Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The August 2011 riots: Them and us

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The riots of 2011 shocked and enthralled the nation. The extreme levels of anger, violence and lawlessness aroused fear and unease about what seemed to be a moral if not social collapse and challenged traditional notions about England and the kind of place it is assumed to be. The Prime Minister David Cameron's view was that 'There are pockets of our society that are not only broken, but frankly sick', but exactly what sickness did the Prime Minister think that the rioters were suffering from? This paper argues that to understand the riots requires as much of an examination of the non-rioters (us) as those who rioted (them). I put forward the idea that the riots were a manifestation of a deep malaise, not only in 'them' – the rioters – but within 'all of us'.

Keywords: complexity theory; splitting; projection; paranoid-schizoid; the index-patient; dynamic context; antisocial tendency

The condition of the individual … demand[s] that we associate antagonistic concepts: exclusion and inclusion, the I, the they, and the it. This requires what I have called complex thinking, … a thinking that is capable of unifying concepts which repel one another and are otherwise catalogued and isolated in separate compartments. (Morin, 2008)

Whilst we might thirst after the truth, 'to understand' is, more often than not to suffer. Thus whilst they might poison the mind, lies preserve us from conscious suffering. (Hoggett, 1992, p. 61)

The August 2011 riots started on 4 August 2011 in Tottenham, as a result of the suspicious shooting of a young black man, Mark Duggan, by the police. The police's failure to engage with his family and supporters who went to the police station for answers became the trigger for the riot. From Tottenham, the rioting quickly spread over the next six days to 66 different areas across England and Wales. Five people died, at least 16 others were injured and many lost their homes, businesses and priceless possessions. It was estimated that 13,000–15,000 people took part in the riots and that overall the riots cost the

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country approximately half a billion pounds. Over 4000 people were arrested and about 1483 were found guilty as charged (Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012).

The causes of the Riots of August 2011 were complex and I think psycho-analysis can only help to contribute to our understanding of the riots rather than to provide an explanation. In this paper, I aim to explore the idea put for-ward by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, that the riots are the product of 'pockets of our society that are not only broken, but frankly sick', but exactly what sickness is Cameron referring to – or what does he mean when he says the rioters are sick? I will put forward the idea that the riots were symptomatic of a malaise and were also an unconscious request for its recognition, under-standing and thoughtful containment. I would also argue that to understand the 'sickness' requires an examination not only of the rioters, (them) but also of those who did not riot (us).

Complexity theory is based on the view that all dimensions of existence are inseparable or interconnected (Morin, 2008). There is growing recognition of our tendency to avoid complexity in favour of simple or one dimensional explanation for human behaviour. Morin argues that to take seriously, the com-plexity of things will involve acknowledging that we can never be completely sure and that we always need to work with varying degrees of uncertainty. The ideas put forward in this paper are far from certain. I hope, however, that they engender a better appreciation of the complexity of the riots, and more impor-tantly stimulate more thinking and understanding about them and us.

I was in a holiday resort in Turkey, with mainly French and German tour-ists when we heard on the TV a news report about riots in London. The images on the screen of burning shops and looting were not one, my fellow tourists, associated with England – the green and pleasant land of Queen Elizabeth, the Houses of Parliament, Wimbledon, Oxford and Cambridge etc. The scenes of Tottenham and the rioters were disturbing, at many levels, not least because they jarred with the popular image of England and the English, but they were upsetting, embarrassing even shameful to me and they demanded an explanation.

The rioters: a sick pocket of society, a breed apart?

In the early days of the riots, there was an outpouring of contempt for the riot-ers. Government ministers, the media and other public figures talked about the riots as a product of criminal gangs, feral children and teenagers, feckless and irresponsible parents, and young thugs who shared a culture of entitlement and a disdain for responsibility and hard work.[1] On 10 August 2011, David Cam-eron reassured the country that law and order will be restored on our streets.

He said,

… It is all too clear that we have a big problem with gangs in our country. For too long there had been a lack of focus on the complete lack of respect shown

by these groups of thugs. I'm clear that they are in no way representative of the vast majority of young people in our country who despise them, frankly, as much as the rest of us do. But there are pockets of our society that are not just broken but frankly sick. When we see children as young as 12 and 13 looting and laughing, when we see the disgusting sight of an injured young man with people pretending to help him while they are robbing him, it is clear that there are things that are badly wrong with our society. For me, the root cause of this mindless selfishness is the same thing I have spoken about for years. is a complete lack of responsibility in parts of our society, people allowed to feel the world owes them something, that their rights outweigh their responsibilities and their actions do not have consequences. ('UK riots', 2011)

Cameron seemed to be saying that the rioters are sick because they are mindless, selfish, thugs who lack compassion, respect and responsibility and feel the world owes them something.

Tony Blair, Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, contends that neither social deprivation nor a lack of personal responsibility was the cause of the riots. He argued that Britain, like 'virtually every' developed nation, needs to deal with a group of people who are 'beyond the pale'. In Blair's view, the rioters are 'alienated, disaffected youth who are outside the social mainstream and who live in a culture at odds with any canons of proper behaviour'. They are not 'symptomatic of society at large' and 'Britain, as a whole, is not in the grip of some general "moral decline"'. These young people are simply the product of 'families that are profoundly dysfunctional, operating on completely different terms from the rest of society, middle class or poor' (Blair, 2011).

Blair argues that what is needed is intervention family by family, a reform of criminal justice around antisocial behaviour, organised crime, persistent offenders and gangs.

The Riots Communities and Victims Panel set up by the Prime Minister David Cameron reported in December 2012 that the riots were not carried out by children or teenagers, or gang members but by mostly young adults. 'Our conclusion is that here was no single cause of the riots and no single group was responsible' (Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012, p. 25). Tony Blair and David Cameron might also both note that the Panel's survey of local authorities found that only 5% thought there was an overlap between troubled families and riot families. I think the extreme demonisation and pathologisation of the rioters and their parents, which occurred, during and shortly after the rioting suggested the predominance of what Melanie Klein would describe as paranoid-schizoid thinking. The splitting of society into good and bad, responsible and irresponsible parents, law-abiding majority and criminal minority involved the projection of all bad feelings into groups on one side of the split and an idealisation of the other groups as all good.

Paranoid-schizoid thinking: them and us

The rage of the rioters aroused anxiety about annihilation. According to Klein (1946), when under threat, people are more prone to operate in the paranoid schizoid position, where they project all their unbearable feelings into the other and then can feel guilt-free, even self-righteous. During and shortly after the riots, a paranoid-schizoid state of mind seems to have predominated, and the society became one that was made up of the rioters and the non-rioters, them and us. They, the rioters, were seen as bad, immoral, irresponsible, criminals or 'frankly sick' in Cameron's words, and we the non-rioters were seen as different, that is, the normal, law abiding, decent majority who are not like them but who are in a position to judge and condemn. In this state of mind, the rioters were dehumanised and were seen in Tony Blair's words as 'a breed apart'. Although Cameron and Blair use different words, they both regard the rioters as different to the rest of us – a sick pocket of society. I would like to suggest that whilst those who rioted were not angels, they were through projection being asked to also carry unwanted feelings for the dominant groups in society and for society as a whole, such as guilt and shame about its own lack of responsibility, compassion and destructiveness.

The index patient: the dynamic context

Psychoanalysis is based on the idea that the individual's behaviour is affected by unconscious factors. An individual's personal unconscious, however, is influenced by their parents, family and social environment. There is though a tendency within our society to ascribe a person's behaviour simply to personal factors (an approach that conveniently obscures or denies its roots in family, community and society), and it is much more difficult to demonstrate how it may be linked to family, group or wider societal dynamics. Central to psychoanalytic practice is the idea that one unconscious can communicate to the unconscious of another (Freud, 1912), and there is increasing recognition that unconscious intersubjective processes affect the psyches of individuals much more than has been appreciated (Brown, 2011).

In my clinical experience, many young people for example who are referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) struggle frequently not only with their individual problems, but also with their relationships with their families, primarily parents and or their social context. Often the young person is unconsciously bringing their parents, family and sometimes school or society for treatment. From this perspective, the young person is accurately referred to as the index patient, that is, an indicator, sign or emblem of a family or wider systemic problem.

Drawing on Winnicott's thinking, Teresa Bailey has written an interesting clinical paper in which she points out, that there is no such thing as an adolescent, because their parents are always present in our work, even when we are working alone with a young person (Bailey, 2006, p. 180). Like the adolescent,

parents and families are often unprepared for the loss of childhood, pain of separation and the aggression and emotional drama of the teenage years. Bailey points out that the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics of parents impacts on the adolescent and their functioning in many different ways. There are a number of common risks which parents face such as letting go too quickly (underestimating the need of the adolescent for supervision and guidance) as sometimes parents can feel resentful about still being needed. On the other hand, parents can hold on too long because of their own personal needs such as for company or as a way of keeping the parental couple together. Some parents may not have worked through their own adolescent conflicts and this can often unhelpfully dominate their approach to parenting their adolescent children, being unable to see their child's different needs and circumstances, and repeating mistakes made by their own parents.

The adolescent's growing independence and freedom to explore and experiment can also be envied by parents or be experienced as rejecting, and parents can become depressed or wish to hit back at them. Bailey stresses that whatever feelings the adolescents may stir up in their parents, they do need their parents to support their development, and sometimes parents need help to understand this vital role (Bailey, 2006). The difficult demands of adolescents are more likely to be met by parents who are able to find what Britton (1989) calls the 'third' position internally or externally through links with others who can help them think about and adjust to the emotional needs and demands of their adolescents.

Vignette

A is a 15-year-old young man who lives with his 11-year-old sister and parents. He was referred to CAMHS because he was described as out of control and having a serious 'anger management' problem. He had smashed up the living room in his house and had suffered serious cuts to his arms and hands in the process. His parents felt they could no longer cope with his behaviour and they wanted him sorted out otherwise they might have to ask him to leave.

At the first appointment, I met with A individually, and a colleague met with his parents. A said he was 'pissed off' with his parents and his little 'goody 2 shoes sister'. His parents he described as over-controlling, because they object to him smoking cannabis, which in his view was no worse than alcohol, and they would also prevent him from going to parties or if they did allow him to go, wanted him to come home at ridiculously early times, like 11–12 pm. In subsequent appointments, I learnt that at age 11, against his wishes, A was sent to a private school in another borough, and as a result had lost contact with primary school friends and had found it hard to settle at the private school. He could not relate to the children in the school because none came from his area, they were very middle class if not upper class, and most had been at the school since the age of five. He felt an outsider at school and

an outsider in his home area. By year 9, age 13, unknown to his parents, he was depressed and was having suicidal thoughts. He began to smoke cannabis and became close to a few boys in the school who also smoked. He thought his parents were hopeless: they never really listened and his father was never home because he worked all the time. Three years ago the family had moved into a bigger house, in a nicer part of their area, but he thought his mother was unhappy but always pretended otherwise. The whole thing is pointless he would often say.

The parents presented as a united couple, confused about A's anger and increasingly unpleasant and irresponsible behaviour towards themselves and his sister. My colleague learnt that father was a successful plumber who had opened a plumbing shop, but also continued to work as a plumber. Mother used to be bank clerk and after A was born began to work at home managing her husband's business accounts and administration. Mr C was a charming and confident man who filled the room, and Mrs C was quiet, polite and tended to allow Mr C to speak for both of them. Mr C thought that in contrast to his own childhood, A had had it all and thought that he had probably been spoilt – had got things too easily and lacked discipline. However, their daughter was doing well. She had just started at the same school and seemed to be thriving. The two children, they said, were like chalk and cheese.

The work comprised individual psychotherapy appointments with A, parent appointments and family appointments. However, as the work went on Mr C often missed appointments or arrived extremely late. Mr C would be openly confronted by A in the family sessions, whose excuses and justifications became increasingly embarrassing. Mrs C who had never challenged her husband, began to share her frustration and despair about him never giving the family priority. In a parents' appointment, whilst waiting for Mr C to arrive she broke down and talked about her unhappiness, how she had a drink problem and had had an affair. The therapist felt compromised by having this secret information and as Mrs C refused to share this information with her husband, encouraged her to seek individual help.

Whilst on the surface appearing to be successful and thriving, this family was fundamentally unhappy and fragile. As thrashing of the family's expensive – but we discovered unused – living room, was a symbolic communication about the lack of life, joy and togetherness in the family. He had rung an alarm bell for himself and the family in his extreme destructive and self-destructive outburst. Consequently, the family was brought together to 'sort out' A, but in effect he had arranged for the whole family to address its difficulties. In his individual therapy, A acknowledged how lost he was and how he felt locked onto a self-destructive trajectory. The cannabis which had initially brought him some relief had increasingly become a problem: he felt he had become highly dependent on the drug, it was adversely affecting his concentration, and he was putting himself at risk of being excluded from school or being arrested because of the activities of some of his associates. A was not conscious of his mother's depression and alcoholism,

but I think he unconsciously knew that something vital had been lost in the family and that his mother was very unhappy; father needed to be around more and that some urgent radical change in the family was needed.

I trust that this case has illustrated how an individual's behaviour can be a product of personal factors as well as of dynamic forces within the family and social context and that much of this can be unconscious to those involved. We need to create a thinking space that enables thinking about the adolescent, the parental couple, the family and the social context and their anxieties and defences. Such a space would ideally bring together all parties involved to consider their difficulties, with the support of a therapist who allied him/herself to seeking emotional truth and understanding and not allying too much with either the adolescent, parent or society as this is likely to put the work and the possibility of change at risk.

I will now try to show that the rioters of August 2011 can be thought about as index patients – an index of a deep malaise.

Riots as an index/symptom of malaise

Riots and revolt has been, for the past six centuries, a traditional way of expressing and redressing the grievances of the poor and powerless (Webber, 1981, p. 245).

There have been riots in Britain for centuries, by the poor and the powerless as a way of expressing their pain and grievances. Much has been written about the difference between the 2011 riots and previous riots, leading many to regard the 2011 as not a political riot or organised social protest, with a clear purpose or message to deliver but as simply mindless violence, criminality or 'irrational outbursts of destructive if not self-destructive violence (Zizek, 2011). However, in my view, the August 2011 riots whilst unique in many ways, did also share elements in common with previous riots (e.g. the 1985 riots in Tottenham and the 1981 and 2001 riots in Brixton, Toxteth and Manchester). Many reviews of riots (e.g. Bunyan, 1981) have shown that riots tend to take place in deprived areas, are carried out predominantly by the poor and powerless and are triggered by a breakdown of communication between the police and local communities'. These factors also apply to the August 2011 riots.

According to The Guardian and London School of Economics (2011) and the Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2012), the majority of the August 2011 rioters came from poor neighbourhoods, with 41% of suspects living in one of the top 10% of most deprived places in the country. The data also show that 66% of neighborhoods where the accused lived got poorer between 2007 and 2010. Researchers found that in almost all of the worst-affected areas, youth unemployment and child poverty were significantly higher than the national average while education attainment was significantly lower. The adverse impact of not being at work on both physical and mental health has been grossly underestimated (see Davies, 2011; Waddell, 1999).

People do not always know the full reasons for their behaviour or are not able to articulate what they are aware of. In fact, we tend to communicate our most unmanageable/unbearable feelings through projection into others, and it is only through the recipient feeling these feelings, that is, if we can contain them, that we can begin to make sense of the feelings the subject cannot manage. As Moylan (1994) put it 'we sometimes communicate only with the primitive unconscious language of projective identification' (Moylan, 1994). Violence can be a way of the rioters evacuating into others their unbearable experiences – creating fear, vulnerability and loss in the victim.

The case of A illustrated that there were conscious and unconscious reasons for his destructive and self-destructive behaviour. Understanding the reasons for this should include studying the dynamic context as well as listening carefully, not just to the content of what the rioters say but also the way it is said and the atmosphere it creates – the feelings it produces in you the listener. Noticing our experience and reflecting on it can help us gain some notion of what the rioters might have been communicating unconsciously. An examination of the context within which the riots occurred shows the following:

(1) A financial crisis, starting in 2007–2008, led to a global economic recession, considered by many as one of the worst recessions since the 1930s. A major factor causing this recession was a credit bonanza driven by greed, – in particular by banks developing more and more high risks credit and mortgage products particularly in the USA and lowering lending standards (otherwise known as the growth of sub-prime markets). When this market collapsed, it led to the collapse of Northern Rock who had apparently made loans for more than four times what it had in its reserves. Northern Rock and other British banks were eventually rescued by the British taxpayer with loans of upwards of £850 billion (http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2011/sep/12/reality-check-banking-bailout).

(2) A government which had, in the face of the economic crisis, declared that 'we are all in this together', instituted an austerity programme that placed the cost disproportionately on the poorer and weaker members of society (e.g. cutting public services, imposing a pay freeze on public sector workers, reducing tax credits, raising the age of retirement). This programme had been introduced in a country where income inequality had been rising faster than in any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country since 1975. Their data show that the ratio of the average income of the richest 10% to that of the poorest 10% was nearly 12–1 (OECD, 2011).

(3) A number of reports had noted that social mobility in the UK had stagnated, if not declined and that people's occupational and economic destinations were increasingly dependent more on their social origins than

their personal ability. In other words 'equality of opportunity' in Britain has deteriorated in the past decade.

(4) Youth unemployment (young people aged 16–24) in the UK was 1.04 million (22.5%) in December 2011, the highest it has been since 1986/1987. According to the Centre for Social Justice (2011), the number of permanent school exclusions had almost doubled between 1997 and 2007. Klein (1999) argues that changes in the British educational system, such as an increasingly inflexible curriculum and emphasis on exam league tables have contributed to the increase in school exclusions and disguised exclusions. The Social Exclusion Unit (2000) has pointed out that school exclusion is a risk factor for substance misuse, youth crime, mental health problems and homelessness and in general is likely to increase a young person's disaffection.

(5) Against this background of austerity, widening income inequality and decreasing social mobility, a number of scandals were exposed which left the public outraged by the actions of those at the top of society who seemed to be self-serving, dishonest and greedy. They include the parliamentary expenses scandal (June 2009), the Liberal Democrat Party breaking its election pledge to vote against any proposed increase in tuition fees (2010), and the phone hacking of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler and victims of the 7/7 London bombings and many others by Rupert Murdoch News Corporation.

(6) Finally, about two weeks before the riots, there were the resignations of two senior police officers, Sir Paul Stephenson, the Commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police Service, and Police Assistant Commissioner John Yates due to concerns about their close links with News International.

A number of commentators saw the August 2011 riots as a product of serious dysfunction in wider society. Zizek (2011) regarded the manifesto of the Spanish Protest movement against austerity measures as expressing the attitude not only of many people in Spain but in other western countries as well, including Britain. This manifesto he reports state that 'Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical, but we are all concerned and angry about the political, economic and social outlook that we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice' (Zizek, 2011). Claudia Webbe, a social worker who helped set up Operation Trident, a police unit aimed at combating drug-related gun crime, argued that there is no one single underlying cause of the riots, but believed that they were clearly linked to tensions that had arisen over issues ranging from the economy to social deprivation and policing. She saw the riots as a venting of anger about inequality, decades of generational unemployment, poverty and police stop-and-search – in short a wake-up call to society.

The role of the police is of particular importance, given their symbolic and actual relationship to the rioters. The police are supposed to be neutral, enforce the law fairly and protect all citizens. But as a result of a number of reports, for example The Report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel (2012), police neutrality is seen not as an operational reality but more part of the legitimising ideology of a class dominated society (evidence is that criminals are seen as located within deprived poor areas and the police are less concerned and focused on 'white-collar' crimes than with policing poor criminals). This approach tends to lead to the criminalisation of the young and disadvantaged, through the stopping and searching of black youths and sections of white working class youths. It is assumed that most crimes or criminality in Britain is a product of the unemployed, poor underclass in deprived areas. According to Kushnick (1981) the reality is that there are discriminatory police practices that are reinforced by a discriminatory criminal justice system, through the definition of crime itself through selective, discretionary and discriminatory law enforcement, through differential access to bail and adequate legal representation, differential conviction and sentencing rates – all adding up to a disproportionate policing and criminalisation and imprisonment of poorer, especially black members of society.

I think the August 2011 rioters, like patient A above, can be thought of as index patients. Their behaviour is a symbol of a malaise not just in themselves, but in their families and communities and society as a whole. In many ways, the rioters' behaviour mirrored the greed, lawlessness and lack of compassion of bankers, politicians and the police. Even the *Daily Mail*, not a left-wing paper by any measure, seems to share this view. Its editorial stated that: 'the bankers have the same contempt for the law abiding public as those looters and the same sense of entitlement to wealth as the teenagers who smash shop windows to steal flat-screen televisions' ('Bankers, looters', 2011). But the rioters are not simply an index of the greed, dishonesty and lack of compassion of those at the top of society such as the bankers and MPs. They are an index of all of us. The financial crisis was also a product of oral greed: a widespread credit culture linked to an increasingly individualistic, narcissistic and consumerist lifestyle across the whole of society. This is reflected in the decline of communal and mutual organisations, for example, trade unions and building societies. Instead, there is and has been and there still is a common preoccupation in our society with individual status, fame and the ability to participate in consumer markets (Morrow & Richards, 1996).[2] In short, the rioters are also an index of our preoccupation with consumerism, of acquiring property, money, success, status or fame at seemingly any cost. Davies (2011, p. 71) argues that 'the culture of capitalism must keep individuals sufficiently dissatisfied that they continue to seek satisfaction from it, but not so dissatisfied that they reject or resist it outright'. Advertising plays a key role in this process by subtly instrumentalising dissatisfaction and unhappiness as a motivation for consumption and dissatisfaction (Davies, 2011). The August 2011 riots I think say as much about 'us', the non-rioters, as they do about 'them'. There is an

old African saying, which states that when one points a finger to blame someone, there are three other fingers on the same hand that point back at you.

I believe the riots constituted at least in part an unconscious protest on behalf of all of us, about the lies told by politicians and the media, widening social inequality, and a culture that seems to be driven by feathering one's owns nest, consumerism, and the placing of money, power and status above the welfare of human beings. I will now go on to argue that the August 2011 riots were largely adolescent in character and to draw on Winnicott's ideas of 'The antisocial tendency' (1956) and 'Delinquency as a sign of hope' (1987) to further explore the meaning of the violence, stealing and thrashing of shops that characterised the riots.

The riots as a communication and a sign of hope

Although the rioters were made up of people of all ages, it was found that the majority of rioters (about 75%) were aged 24 or under of those brought before the courts, just under half were aged 18–24 – with 26% aged between 10 and 17 years old, and only 5% over 40 (The Guardian and London School of Economics, 2011; Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012). The riots had an adolescent character, not simply because most were under 25 years old. But as Ward (2012) pointed out, the rioting also had an impulsive, risk-taking and wild acting-out quality, with many of the rioters seemingly caught up in the delinquent excitement of the crowd, thinking that as everyone was doing it, they would not be caught.

Winnicott in his classic paper 'The Antisocial Tendency' (1956) argued that all children have an antisocial tendency, which is inherent in emotional development as no one's childhood is perfect and to a certain extent frustration and a sense of deprivation is inevitable. Antisocial behaviour, according to Winnicott, is more likely to be a product of true deprivation, that is, when

> there has been a loss of something good that has been positive in the child's experience up to a certain date, and that has been withdrawn; the withdrawal has extended over a period of time longer than that over which the child can keep the memory of the experience alive. (1956, p. 309)

Such children, he argued, often unconsciously yearned for what they once had and has been deprived of. According to Ward (2012), the antisocial tendency is an expression that something is not right and could be better understood as an unconscious request to be held firmly but lovingly. The hope is that parents or family will hear the communication behind the antisocial act and respond appropriately. Otherwise if not the antisocial behaviour will spread to the school and then into society. As Ward (2012) points out, the further it spreads beyond those who know and have any relationship with the young person, the

less likely it is that the behaviour will be heard as a communication and the more likely it will receive a harsh punitive response from society and its representatives. If the hoped for response is not provided the antisocial tendency begins to turn into delinquency.

Winnicott argues that because their request for help through antisocial behaviour is not understood, some young people become hardened and derive important secondary gains from their antisocial activity, which then makes it 'much more difficult to see (what is still there, nevertheless) the SOS that is a signal of hope in the boy or girl who is antisocial' (Winnicott, 1987, p. 90). However, instead of a considered response to the antisocial behaviour of those who rioted, there was a severe retaliation against them. A petition signed by over 200,000 people was submitted to the government proposing that any convicted rioters have their benefit payments cut. On 10 August 2011, David Cameron reassured the country that law and order will be restored on our streets.

He said,

> As I speak, sentences are also being passed; courts sat through the night last night and will do again tonight. It is for the courts to sentence but I would expect anyone convicted of violent disorder will be sent to prison. We needed a fight back and a fight back is under way. ('UK riots', 2011)

Some Councils stated that they intended to evict tenants who had rioted from their homes.[3] The courts appeared to join the punitive frenzy, because defendants who would normally be released on bail were being routinely remanded in custody and many of those found guilty seemed to be given disproportionately harsh sentences. Bawdon (2011) reported that Ken Macdonald QC described the courts as afflicted by a 'collective loss of proportionality' after the riots. For example:

(1) In London, Nicholas Robinson, 23, an electrical engineering student with no previous convictions, was jailed for the maximum permitted six months after pleading guilty to stealing bottles of water worth £3.50 from Lidl in Brixton. His lawyer stated that Nicholas had been walking back from his girlfriend's house in the early hours of the morning when he saw the store being looted and had taken the opportunity to go in and help himself to a case of water. He explained that Nicholas was caught up in the moment and was ashamed of his actions but the prosecution told Judge Alan Baldwin: 'This defendant has contributed through his action to criminal activities to the atmosphere of chaos and sheer lawlessness' (Addley, Vasagar, & Coleman, 2011).

(2) Mother-of-two Ursula Nevin, from Manchester, was jailed for five months for receiving a pair of shorts given to her after they had been looted from a city centre store.

(3) A senior crown prosecutor Ann Crighton (see Bawdon, 2011), with 18 years experience with the Crown Prosecution Service, said she has been reduced to tears by the severity of some sentences being handed out to teenage riot offenders by the youth court. She cited the case of a 17-year-old boy 'from a very respectable family, who had never been anywhere near the police before', who was sentenced to 18 months custody by West London youth court after handing himself in to police.

The former chair of the Criminal Bar Association, Paul Mendelle QC, said sentences were too long and harsh. He told BBC 5 Live:

> When people get caught up and act out of character, in a similar way, there is a danger that the courts themselves may get caught up in a different kind of collective hysteria – I'm not suggesting violence or anything like that – but in purporting to reflect the public mood actually go over the top and hand out sentences which are too long and too harsh.

Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for Communities) told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: 'We need to understand that people for a while thought that this was a crime without consequence – we cannot have people being frightened in their beds, frightened in their own homes for their public safety'. That is why these kind of exemplary sentences are necessary. 'I think people would be rightly alarmed if that incitement to riot got off with just a slap on the wrist'.

I am not saying that the rioters should not be punished but that our punishment should be considered and assist with the development of the adolescent. The failure to understand or be interested in the meaning of the behaviour or the message behind the antisocial act can lead to more severe disaffection and more serious antisocial behaviour. I think the riots were also a manifestation of the antisocial tendency, an attempt to find the environmental care that has been lost, is needed and which is arguably an entitlement. The riots could be thought of an expression of anger about the loss of and contact with good objects and a search for holding, containment and environmental stability – a search for care so that development can occur. It implies hope and an attempt to not settle for deprivation and despair.

Since the riots there has been further evidence that there is a deep societal malaise (banks found guilty of consciously mis-selling Payment Protection Insurance, Barclays' illegal fixing of Libor rates and the scandal of Hillsborough which clearly demonstrates that those in authority can be unjust, inhumane and corrupt. For 23 years, in the case of Hillsborough, the working class victims were blamed by those in authority, the respectable classes who had lied and fabricated evidence to avoid accountability and face justice). Despite some recognition that these riots were 'a wake-up call' to do something about gross hardship and despair at the bottom end of society, and that it mirrored our narcissistic, self-serving consumerist culture, there is as yet no

evidence that the riots have led to the recognition that the national family is afflicted by a malaise and is in need of serious treatment.

Conclusion

The psychoanalyst Bion (1992, p. 122) thought that there are two influential tendencies within the personality: one which is ego-centric (narcissism) and the other socio-centric (socialism). We appear to be more dominated by the narcissistic tendency at the moment, in which notions of community and inter-dependence are dwarfed by the obsession with self. But although I think that psychoanalysis can make a useful contribution to thinking about unconscious dynamics in society, the contributions of other disciplines are also necessary to achieve a fuller understanding of societal functioning. In this paper, I have drawn in particular on Klein's notion of the paranoid-schizoid position, where splitting, denial, projection, projective identification and idealisation are used to understand social anxieties about survival of the dominant or more powerful groups and the defences they use to ward them off and to protect themselves: described by Dalal (2002) as the inevitable relationship between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. But if we move beyond this defensive position or identification with the 'have's', we will be more likely to be able understand and work with the emotional complexity of the riots. If we are in the depressive position, we would be less likely to split off unbearable feelings about the self and thus be more able to work holistically with all factors of internal and external reality for both them and us.

Threats to survival stir up primitive anxieties about annihilation. Very often the response is to withdraw from reality in a way that seriously compromises the capacity for problem solving. Describing the riots as a medical or criminal condition reinforces notions of a pathological and deviant underclass and downplays not only that social and structural forces influence the development and course of disaffection but also conceals the deviance, criminality and lack of compassion that is rife within our society. The riots are not just about 'them' – the rioters – they are also about 'us' – those who did not riot.

The roots of the riots lay in the individual developmental histories of each rioter, family dynamics, school milieu and the social and economic context (see Kelloway & Harvey, 1999; Merton, 1998; Sandlers & Hendry, 1997). There is an African saying that it takes a village to raise a child, which seems to be increasingly quoted in Britain. I think for good reason, because the riots are not just about the people who took part in the riots, it is also says something about the village.

Notes

1. Theodore Dalrymple (real name Dr. Anthony Daniels) has popularised the notion of 'culture of entitlement' and described British youth as barbarians and 'the most unpleasant and violent in the world' (Dalrymple, 2011; Moran & Hall, 2011).

2. It is now a common ritual to get the latest version of a mobile phone such as the iPhone, which is an example of the perpetual chase for 'happiness' or 'status' through the possession of consumer items. *The Independent* (Rawlinson, 2012) reported that there were more than two million pre-orders in just 24 h of the launch of iPhone5, more than double the number of the iPhone4's pre-orders in the same time period previously and that there were queues forming outside Apple's London Covent Garden store two days before the iPhone5 launch on 14 October 2012.
3. On 13 August 2011, Wandsworth Council served the first eviction notice, on the mother of an 18-year-old suspected to be a rioter.

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