

Theories of the london riots



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Secondly, Karl Marx's class conflict theory of Marxism will be discussed regarding its theoretical input to the preliminary causing of the riots.

Capitalism engenders crime through the infusion of egotistic tendencies with the failure of means to satisfy such demands. A financial hierarchy has been created in which wealth and material possessions are crucial when escalating up this hierarchy.

Lastly, the theory of consumer culture shall be considered in response to the London riots. Consumer culture is broadly defined as one's desire and ability in living beyond basic needs. Merton (1938) suggests that crime occurs when an individual's ambitions of material wealth cannot be achieved in a socially acceptable manner, leading to means of deviance such as theft.

Social Exclusion in response to the London riots.

'Individuals, families and groups can be said to be in poverty when . . . their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities' (Townsend, 1979). We need to remember that social exclusion doesn't just happen within the working classes; it can happen across all the classes. Social exclusion differs to Marxism in that it doesn't concern itself primarily with poverty, social exclusion can be multi-dimensional in which poverty is typical, but not always implicated (Saunders, 2003).

Social exclusion is contrast to Marxism in that the focus isn't on poverty and class. Social exclusion happens for many global roots, whether this can be

through the decline of manufacturing industries and the creation of structural unemployment.

Wilson (1996) highlights issues with people wanting to work but not having the necessary skills or education to do so. This therefore leads them into financial deprivation then essentially crime i. e. looting and robbery.

University fees now situate themselves at £9, 000 alone. This prices out many individuals leaving them without the necessary education to strive and achieve in the workplace. In relation to the riots, it is this exclusion from societal expectations that leads individuals to have to fight for their place in society. Bauman and Rose also argue that active rejection of the lower class by society by downsizing industry creating higher unemployment, the labelling of those without jobs and the ideology that the lower class are criminogenic, violent, with many being ethnic. Social exclusion detracts poverty and class away from the causes of crime however, which was a very apparent concern in the spread of the riots. Coupled with this there is very little theory to actually explain the causes and effects of social exclusion in which is very apparent within the Marx theories.

MacDonald and Marsh (2002) state that ‘ it has become a confusing and slippery “ catch-all” phrase’ with no real explanation. Social exclusion reiterates the implication of dichotomy between exclusion and inclusion (Levitas 1996; see also Hills et al. 2002) in which is very poorly explained.

Marxism in response to the London riots.

Representation of anger and resentment from the working class, predominantly the poorest, most excluded individuals were shown towards

the police, capitalism and racial victimisation throughout the London riots. The catalyst for the initial focus was the killing of Mark Duggan by police officials. Reports from the police and the news teams which followed this unlawful killing were contradictory and unclear leading to an uproar of frustration and anger. Marx would suggest that the police are an organisation of armed men, who look to implement the authoritarianism of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he would suggest that the media and police are all products of the same billionaires who fund and own such organisations. This coupled with the consumerist society is what drove individuals to rebel.

The Marxist theory suggests that societal judgment of an individual is performed on the contents of their wallet and wardrobe as opposed to their characteristics and personality (Clinnard and Meier, 2008). Marx states that where a 'ruling class' classification is achieved; the individuals not situated in this group will revolt against them who do, thus creating power relationships between different social groups (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007). Inequality is largely fuelled through social deprivation; this creates jealousy, greed and conflict within societies and in turn leads to public displays of rebellion and revolt. The London riots of 2011 suggest that a society driven by consumerism encourages anti-social behaviour, coupled with the vast amount of material 'looting', we can assume that this revolt was aimed at the rich capitalists who situate themselves pinnacle within this hierarchy of wealth and importance.

Whilst applying Marxism to the riots and the real world it would seem that accountability for essential parts of society are lacking. A Marxist society

see's individuals who work hard being rewarded with wealth and stability for their efforts. Unemployment rates were exceptionally high within society at the time of the riots giving well educated and skilled individuals no means of income or alternatively, struggling whilst working hard in low paid jobs.

Furthermore, within the riots it was stated that individuals involved were all low class, young and criminogenic complimentary to Marxist views of criminals being from a third class, lumpenproletariat. Amongst those convicted for rioting however was a millionaire's daughter and law student who were firmly nestled within middle class families.

Colvin and Pauly (1983) suggested that people in lower paid jobs are controlled at work through manipulation and coercion. This can further be seen in the lead up to the riots of August 2011 through the policing of communities. 73 per cent of individuals interviewed in the 'reading the riots' article had been stopped and searched within the past year. Marx would suggest that this robust policing on specific communities are the 'ruling' class exploiting the working class, thus explaining involvement within the riots as an act of hatred for the authorities.

Consumer Culture in response to the London riots.

Throughout the aftermath of the London riots many aspects of society have been subjected to culpability in the reasoning for the preliminary causing of this rebellion and revolt. However, rather a large aspect of societal influence hasn't been subjected to this liability, this being designers, retail companies and electrical suppliers. The riots were not focussed on the destruction of property or violent attacks upon our government/forces instead these riots were subject to obtaining goods free of charge. Footlocker, JJB, Carphone

Warehouse etc. these were just some of the shops in which were targeted but these young individuals, this coming as no surprise. Businesses like these are home to the goods in which are most desirable by individuals today, highlighting that the riots happened due to an 'out of control consumerist ethos' (Hawkes, 2011).

Consumer culture has an illustrious history behind it. Slater (1997) stated that 'consumer culture is discovered every few decades; or, to be uncharitable, it has been redesigned, repackaged and relaunched as a new academic and political product every generation since the sixteenth century'. Importantly, consumer culture became 'mass' during the 20th century, particularly after the Second World War (Hall et al. 2008). This shows that under no measures will consumer culture be controlled.

Consumption has now replaced production as the defining characteristic of Western societies (Lasch 1979, Bauman 1998). Advertising is dominant in every aspect of an individual's life, Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, these are all new and improved ways in which products can be publicised. It is this constant barrage of consumerism that leads to every aspect of an individual's life being consumeristic, education, where you reside etc. all are key in your social expression.

Merton (1938) states that when a materialistic wealth is unable to be achieved through socially acceptable means, crime and deviance will occur. This links well with Young's (2007) view of a 'bulimic' society in that 'massive cultural inclusion is accompanied by systematic structural exclusion.' He then continues to say that 'the consumer markets propagate a citizenship of joyful consumption yet the ability to spend (and sometimes

even to enter) within the mall is severely limited.’ The riots of August 2011 were described as ‘envy masked as a triumphant carnival’ (Zizek, 2011). Bankers, politicians, footballers etc. are all subject to ample amounts of publicity and it is their materialistic wealth that creates this want and envy, in turn, leading to individuals going to these extreme lengths in order to achieve such wealth.

Hayward (2004) however creates a different notion. He believes that the material goods in which were taken during the riots were not for the wealth they bestowed but alternatively for the identity in which they gave the individual. Thus, where the employed and wealthy are also looting it is hard to label these select individuals into one generic category. This rebellion of consumerism and social exclusion that is seen everywhere when reasoning for the riots surely is incorrect. It was an attempt to join in (Bauman, 2011), climb that materialistic hierarchy and enhance your identity.

Conclusion:

The theories discussed above are merely three of many in which can account for the riots in August 2011. All three of these theories highlight issues surrounding poverty, class and the exclusion in which conjoins itself to this hierarchy of wealth. Karl Marx’s capitalism suggests response to the riots in that a good capitalism is needed to rejuvenate Britain but we must then account for the question, can capitalism be reformed to account these lower class individuals or simply continue to exploit them?

It is this exploitation in which needs to be controlled and accessed within many societal areas. It is extremely evident that the police forces abuse their stop and search powers and this is further targeted at the same individuals in which are secluded from society from governmental statues and manifesto's; the youths, blacks and underprivileged. Education, direction and employment are very regularly inaccessible for these individuals which, in turn, lead to a lifetime in crime as means of survival.

But where there is consumer culture, they will be exploitation. Our direction, our role models tend to locate themselves at the highest end of this hierarchy of wealth. We see the watches they buy, we see the clothes they wear, we see the cars they drive, this strive for success and these material goods are the main factors in which also spirals an individual into a life of crime. The London riots saw an extremely large number of individuals overlooking the laws and their morals to provide themselves with these material goods in which they probably wouldn't have owned without taking these measures.

The conservative government have a history in capitalism, exploitation and the lack of societal values. We saw Margret Thatcher openly state these views throughout her time as prime minister but, in this modern society in which we live it has become obvious that these views will not stand and individuals will do anything in their power to rebel against this.