangulation is the subject of desire and the subject constituted by language which make up two essential parts the human condition. While desire is the driving force of people, what makes people do things, it always builds upon lack. What this study gained from this interplay between lack and wholeness and thus Lacan's theorisation and what were transferred to the socio-political realm were three interdependent concepts, wholeness, lack and obstacle.

As there is no big contradiction between the level of subjects and the level of society in psychoanalysis, this study took the Oedipus complex as the main function of discourses. As the study constructed the four major explanations of the riots as discourses the theorisation of these and the initial step to address the research question begun by outlining how the Oedipus complex function in the context of this study. Three concepts constitute the foundation herein, wholeness, lack and obstacle. Basically, any political discourse presents an imaginary, either a lost wholeness or a unity in process of becoming. And given that it is driven by desire, the political project is necessarily incomplete because it is founded upon a lack. The four major explanations of the riots all highlighted lack and wholeness. In the first discourse criminality and violence is the problem, order is what belongs to the English imaginary. In the discourse addressing moral decline as the cause of the riots morality is what is lacking. In the discourse on dysfunctional families, the nuclear family is the imaginary and lastly, in the discourse on inequality, an equal society is the potential wholeness. The study argued that in the interplay between wholeness and lack, a necessary obstacle appears. It thus contends that the three concepts wholeness, lack and obstacle describe the basic function of the four discourses used to explain the riots.

The study then argues that this theorisation gives rises to four characteristics. Relying both on the clinical ideas of Lacan and the socio-political theorisation developed by Žižek and those working in the Žižekian tradition the four concepts are law-transgression, the Other, enjoyment and envy, and decline in Symbolic authority. Law-transgression is taken to mean that what appears to be radical opposites is highly interdependent. The study uses this concept to highlight how the problem each explanation associate with the riots is not an external temporarily failure but rather internal to the English society. The Other names the obstacle the study takes to be necessary in all discourses. Its content, whether it is a person or an institution, depends upon the discourse. Used to theorise the obstacles the discourses identifies, what comes to embody the problems of the riots, the concepts was central in this study. Enjoyment and envy function in relation to the Other. Because the Other represents the cause to why wholeness or harmony is lacking, what is of concern, psychoanalysis argues, is enjoyment. What is problematic with an Other is thus his or her access to enjoyment. The last concept, decline in Symbolic authority, described the problems associated with the contemporary post-political situation. It emphasise that conflict

free politics and diminishing rules and regulations leads not to greater freedom but give rise to new problems. The study in this sense presents a discourse analysis addressing both the linguistic and affect dimension.

6.2 Key Findings

The study next argued that order, morality, the nuclear family and equality, basically what the discourses describe as the lacking wholeness, can be described as part of an abstract universal. In this case, the abstract universal is theorised as Englishness and is comprised of the positive sides of Englishness. In short, the abstract universal describe how an identity or discourse appears complete. The concrete universal, on the contrary, delineate the negative sides of Englishness, what cannot be acknowledged as features of the abstract universal. The focus of this study, however, laid in the interplay between the two. To manage the negative sides of Englishness discursive strategies name the ways discourses cope with the problems identified in each discourse. Two discursive strategies were outlined and developed in this study in order to address the research question.

The first focus on how the problems and thus causes of the riots are a consequence of Englishness rather than external. While the concept law-transgression explains this function the discursive strategy in addition exploit the concept decline of Symbolic authority to scrutinise how the political dimension of the problems described by the different discourses are disavowed. The study contended that while each explanation highlight an issue of the British society; they do so in an apolitical way. Although criminality and gangs, welfare recipients and unregulated capital, single mothers and inequality does exist, the concern in this study has been how this is interpreted, how the issues are presented. The study suggested that the political aspects of these issues are obscured.

Against the background of the first strategy, the second strategy, what is referred to as external antagonism, stressed how the disavowed political dimensions of the riots are displaced into another cause and how that cause becomes embodied by groups. The study found that in the process of explaining away the causes of the riots the discourses to varying degrees create antagonism. Basically, in the absence of a politicisation of the riots, various groups come to symbolise and become responsible for the larger issues identified in the four discourses on the riots. In sum, the study highlights the relevance of conducting research on the way problems are posed rather than analysing a set of predefined problems.

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