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THE PRECARIAT: OUTBURSTS OF CRIME, SUCH AS THE 2011 LONDON RIOTS, CAN BE EXPLAINED THROUGH THE LENS OF NEOLIBERALISM

ADVANCED CAPITALISM'S ENDLESS
COMPETITION AND CONSUMER CULTURE

GIANSANTI ENRICO

This is what back to basics was really about: the unleashing of the barbarian who lurked beneath our apparently civilized, bourgeois society, through the satisfying of the barbarian's basic instincts. On British streets during the unrest, what we saw was not men reduced to 'beasts', but the stripped-down form of the 'beast' produced by capitalist ideology, neoliberalism (Žižek, 2011).

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Abstract

The financial misconduct and corruption at the very top of the class system that in 2008 caused the collapse of the world economy saw no reaction from the criminal justice system. In contrast, the 2011 English Riots at the bottom rungs of society, estimated to have caused 200 million pounds of damages, produced a ruthless response from the judiciary where sentences were almost treble the usual rate. Politicians were quick to condemn the rioters as mere wanton criminals and framing their actions within a behavioural explanation calling for severe punishments. My thesis's aim is to show that it was instead decades of neoliberal policies that pushed these people to vent their frustration through rioting. Their ensuing anomic ethic is understood by considering the rioters' actions through the prism of both Strain Theory and Institutional Anomie Theory. To contextualise their place within today's capitalist society I categorized them within an emerging social class: The Precariat. Through a qualitative analysis of 17 interviews' extracts, all that transpired was their desires to be active consumers by grabbing what they could; the riots were merely an excuse to bypass the structurally imposed limits that stood before the desired higher social status. This research speaks of an increasingly unequal society, which positions individual economic success above collective well-being. These disturbances are symptoms of a deep seated malaise and of a stripped-down manifestation of what neoliberalism really is. To reverse it, we ought to implement holistic socioeconomic policies that empower people through the creation of secure and well-paid jobs, encourage collectivism over individualism and that promote better education towards sustainable living and happiness.

Keywords: neoliberalism, riots, structural inequality, laissez-faire, anomie, the precariat, strain theory, institutionalized anomie theory

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1. Introduction

Between the 6th and the 9th of August 2011, there were public disorder outbreaks occurring in England, mainly in the London area. By August 9, most disorders were occurring in the West Midlands, Nottingham, and Greater Manchester, Merseyside, and other small areas outside of the capital city (Ministry of Justice Bulletin, 2012). The trigger was the fatal shooting of Mark Duggan, an alleged criminal, by officers of the Metropolitan Police. The initial protest against this incident soon precipitated into more destructive outbreaks, where the subjective motivations of those who saw the chance to do some free shopping took precedence over the initial protest for the use of unnecessary lethal force by the Metropolitan police (Treadwell et al, 2013). Four years after the shooting, the Independent Police Complaints Commission cleared the officers involved of any wrongdoings in the killing of Mark Duggan (The Guardian, 2015).

On the 11th of August 2011, in Camberwell Green Magistrates Court, a 23-year-old student with no criminal record was sentenced to a prison term of six months for stealing a pack of bottled water worth £3.50 (Ministry of Justice Bulletin, 2012). This extremely severe sentence would usually have been a source of extensive condemnation of judicial abuse, however, after five nights of intense rioting across a dozen English cities, the extraordinary turned ordinary for the judiciary. In contrast to the establishment's mild reaction to the widespread financial criminality at the very top of society's echelons that resulted in the 2008 financial meltdown and consequent loss of hundreds of billions of pounds and the well-being of billions of people across the globe, the response of the criminal justice system to what was in essence a street fracas, albeit a costly one (200 million pounds in damage), was swift, brutal and decisive. The people convicted at the Crown Court for robbery, that is, looting, however minor, during these disorders were sent to prison with striking swiftness to an average of 29.8 months, approximately three times the typical rate of 10.8 months (Ibid). Those convicted of violent disorder secured 30.6 months compared with the typical sentence of 9.9 months, while those pinched for theft met sentences almost double the usual length, 10.1 months against 6.6 months (Ibid). Once the riots ended, the police employed substantial resources and various procedures to track down and round up the looters comprising scanning television footage and web postings, setting up phone lines for snitching, running 'Shop A Moron' advertisements on buses, whereas politicians assured to cut welfare and housing benefits to the families of the perpetrators. Why did we see these double standards? Why did they come about?

Juxtaposed to decades of socioeconomic and political policies that saw severe state reduction in expenditure and at the same time unrelenting invocation of personal responsibility, powerful scenes of burning buildings and groups of hooded youths raiding shops, coupled with thousands of police officers patrolling the streets in riot gear were bound to generate rash public statements and hasty government responses. During the riots as well as in their immediate aftermath, anybody trying to articulate an explanation of the disorders other than a behavioural one was loudly condemned as essentially condoning or even supporting rioting (The Telegraph, 2011). So called experts, journalists and of course politicians, rushed to justify a behavioural explanation to the riots as to instil a moral panic within public opinion and hence justifying the need for harsh punishments (Garland, 2008). Boris Johnson, the then Mayor of London, personified this stance when he stated that "It's time we heard a little bit less about the sociological justifications for what is in my view nothing less than wanton criminality" (The Independent, 2011). As the disturbances spread to several London districts, and to other cities in England, a rhetoric blaming either pure or copycat criminality soon became the consistent motive given for their occurrence. A rhetoric that was abundantly

regurgitated and perpetuated among police chiefs, politicians, and of course the mainstream media. Of course, Boris Johnson, together with the then Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne were quick to forget about their disorderly and vulgar days while studying at the University of Oxford as members of the infamous Bullingdon Club (The Guardian, 2009).

In this thesis, I will argue that such knee-jerk reactions where 2,710 people were brought before the courts and of which 2138 were convicted and sentenced, were extremely unwarranted. Furthermore, I will argue that the disturbances that erupted in England between the 6th and the 9th of August 2011 had been caused by a slow-brewing malaise that had been planted in the social fabric of our society by the introduction of neoliberal policies a few decades earlier. Unfortunately, such policies have been embraced and more aggressively developed by the current political elites (Chomsky, 2017). Beginning in the late 1970s the UK has gone through an extraordinary (and seemingly ongoing) neoliberal transformation, where the British ruling elites have been at the centre of such revolution that has since seized unequally all over the world. However, what started as a radical series of policy moves towards privatization (a systematic assault on the Keynesian welfare state and on trade unions) has morphed into what has skillfully been labelled “the mobilization of state power in the contradictory extension and reproduction of market-like rule” (Tickell and Peck, 2003 pp.166). An unpleasant troika of economic deregulation, welfare state withdrawal, and penal expansion. In other words, a laissez-faire in the economic register at the top, and anything but laissez-faire on the social register at the bottom. All of this, fashioned by non-stop statecraft (i.e. the state as a political process in motion, not a hobbling bureaucratic monolith) has essentially restructured social relations from above, and led many to believe, and fervently defend, the myth that economic growth is all that matters to a society as wealth will trickle-down and benefit everyone. In the 1990s this rationality was incorporated by many political parties across Europe from the social democratic to the left-wing movements and positions. Without much scope for discretion following the mantras of the free market, low-taxation, inflation-busting radicalism of the previous decades, these parties all spun neoliberal. The prime illustration of such a party is the UK Labour Party, in power from 1997 to 2010 under the clever capacity for populist reform shown by Tony Blair and his senior advisors. Amid the numerous damaging legacies of this era is a truly appalling record of income inequality, where by all available measures on nearly every possible indicator shows that the wealthy became wealthier and the poor became poorer (Dorling, 2010).

The 2011 English riots happened one year after a Coalition government came to power in the UK; an election which did not produce a clear majority for any party. That Coalition was a tilted alliance between the dominant Conservative Party (which ironically campaigned using the language of compassion and social progress to shield the electorate from its zealous right wing, ruling class and corporate ethos), and the secondary Liberal Democrats (a fairly small group of centre-right political lightweights arguably devoid of an intelligible discourse or set of policies). The new Prime Minister, David Cameron, and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne (both members of the British aristocracy with substantial family fortunes, who have surrounded themselves with people from similar backgrounds) landed in office in the course of a global financial crisis, and were met by a considerable budget deficit which they contended was a result of irresponsible and careless public spending by the previous Labour government. For Cameron and Osborne, two champions of low taxation and even lower public spending, there was only one approach to reduce such deficit: a brutal austerity package, which, fittingly, was also a chance to completely extinguish the welfare state that the Thatcher’s children of the Conservative Party much loathed, and replace it with their dream of

a systematically privatized and individualized society which would defend the holiness of private property rights and the free market (Chomsky, 2017).

Emblems of the Fordist-Keynesian period such as the welfare state were, and still are, regarded by the Conservative Party as “dangerous impediments to the advancement of financialization” (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2013, pp20). To carry on the inexorable stride of increasing economic global growth, British ruling elites have set out to control and monetize more and more of those human requirements that were not commodified in preceding rounds of financialization. Thus, social cushions such as pensions, healthcare, education, and particularly housing have been more aggressively seized and financialized by and to the private sector (Meek, 2014). For the Conservatives, the redistributive route, that of increased taxation of corporations, land and property (the City of London, in particular, is known as a ‘square mile’ tax haven for foreign investors in land and property), was and still is not a problem for public debate. For that end, a whole team of professionals, including economists, lawyers, think tank researchers and communications experts, was and still is in place to make certain the political discourse does not move in that direction. This guarantees that it is unknown that an estimated £120 billion a year is lost in the UK due to corporate tax avoidance, evasion, and collection errors. To put things in perspective the money lost over tax avoidance could, for example, pay for 25,000 nurses on a £24,000 a year salary for 20 years; it could put 129,000 children through school from the age 5 to the age of 18, and would allow the government to pay every single pensioner in the UK an extra £65 a year (Left Foot Forward, 2013).

By taking a more critical position at the methodical attack on the welfare system in the UK, one can move a step closer in the direction of appreciating the common indignity and humiliation among the people who feel deserted and betrayed. Table 1 in the appendix presents a summary of the welfare reforms and cuts that have taken place in the UK since the Coalition government came to power in 2010. Perhaps, the fact that these cuts were all being mooted by members of parliament with such enthusiasm goes some way towards explaining the anger displayed on the streets of England during the summer of 2011. These cuts are, quite simply, structural violence against the least affluent and most vulnerable people in society.

As a starting point of my thesis, I will firstly discuss Strain Theory. This discussion aims to underline Merton’s core principles and how the combination of the strain between the cultural goals of monetary and material accumulation and success, and individualism, nowadays exacerbated by capitalism’s advanced consumer culture, and the restricted means that people have at their disposal to obtain these goals, have contributed to the anger against the status quo and hunger for consumer products that we witnessed during the disturbances of the 2011’s summer. I then discuss Institutional Anomie Theory and the still quite novel idea of The Precariat. These perspectives will help to demonstrate how the neoliberal economic policies have years after years peeled away the social protections that promoted solidarity and altruism while at the same time marginalising a substantial section of the population. This process has resulted in increasing apathy and anomie among those affected by these policies, which apathy and anomie were eventually vented out through the violent manifestation we saw in the 2011 English Riots. This last point will be underlined using actual interviews with 17 rioters that were taken during and in the immediate aftermath of the riots.

2. Aim

The overall aim of my thesis is to argue that the root causes of the 2011 English Riots were a pervasive consumer culture coupled with the erosion of the social institutions and policies both derived from the neoliberal policies of today's capitalist society. I will develop my argument through the lenses of Strain and Institutional Anomie Theories. I will use the concept of The Precariat to contextualize the rioters' actions in today's market economy. My research question is thus:

Can Strain Theory, Institutional Anomie Theory and the concept of The Precariat help us contextualize the 2011 English Riots within the 21st century's advanced capitalism's never ending competition and pervasive consumer culture?

3. Data and Method

3.1 Data: the riots in numbers

By the 1st of February 2012, 2,710 people, mostly youths from London (1,896), had appeared before the courts for first hearings; 89 percent were male and 11 percent female and these percentages were similar across all interested areas. The majority were young people, as 27 percent of those brought before the courts for public disorder offences were aged 10-17 (juveniles), and 26 percent were aged 18-20. Only 6 percent were aged 40 or above (Ministry of Justice Bulletin, 2012). Compared to the year before, 2010, there was a different distribution, where the proportion of juveniles brought before the courts for similar offences was 16 percent, the proportion of 18-20-year-olds was 15 percent and the proportion of 40-year-olds or older was 15 percent. In terms of ethnicity, of those brought before the courts and whose data collected were based on self-defined ethnicity, showed that 41 percent identified themselves as being White, 39 percent as being Black, and 12 percent as being Mixed (Ibid). Of the 2,710 people brought before the courts for a first hearing, 1,789 (66 percent) reached a final outcome. The most common offences for which they had been brought before the court were burglary (49 percent), violent disorder (21 percent), theft (16 percent), robbery (2 percent), and criminal damage (2 percent). The remaining offences covered small numbers of a wide range of offences. As of the 1st of February 2012, 1,483 people had been found guilty of some offences and sentenced for their part in the disorders (Ibid). Circa 2,500 shops were looted, and the total cost to the taxpayers was at the time estimated to fall on and around £200 million (Topping & Bawdon, 2011; Greenwood, 2011).

3.2 Method

My thesis consists of a theoretical literature review of existing criminological research, the introduction of the idea of a new social class [The Precariat], and a qualitative analysis of extracts from 17 interviews collected during and immediately after the 2011 English riots. My literature review discusses Merton's Strain Theory and Institutionalized Anomie Theory. I also discuss the concept of The Precariat, which has been characterized as a new and marginalized social class that resulted from polarizing neoliberalism's socioeconomic policies. Because of the time lapse since the English riots, and given the limited time and resources at my disposal, I decided to use material that had already been gathered by other researchers. The extracts used have been taken from 17 interviews collected during and immediately after the English riots by Treadwell et al (2013). The extracts will be presented in *italics*, and verbatim, as they were originally collected and published. This is to avoid loss of content and to minimize personal biases.

Theories are produced to enlighten, predict, and comprehend phenomena and to test and expand existing knowledge. A theoretical framework is a structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study (Tewksbury, 2009). Its aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the topic before testing it. A literature review is important because it helps to find potential areas for research or to pinpoint similar work completed within the same area. In this way, researchers can identify knowledge gaps that call for an additional investigation. A point of great contention in criminological research is whether qualitative data is better than quantitative data, or vice versa. For my thesis, I use qualitative data for reasons that are relevant to my thesis's aim. Collecting and analysing data through interviews give us a more in depth understanding of crime, criminals and justice system processes and operations than detached quantitative data (Ibid). The data's intrinsic difference, how it is collected and analysed, and what its analyses say about the subjects of study, make the understanding attained through qualitative research more informative, richer and offers better knowledge to my thesis's aim than what would have been obtained through quantitative research. The advantage of qualitative investigation stems from the fundamental differences in what qualitative and quantitative data are, and what their aims are. At its core, qualitative research centres on the meanings, traits and defining characteristics of events, people, interactions, settings or cultures and experience (Ibid). As a prominent advocate of qualitative methods argued:

“Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing, its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things.” (Berg, 2007: pp 3).

Important to note is what is missing from Berg's definition; the *amount* or *quantity* of what it is that is being researched. The numerical descriptions of objects and their relationships are not the focus of qualitative research; that is the focus of the quantitative method (Tewksbury, 2009). Thus, because in my paper I am interested in the understanding of the social aspects of why theft and violent rioting occur and why those involved, the structures and processes in which they operate work, I used qualitative data as it generates the in-depth information I need to draw my conclusions. People neither understand and experience things nor do they operate in a vacuum; rather they do so in culturally-grounded contexts. This is why, to answer my research question, qualitative data is more valuable and useful than quantitative data. Those arguing for quantitative data over qualitative data will say that the latter is inferior and anyway can only provide anecdotal, non-scientific examples of marginally interesting and valuable insights (Ibid). In other words, how can we trust what these people are saying? They are criminal after all. However true that might be, a similar argument can be made against quantitative data: after all, how can we be sure that who collects the data is unbiased? How do we know that the methods of collection are not flawed, or that the agencies storing it are not biased?

Qualitative research based papers tend to be rarer in top tier journals (11%) than papers based on quantitative research, and less than 15% of papers published in non-top tier journals utilize and publish results from qualitative research (Ibid). However, the fact that qualitative research is less common than quantitative research, on its own, is not a strong enough deterrent. In fact, many scholars and editors of academic journals recognize the strengths and benefits of qualitative research and wish more would be done and published (Ibid). One supposed advantage of quantitative data is that it allows researchers to make fairly accurate predictions; however, one must not forget that making predictions in social sciences is always a gamble and that the efficacy of such predictions is always going to be peripheral and questionable.

Predictions are based on theoretical foundations, and the testing of theoretical ideas, suggestions and relationships; theories are the result of qualitative research. Qualitative data help generate the ideas and suggest the theories that are used to instigate trials and predictive models (Tewksbury, 2009). As mentioned above, qualitative research focuses on depth rather than breadth; such data helps understanding specific individuals and their interactions with their contextual settings. However limiting in generalization terms that might be, it provides an invaluable source of deep learning about complex social situations. Thus, while I recognize that the quantitative method is helpful in describing general patterns, and is widely used in criminological research, for my thesis's aim, the qualitative method is arguably more relevant.

4. Ethics

The Faculty of Health and Society's Ethics Council, recommends that all students conducting research that involves the handling of ethically sensitive material must apply for a review to the Council. After reading the relevant guidelines (University of Malmö, 2017), and consulting with my supervisor and the course director, I have concluded that such ethical review was not necessary for my thesis. However, since my thesis contains extracts from 17 interviews collected and used in an earlier study, I will briefly describe the ethical considerations taken.

The concept of research ethics developed following events spanning from the 1940s to more recent times. More specifically, when conducting research involving human beings several ethical considerations must be taken. Before commencing, it is essential to obtain participants' informed consent, ensuring that they are aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, how to address and minimize any distress they may go through during the study and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality is maintained before, throughout and after the study is concluded (CODEX, 2016). While Treadwell et al (2013) followed all of the above guidelines, I have also paid attention not to publish any detail that could have compromised the interviewees' identities. While there was nothing I could do regarding the content of those interviews, since publishing them verbatim was in itself a principle of my thesis's objectivity, I certainly paid particular attention in ensuring that in doing so I was following CODEX's guidelines (2016) as well as those highlighted by the University of Malmö (2017).

5. Strain Theory

5.1 The origins

Strain theory (ST) originally stemmed from an article written by Merton and Ashley-Montagu in 1940 to rebut, or better condemn and criticize, Earnest Hooton's biological theory of crime (Merton, 2011). Hooton, in a similar vein to criminology's precursors Lombroso and Goring, argued that certain physical characteristics such as the breadth and depth of the chest, weight, head length and circumference, and nose height, were good enough factors to determine who was likely to offend and become delinquent. He argued that these ape-like physical characteristics showed an intrinsic organic inferiority, which in turn was the source of their criminality, and that the only way to prevent or reduce crime, was for society to rid itself of the organically inferior. In their analysis of Hooton's data, Merton and Ashley-Montagu were able to show, perhaps to their amusement, that certain type of offenders had fewer ape-like

bodily features, and thus were arguably more organically advanced than non-offenders (Merton, 2011).

Even though they never entirely dismissed the possibility that biology played a role in criminality, Merton and Ashley-Montagu argued that cultural and social factors were unquestionably more responsible for criminal behaviours than, in this case, biology (Ibid). Merton, unlike the prominent theorizing of the day, did not believe that the major cultural and social factors responsible for criminality were peculiar to the slums, but rather were circumstances central to the American society in general. The key element to criminality was not neighbourhood disorganization but the American dream: a creed conveyed to all citizens to strive for social ascent by means of economic well-being. Unfortunately, as in all competitions, there are always losers, and in this case, the inability to succeed had catastrophic consequences for the society (Ibid). Most of the theorists who argued for social disorganization of poor neighbourhoods as a cause of delinquency were actually born in small, stable rural communities; the big city struck them as disorganized. From there it was a small step to link criminality to this social disorganization (Ibid). Merton was actually born and raised in a slum; however, he saw and experienced poor neighbourhoods as diverse, complex social spaces. He was not drawn to social disorganization. Although gang violence, poverty and antisocial behaviours were present, there were also good people, libraries and the possibility, as he demonstrated, of social mobility (Cullen & Messner, 2007). Merton identified two sources of crime: anomie and strain.

5.2 Merton's Strain Theory

The Chicago school's tradition believed that the origins of crime were rooted in impoverished areas, and that individuals become criminal by assimilating deviant cultural values in these areas. Merton argued for a different social process, one involving conformity to conventional cultural values as a cause of crime and deviance. One aspect of this process was a structurally induced strain (Merton, 2011). Merton saw the American society as unique; not only did it push people to succeed economically, but it made no difference at all between them: poor and wealthy were collectively instructed to pursue the American dream. Hard work will get you there, the mantra went. Merton argued that this prime American virtue, ambition, eventually promotes a prime evil, deviant behaviour (Ibid). However, how can the desire to succeed lead to criminality? The problem was and still is for many people, that the social structure limits the ability to reach the top through the legitimate means of education, employment and connections; as in the case of many of the individuals involved in the 2011 riots (Topping and Bawdon, 2011). Those born in the lower class face structural burdens that put them at a disadvantage compared to those born in the middle and upper classes. In order to succeed, these people must be extremely talented and lucky. Thus, it follows that the incoherence between what the cultural mantra praises (universal striving for success), and what the social structure allows (limited legitimate opportunities), put a large part of the population in the strain-generating position of aspiring to succeed without having any legitimate means to achieve such success (Merton, 2011). This situation creates intense pressure for criminality.

Merton proposed that there were different ways in which people responded to the strains generated but this inability to succeed, and developed his typology of adaptations (Merton, 1968). Most people, Merton noted, did not fall into delinquency, but rather continued to conform and to pursue their goals through conventional and legitimate means. However, some did not do so, and given that the disjunction between means and goals was the source of their problems, a way to diminish the strains was to either changing their cultural goals or renouncing their commitment to institutionalized means (Ibid). Either course would, however,

mean deviating from norms prescribing what success should be, or how to achieve it (through legitimate means). Merton thus developed four deviant modes of adaptation. He argued that a great deal of criminal behaviour could be characterized as *innovation* because this adaptation included those who continued to embrace economic success as a worthy cause, but used illegitimate means when they could no longer pursue their goals through conventional means. The behaviours of white-collar criminals, fraudulent tycoons and scientists, who misrepresent data to be published, are examples of how the desire to succeed can produce innovation among the more affluent. However, this adaptation seems to be prevalent among the lower strata: presented with unrealistic possibilities for advancement, the disadvantaged are most vulnerable to the lure of power and money from organized crime (Ibid). The *ritualists*, by contrast, uphold clear conformity to the norms overseeing institutionalized means and alleviate the strains by lowering their aspirations to the point where their goals can be comfortably reached (Ibid). Thus, despite the cultural pressures to pursue the goal of economic success, they are satisfied to keep away from taking risks and to live within the limitations of their day-to-day routines. The *retreatists*, forfeit their allegiance to both the cultural success goal, and to the norms advocating acceptable means of ascending the social ladder to economic success. These are individuals who are in society but not of it; they escape society's demands through deviant behaviours such as alcoholism, drug addiction, psychosis, homelessness, with suicide being the last or ultimate retreat (Ibid). The final typology of adaptation, according to Merton, is *rebellious* citizens, who reject and wish to change the system. They are estranged from dominant ends and normative values and suggest replacing a new set of goals and means. In the capitalist American society, they could be socialists arguing for collective, rather than individual, success; advocating for norms requiring the redistribution of wealth equally and according to needs, rather than unequally and corresponding to the product of brutal competition (Chomsky, 2016).

5.3 Alienation and uncertainty: Anomie

Merton went beyond why individuals faced with strains are prompt to deviant adaptation and crime. He used the concept of *anomie*, normlessness or deregulation, to describe a social condition where established norms lost their ability to adjust human wants and action (Merton, 2011). He emphasized how the advancing industrialization and prosperity of modern society was going ahead without considering the obligation to restraining people's appetite for success. This resulted in a chronic state of anomie. While people were now free and encouraged to pursue seemingly unlimited economic success, some unforeseen consequences materialized (Ibid). Placing a great value on economic success will weaken institutionalized norms while anomie takes hold. When this happens, the normative standards of right and wrong no longer steer the pursuit of success: the only route to success becomes whichever practices are most effective in achieving the culturally accepted value (Merton, 1968). The various and recurrent insider trading and banking scandals are a fitting example of how the common preoccupation of accumulating wealth leads to the collapse of institutionalized norms, laws and rules, where anomie sets in and nurtures an unrestrained quest for monetary rewards (Chomsky, 2016). It should be noted that as anomie intensifies, innovative conduct becomes especially predominant. This is because, contrary to ritualism or conformity, this type of adaptation demands an aptitude to surrender commitment to institutionalized means in favour of illegitimate ones (Merton, 2011). Thus, variations in levels of anomie across time and within certain sectors of society can be expected to predict overall rates of deviance but also particular types of deviance, including the archetypal innovative response: crime. Anomie and deviance are mutually reinforcing, and while initially, only a limited number of individuals will likely violate the socially approved standards due to the weakening of institutionalized norms, eventually and after being observed by others, such deviance becomes

a concrete threat to the norms' legitimacy (Merton, 2011). Merton argued that this process increases the extent of anomie within a system and subsequently increases the possibility that noncompliance will become more pervasive. The increasing consumption of cannabis illustrates this process quite well. The weakening of the norms prohibiting its use in the 1960s, coupled with the ridiculing of the claims its use pushed people to madness, led to more people trying the substance, particularly in social situations. This observed, and to some extent boasted, deviant behaviour undermined the legitimacy of institutionalized norms, to the point where in some circumstances the justice system refused to enforce existing laws and recreational use was decriminalized. Thus, anomie became pervasive and curbs against consuming cannabis were abated significantly, a circumstance that made cannabis use even more pervasive (Merton, 2011).

5.4 Rejecting the idea of individualism

Overall Merton argued that the very nature of American society, and more precisely its mantra of the American dream, was what generated a substantial amount of crime and deviance. The incoherence between the cultural and social structures is what positions many individuals, and particularly the more disadvantaged, in a situation where they are encouraged to desire unattainable goals (Larry, 2014). Powerful strains generated by this tension force many people to find deviant solutions to resolve their quests. This strong and powerful cultural imposition to succeed decreases the strength of institutionalized norms to control behaviours. As anomie becomes widespread, people feel, and essentially are, free to pursue their objectives with whatever means are available, legitimate or not. Thus, innovation, a type of adaptation encompassing many forms of crime, becomes possible and very likely. Similarly to the theorists of the Chicago school, Merton placed criminality and its roots well within the American society's fabric. The only difference is that while the former focused on the criminogenic role of the inner city and of conformity to a criminal culture, Merton stressed the criminogenic role of conformity to the widespread and conventional cultural goal of monetary success. Aside from this, both perspectives recognized that crime did not originate within people's minds and bodies (Merton, 2011). Merton, in particular, rejected the notion that the primary impulse for evil resides within human nature.¹ Rather, he argued for a perspective where socially deviant behaviours were just as much a product of social structures as conformist behaviours, and that regards social structures as active and creating new motivations which cannot be anticipated on the basis of knowledge about people's urges (Ibid).

5.5 Strain Theory in context

Merton's own personal experience mirrors the two central points of his perspective: the importance of the cultural mantra for all to pursue the American dream, the new neoliberal capitalist ideology, and the stark reality that people will have different opportunities and unequal means to attain such universal objective. He lived and in a way embodied the American dream by assimilating the dominant culture. Son of eastern European Jewish immigrant he changed his name from Meyer R. Schkolnick to Robert Merton (Cullen & Messner, 2007).

¹ I personally reject the idea of there been a "human nature"; that is, there been a unique way to exist and be recognized as human. Instead, I believe in there been an "intelligent life nature". As intelligent life, I include all forms of life from the smallest bacterium to the largest animal, including all types of plants. And when I talk about intelligent life nature, I intend its ability to adapt and develop according to its environments and its plasticity. However, for the purpose of my thesis, and because I am quoting other researchers' material, I am obliged to use their conceptualisation of "human nature" that is normally considered to comprise greed and selfish behaviours.

Contrary to the Chicago school's theorists who believed that ethnic heterogeneity and cultural conflict were the basis for the dominant reality of crime, Merton believed that the defining reality of the United States was cultural homogeneity and universalism. American people shared a dream and an identity; there were powerful agents at play pushing people to embrace the dominant culture of economic and social ascent, and thus becoming American (Ibid). However, his humble beginnings influenced the theoretical emphasis that structural limitations place on social mobility. Merton did not believe that inner-city areas were intrinsically and inherently disorganized and criminogenic, however, he recognized that those born in such environments were less likely to succeed, both socially and economically; in fact, most of his childhood neighbours did not fare so well (Pfohl, 1985). The Great Depression had also contributed to pushing people to the bottom rungs of society and made it almost impossible for them to reach the dream they had been taught to pursue. In contrast to the social disorganization tradition, strain theory, as Merton envisaged it, did not claim that life in poor areas inevitably would lead to crime. Rather, criminality resulted from the denial of the chances to leave such poor areas and poverty itself (Merton, 2011). However, strain theory only became widely prominent in Criminology in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One reason for that was that poverty was not viewed as a substantial social problem rooted in the structure of society until that time, particularly in the political arena (Murray, 1984). It was only then that a consensus emerged where poverty was no more seen as the just desert for people who did not try hard enough, but rather as a byproduct of structural conditions that were outside the control of individual virtues and efforts (Ibid). There was a conceptual shift, where blame shifted from the individual to the system, and where the civil rights movement conceptualized it as a denial of equal opportunities for minorities. This idea of a flawed system where a large swathe of the population was denied access to the American Dream gained momentum among journalists, government officials, academics and of course criminologists. The core of Merton's perspective was that the American society encouraged all to ascend economically, but at the same time, its structure denied equal opportunities to pursue this cherished goal (Merton, 2011). Arguably, this flawed system is still relevant today.

5.6 Delinquent subcultures

Cohen extended Merton's theory by applying it to juvenile gangs in urban areas, and by studying the origins and effects of delinquent subcultural norms. Cohen drew from both Merton's perspective, but also from social disorganization (Merton, 2011). Cohen observed that delinquent gangs and the subcultural values they embraced were concentrated in urban slums and that those values were supportive of crime in that they were non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic to the extent that the resulting delinquency was contemptuous of authority and completely irrational to the conformist citizen (Cohen, 1955). In a similar vein to Merton's theory, Cohen proposed that such deviant subcultures emerged in response to the special problems that people face: for example, youths from the lower-classes are at a disadvantage in trying to succeed and obtain status in conventional institutions. For instance, schools, which incarnate middle-class values, form a specific hurdle to lower-class children: poor children often lack the early socialization and economic resources to compete on the same level with their more affluent peers. Hence, they are prevented to achieve status in the respectable society because they do not meet the criteria of the respectable status system (Cohen, 1955).

These status problems can be solved through a delinquent subculture, by making available criteria of status which these disadvantaged children not only can aspire to but are able to achieve. In a manner resembling an after-effect construction, the poor children reject the

middle-class goals and norms that they have been taught to wish but by which they are deemed ill-equipped. They substitute middle-class values with a set that is the exact opposite. Thus, if middle-class values included ambition, responsibility, courtesy, control of physical aggression, and respect for authority, the disadvantaged youths would encourage behaviours that defy these values; it follows that status would be given to those who are truant, contravene authority, fight, and vandalize property (Ibid). Cohen argued that the strains of class-bound status disappointment are contributing to the rise of subcultural values supportive of crime, similar to what had happened in the summer of 2011 in London (Larry, 2014). Disadvantaged youths, cramped together in high-density inner cities areas and burdened with a common problem, will find a common solution in accepting standards that provide status and the mental satisfaction of rejecting the conventional and respectable values that are placed far beyond their reach. Since modern neoliberal societies continue to present each new generation of inner city youth with the issue of status, a structural basis is created for the perpetuation of these delinquent values, and the gang organization they nurture. Once in existence, this subculture assumes a reality of its own, and the criminal culture can be transmitted to those juveniles whose status discontent is insufficient in itself to motivate delinquency (Cohen, 1955).

5.7 Strain Theory: Policy Implications

If strain theory is correct, and denial of opportunity generates criminogenic strains, it follows that by expanding legitimate opportunities we should be able to find a solution to the problem. This perspective would suggest supporting programs that strive to give the disadvantaged educational resources, job training, and equal access to employment (Merton, 2011). This perspective also supports a more humane prison system where inmates have access to education and training that would allow them to attain marketable employment skills (Pratt, 2008 – Part I). Strain theory has been the basis for the development of a variety of delinquency prevention programs, the most famous of which was *Mobilization for Youth* (Empey, 1982: pp.241). During the 1960s this proposal found the right conditions for a type of social engineering that made sense for that time. The political discourse of that time, under Kennedy's administration, was very much in line with creating new and equal opportunities and was dedicated to tackling the problems of young Americans (Pfohl, 1985). *Mobilization for Youth* was very much based on the premises of Merton's theory and thus focused on programs supporting youths' education and employment. The overall approach was to imbue these communities with self-help tools, but also more crucially, to change the political structures that supported biases in opportunity. For example, by giving these minorities access to union apprenticeships, and ensuring that talented and experienced teachers were available to schools in impoverished areas (Merton, 2011). These then new policies were aiming at mobilizing the community against entrenched political interests: *Mobilization for Youth* programs promoted boycotts against schools, protests against welfare policies, rent strikes against slum property owners, legal actions to ensure poor people's rights and voter registration (Ibid). This strategy brought about political tension and consequent struggle by those arguing for the right to self-determination, which was and still is an umbrella-term for right-wing socioeconomic policy. This tension led to the dismantlement of the *Mobilization for Youth* programs and the resignation of most of its leaders (Liska, 1981). However, the failure to resist such attacks does not take away the fact that these were the first programs to attempt to combat the root causes of crime; this failure also speaks more to the political interests that often overwhelm reason than to the actual validity of the programs themselves.

An important aspect of trying to reduce crime by increasing opportunities is that they indirectly legitimize the idea that economic success. However, if this is true, the expansion of

opportunity may have the detrimental effect of intensifying the cultural beliefs that promote crime (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). To reduce the criminogenic effects derived from the amplified emphasis on pecuniary success and its clash with the limits on the means to achieve such success, it is imperative to diminish its strong materialistic pressures and at the same time the creation and support of more socially viable norms. However, this is easier said than done; to the best of my knowledge, there are no viable programs that can make people less interested in economic success and more in socially inclusive goals. However, a good start may be implementing social policies that support employment regulations that allow more family time, and better schools. It may also help to have universal welfare systems that help people to create families, communities and so forth, and that ensure everyone with some measure of material security. A form of universal income would also help in this regard (Standing, 2015). I will argue that it is essential to discredit the current model, which sees money and economic success as the chief measure of personal success. Instead, we should embrace a cultural regeneration where things such as parenting, supporting, and teaching, learning and serving the community become our values and ends in themselves (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that meaningful reduction in crime can occur without a cultural shift where mutual support and collective obligations take precedence over individual rights, interests and privileges.

I have now discussed how Merton's strain theory rejected the idea of locating the causes of crime within individuals. Rather, it argued that the social and structural organization of society restricts what people acquire to develop, and what they may be pressured into doing. In a sense, it suggests that a society gets the crime it deserves.

6. Crime and the Economy: an Institutionalized Anomie

6.1 Market, Morality and Crime

The use of free market policies to regulate the production and distribution of goods and services has become widespread in today's world. Socialism, as intended by the likes of Marx, Mao and Castro, has been largely rejected with the sole exception of pseudo versions of it in modern Russia and China. There are different forms of market capitalism around the world and some disagreement as to the degree of state intervention in the economy (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). However, the intellectual and political debate about the viability of market capitalism appears to be weak, or at least quite biased in favour of it. One position that emerged from the liberal political philosophy of the Enlightenment projected a market oriented society characterized by mutually satisfying relationships guided by voluntary exchange of goods and services that would have promoted social order. On the other hand, critics of capitalism argued that such economy has a corrosive effect on social order and eventually leads to disorder and moral decline (Ibid). Proponents of market capitalism will argue that when this economic approach works best, people are thus free from the restraints on self-interested behaviours imposed by social, political and moral obligations. Although both sides arrive at opposite conclusions, they both use institutional approaches to explain social order and disorder. This is helpful because it allows creating a model for an institutional perspective in the study of crime (Ibid).

6.2 An Analysis of Social Institutions

Over the last decades, criminological theory has started to look at the role of social institutions and how they affect punishment. The way in which societies respond to crime appears to reflect the larger complexity of social institutions and their interactions within

societies (Karstedt 2010; Garland, 2010). The centrality of institutions in understanding crime and how societies respond to it should not be a surprise given for instance that each criminal justice systems are themselves institutions. However, institutional analysis of the causes of crime has been largely neglected (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Most prominent criminological theories place causation in criminals' characteristics, their interaction with the environments and or specific features of localized neighbourhoods. What these theories fail to acknowledge is that individual actions and the proximate settings for such actions are constrained and reflective of the dominant institutional order of the societies in which they occur (Ibid). Traditionally, criminologists have studied the influences that families, schools and other features of the social context have on individual behaviours and have often characterized these entities as institutions. This may be the cause of confusion here. Let it be clear that what is meant by the social institution is the set of rules that regulate behaviours in a social system. Social systems refer to distinctive patterns of culture and social structure and their interrelations in society. Culture refers to the values, beliefs and meanings shared by the members of any given society. Social structure includes the organizations, statuses and roles through which culture is performed and understood in everyday life. Thus, the institutional norms are meant to tie culture and social structure into an enduring social system (Ibid).

Different systems have different norms that apply to a range of different behaviours. These norms can be conceptualized into subsystems that relate to specific tasks that can, in turn, be distinguished on the basis of the impact they have on the working of society and its ability to last over time. These subsystems of regulatory norms are the major social institutions of any given society and are its economy, organization, family and religion among others (Ibid). They are also conceptualized as the "rules of the game" that guide human interaction (North, 1990). This conceptualization has important implications in the understanding of crime. Considering the importance of social institutions in guiding social behaviours, the forms and frequency of criminal activity are likely to be linked to the institutional order (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Accordingly, if crime is a "social fact bound up with the fundamental conditions of all social life" (Durkheim, 1966, pp.70) it follows that different social systems and institutional orders should have symptomatically distinctive forms and levels of crime. These forms and levels of crime should also vary across time and follow the currents of social change, its influence on institutional settings, and the developments within the institutional order (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Another consideration to take into account is that, if crime is indeed fundamentally social in origin, level and type, then crime is normal as argued by Durkheim (1966). Being normal in this context means that crime should be a fairly expected result of the dominant social organization. It follows that every society has a normal i.e. expected crime rate produced by the dominant institutional order. An important point to make here is that apart from historical differences in types and levels of crime over time, crime can never be zero (Ibid). This consideration stems from the idea that crime is normal and bound up in central social conditions. Thus, even if a specific form of crime is eradicated, another one will replace it. For instance, while violent crime rates have gone down in Western societies since the Middle Ages, rates of property crime have gone up during the same period (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). This trends echo central social changes i.e. new modes of economic organization that changed the rules of the game for violent behaviours and the ways in which social control is accepted today. Thus eliminating some forms of crime but at the same time favouring the rise of others. This reasoning also implies that since crime is fundamentally normal and social, its frequency may fall too low for an effective functioning of a society. If crime is a distinctive attribute of society's institutional composition, its partial or total demise may be symptomatic of another social malaise (Ibid). A good example is the low rates of burglary, robbery and other types of street crime that existed in the former Soviet

Union while at the same time there were high rates of corruptions (Karstedt, 2003). A strong military regime can defeat street crime but at a great social cost.

To better understand the implications of the institutional order of societies for crime one must look deeper into the institutional structure, regulation and performance of said order. Institutional structure, for example, entails the content of the norms and their internal consistency and compatibility. Different societies have different norms that change over time: for instance, while market economies distribute resources on the basis of price, command economies distribute resources on the basis of centralized organization and jurisdiction (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Consistency varies in degree reflecting internal norms and counter norms. For instance, in developed societies patients expect their doctors to adopt equally a prevailing norm of emotional detachment and a subordinate norm of compassion. A corresponding standard relates to the compatibility of the norms across institutional spheres such as the economy and the family. The level to which the norms within one sphere directly violate those in different spheres is a fundamental indicator of the structural integration or non-integrations of social institutions, a potential source of social disorder and an indication of social change (Ibid). Another dimension of social institutions, institutional regulation, describes the origin of compliance to the rules of the game. Some may comply because of utilitarian consideration of self-interest, or because of coercive pressure from more powerful actors. A prominent characteristic of an institutionalized social action is a sense of mutual obligation, where people adjust their behaviours to the rules of the game because they believe it is the right thing to do (Ibid). In this context, institutions act as glue between individual players by promoting attachment between them and to the institutions. It follows that when institutional regulation is strong, the norms are regarded as being a substantial moral authority. The final dimension, institutional performance, describes the extent to which commitment to institutional roles develops in the collectively wanted institutional outcome. These three dimensions, albeit analytically different, are deeply interconnected, and such connection can have a substantial impact on institutions during changes in circumstances.

Take for instance the institution of the economy: at some point in time, the norms directing economic activity merge into a command economy, the institutional structure. People connect their economic behaviours closely with the economic rules of the game because they approve and respect such behaviours. Thus, the institutional regulation of the economy is robust and the economic rules of the game are given a substantial moral authority. It follows that institutional performance is also robust as the economy flourishes in generating goods and services at levels that are considered as satisfactory by predominant standards (Ibid). Now, let us imagine that either a natural or social change in the environment substantially hinder such economy's capacity to produce goods and services. Assuming people may none the less continue to follow institutional roles diligently, institutional performance drops. From here, it is reasonable to assume that over time this lower institutional performance will weaken the moral authority of the economic rules, since the economy, as it were, fails to deliver the goods. Institutional regulation will also weaken, as will commitment. Moreover, as the moral underpinnings of economic institutions are threatened, people may consider alternative economic scenarios, possibly that envisaged by a market economy and try to implement them. Depending on the outcome of such efforts, the entire institutional structure of the economy may be changed, and qualitative different rules of the game are introduced (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013).

6.3 Institutional Anomie Theory

This theory starts from the aforementioned insights that the institutional structure, in other words, the compatibility of the rules of the game, is dynamic and vary over time, at least in principle. Institutions work in ways in which the workings of any one institution affect the workings of any other institution. For instance, economic activity always occurs in the presence of other activities, understandings and expectations: a bigger non-economic institutional context. However, despite such inevitable interdependence, major social institutions always struggle to fully integrate (Ibid). This struggle ensues because of some intrinsic differences between institutional roles and what they claim. For instance, values and demands of economic roles will inevitably be different, if not contradictory, to those of family roles: for both men and women being a good parent can at times come in conflict with being a valued employee, and vice versa. The answers of these at odds entitlements and responsibilities in the course of constant social communications produce a unique pattern of institutional relations for the society at large. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007: pp.74-84) have named the product of this balancing of competing for institutional claims as the “institutional balance of power”.

The form of institutional structure that is likely to generate high levels of crime in market capitalist societies is one where the economy dominates the institutional balance of power (Ibid). This is achieved by devaluing non-economic roles in comparison with economic roles; social success is then defined and measured in terms of market achievements. Also, when conflict arises non-economic roles must adjust to the requirements of economic roles. The agendas, procedures and needs of the work place take priority over those of the school, home, church and the community. Finally, economic values and norms permeate non-economic spheres. The market economy breeds itself in other institutions to the degree that its calculating, utilitarian, efficiency-oriented logic directs ideas of the processes and objectives of non-economic characteristics of social life (Ibid). Schwartz succinctly describes how our day-to-day language is filled with market terminology:

“The university is a ‘free market of ideas’. We ‘spend’ time with our friends. Athletes who want to succeed must be willing to ‘pay the price’ of rigorous training. We ‘invest’ a great deal in our children. We enter into marriage ‘contracts’” (Schwartz, 1994: pp.359-360)

In these ways, the market economy compromises other institutions and changes the societies it controls into market societies. How does such institutional structure dominated by the economy promote crime? Well, institutional anomie theory contends that economic dominance meddles with facets of the performance of non-economic institutions that lead straight to criminal behaviour. In particular, economic dominance weakens the structural restraints and social supports of non-economic institutions that normally help to deter crime. At the same time, economic dominance promotes cultural pressures that weaken the moral regulation of institutions, resulting in the condition known as anomie (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013).

6.4 The Erosion of Social Control and Social Support

An essential role of social institutions is to harmonize the behaviours of actors with the principal cultural values of any given society. It is the quintessence of social control and a crucial benefit of social support, expressed as the delivery of the physical and social resources required to accomplish role requirements and attain some degree of personal gratification (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). A lasting institution is one that levies actual jurisdictions over people engaged in its detailed operative tasks and recommends incentives for true compliance

to role necessities. Economic dominance hints to the annihilation of non-economic institutions. As non-economic institutions are required to adapt to economic requirements, and permeated by market criteria, they are less able to complete their characteristic jobs efficiently, comprising those of social control and support. Weak institutions do not offer appealing roles to which individuals are likely to become very committed or in which they will want to invest. As a result, the connections to such orthodox institutions will be fragile, and the limitations against crime and the incentives for conformity related with these connections will be weak (Hirschi, 1969). Economic dominance has significant repercussions not only for the working of non-economic institutions but also for the character of economic activity itself. A significant idea of modern scholarship on markets is that economic activity happens inside a larger cultural and social context (Fourcade and Healy, 2007). Markets function in, and to some point are shaped by non-market social relations. When the economic activity is entrenched in this sense, social control is reinforced, and the economic action itself lean towards curbing egoistic instincts to follow narrow self-interest. When the economy dominates other institutions, economic dealings happen to a larger degree lacking the mitigating effects of the countervailing claims of other institutions. Paradoxically, an institutional balance of power categorized by economic dominance weakens the social control and support roles of all institutions, economic and non-economic (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013).

Economic dominance also encourages high levels of crime by facilitating cultural goals and values that decrease institutional regulation, that is, the moral authority of the rules of the game. To understand these burdens, it is useful to contemplate the characteristic value composite that symbolizes market societies. This composite emphasizes individual competition as the main basis for assigning social success (Ibid). It also outlines achievement in economic terms, thus encouraging people to orientate their behaviour to pecuniary success. These market ideals and their associated behavioural strategies socialize people in suitable market behaviours and confer validity on markets as vital and desired instruments for creating and allocating goods and services. Thus, a strong cultural stress on competition for financial success is a crucial precondition for the long-run viability of a market society. There is nothing fundamentally criminogenic about the market values of competition and materialism per se. The pursuit of individual gains in competition with others can encourage relations of communal responsibility and trust, which are likely to constrain misconduct (Ibid). The market values of competition and materialism, it is suggested here, lead to criminality only when they happen together with what can be called an 'anomic ethic'. Following Merton (1968) the anomic ethic concerns the disproportionate stress on the objectives of social action irrespective of the moral status of the means used to attain social goals. Beneath this cultural state, people are inspired to use whatever measures are technically most convenient to achieve highly valued goals, particularly but not solely, the goal of pecuniary success.

Anomie here means more than just the lack of social rules, as in the usual definition of anomie as normlessness. It becomes itself a social rule, although a highly permissive one that inspires the pursuit of goals by any means necessary (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). As used in institutional anomie theory, therefore, anomie does not result solely from the lack of culture, but, rather echoes a strong cultural stress on ends over means (Ibid). Unlike the value put on the competitive search for pecuniary success via the market, the ethic of anomie has a direct link with criminal behaviour and punitive social control. People who chase goals by any means necessary have no moral doubts about employing criminal means. The choice of means turns completely on practical cost vs. benefit computations, which comprise the apparent likelihood and seriousness of the consequences for criminal behaviour. Therefore, people in

an anomic setting may favour using legal rather than illegal means to attain a goal, but this inclination is not ingrained in the cultural ban of illegal means. In other words, the choosing of the legal means has minor communicative or procedural meaning; it is regarded as neither good nor right in itself, rather it ensues from a dynamic computation that, in this particular instance crime does not pay (Ibid).

Unlike the ideals of competition and materialism, which take robust status in all market societies, the anomic ethic is not an operative prerequisite of a market economy. Consequently, the strength and ubiquity of anomie differ significantly through market settings. For instance, early capitalists were clearly inspired to strive for pecuniary success, however, they were also very thoughtful about the legality of the means by which the returns were attained and used (Ibid). Indeed, this early ethic is frequently used interchangeably with the work ethic, a word that openly stresses the legitimate means and associated personal qualities for obtaining and using wealth: commitment to duty, delayed gratification, and conscientiousness; in other words, hard work. According to this ethic, wealth is the prize for hard work in a vocation and is not the only or the main motive for work. The economic rewards of work are to be reinvested in industrious activity for the greater good of the community, as well as for the advantage of the individual producer (Ibid).

This early capitalism's ethic differs bluntly with the anomic ethic as described above. The anomic ethic by definition is apathetic to the moral status of the means used to acquire economic ends, and it persuades people to think only of themselves as they obtain money to attain and show personal value and social status. However, as detractors of capitalism claim, does the work ethic inescapably become void of wider cultural meaning and deteriorate into the ethic of anomie in the course of capitalist development? Institutionalize anomie perspective argues that a significant feature related with the deteriorating meaning of early capitalists' ethic, and its substitution by the ethic of anomie, is the extent to which the economy dominates the institutional balance of power. The public function of non-economic institutions is to bestow moral legitimacy on the means of social action. From a wholly economic viewpoint, procedural efficacy is the only condition for assessing the appropriateness of means. The existence of significant moral bans against illegal behaviour assumes the presence of satisfactorily dynamic non-economic institutions (Ibid). To the extent that the economy dominates other institutions, cultural communications that infuse the means of social action with moral meaning is short of institutional support. Institutional regulation is therefore weakened. Under such circumstances, the ethic of anomie will tend to rise and stimulate high levels of criminality. It would appear then that substantial dependence on disciplinary measures such as the police, courts and prisons are the only techniques by which an anomic market society can keep criminality under control (Ibid).

6.5 Concluding Remarks on Institutionalized Anomie

Capitalism has become the main form of organizing economic activity. However, a fitting question for the purpose of my thesis is whether a capitalist market economy inexorably leads to social peace and harmony, or to moral failure and disorder? I would argue that the wider institutional settings in which the market economy is fixed affect the association between markets and morality. If non-economic institutions stay healthy, they can prevent market values from deteriorating into an anomic ethic which inspires the pursuit of self-interest by any means necessary. If non-economic institutions are diminished, upset, and infiltrated by the market economy, then the worst concerns of opponents of capitalism may as well be fulfilled. I have applied these general suggestions about anomic culture and institutional disparity to the specific occurrence of crime by ways of institutional-anomie theory. This

theory appeals on other etiological theories but varies from almost all of them in its emphasis on macro-level cultural forms and social structures. Institutional-anomie theory uses the tools of institutional analysis to clarify the discrepancy in crime rates through different institutional orders (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). The principal claim of the theory is that an institutional structure categorized by economic dominance obstructs the social control and support purposes of institutions which, when coupled with an anomic cultural ethic, takes away the moral authority of these institutions and in so doing weakens institutional regulation. Said differently, when the market economy dominates the institutional order, its norms and the principles they echo tend to succeed over those that would offset market-oriented values and diminish the impact of market settings and consequences on families and individuals (Ibid).

7. A Critique of Strain Theory and Institutional Anomie Theory

Those who critique ST argue that economic inequality per se does not lead to problems, since anomie, or indeed strain, have little impact on those for whom economic variations do not change their situation very much (Taylor et al, 2013). Conversely, those accustomed to superior standards of living would be more susceptible to behavioural changes where they experience sudden destructive economic adjustments. Merton (2011), however, believed that the least financially well off and disadvantaged were most at risk from experiencing anomie, not just because they were poor, but because they also believed in the possibility of achieving the 'American Dream', a culturally, and as noted above, economically celebrated ethic. This raises the question as to how reliable ST would be if it were not for the grand reality and effect of the 'American Dream', or indeed if the so called 'Dream' had celebrated different values. A major criticism of ST is that it presumed a general consensus around the 'American Dream', or, to speak in modern terms, the race to obtain the latest gadget, materialism, consumer culture and so on (Taylor et al, 2013). However, the point to be made is that ST only suggested that strain is inversely related to one's structural position, whereas, for instance, for Durkheim (1966) the opposite was true: Durkheim's anomie suggested that the decline of social norms led to social problems, whereas Merton's strain suggested that conformity to such norms led to crime and deviance. Another criticism to Merton's ST is that, notwithstanding its mention to social inequalities, it failed to make clear in whose interest social structures, such as those in the US, were organised (Taylor et al, 2013). In other words, Merton (2011) may not have been adequately critical of the social structure he challenged. Merton relied heavily on the then available official statistics on crime, which, arguably exaggerated lower working class participation in crime and minimised white collar crime committed by those who have had plenty opportunities to achieve success by legitimate means (Taylor et al, 2013). Notwithstanding its emphasis on the burden exerted by the wider society, ST deals only with individual forms of response, whereas much crime and delinquency involve group activity. Its critics argue that ST overstates the function of social class in crime and deviance (Brym & Lie, 2010). ST relates better to lower classes as they wrestle greatest with the absence of resources to make sense of their aspirations. However, after taking into account the broad range of deviant and criminal behaviours, ST poorly accounts for crimes outside the narrow scope of street crimes; white-collar crimes are more widespread amid the middle and upper-classes the 'haves' rather than the 'have-nots'.

Institutional Anomie Theory follows ST's idea of the anomic ethic by calling attention to different organisational causes for anomie. A crucial aspect of ST's idea of anomie rests on the unequal distribution of opportunities right the way through the social structure (Bernburg, 2002). ST contends that the so called social structure is problematic because it neglects to

deliver on its assurance of equal opportunity. Institutional Anomie Theory delves deeper into such analysis by concentrating on the institutional sources of the anomic ethic itself; it endeavours to clarify the institutional procedures that support and strengthen this anomic ethic (Ibid). This theory goes well beyond Merton's theory by identifying the institutional sources of anomie, and by offering a substantial link between crime and social changes. However, by moving away from Merton's emphasis on social stratification, Rosenfeld and Messner (2013) neglect to recognize that the factual circumstances in which goals and norms function are critical in identifying their consequence on actions (Bernburg, 2002). It follows, that the actual prediction to be taken from ST is that cultural and structural differences influence levels of crime in an interactive way. Thus, to put it into perspective, a City of London's banker is very unlikely to take part in rioting as a way of attaining as yet unsatisfied goals beyond his legitimate means. He or she may, however, choose to use their position in different, albeit equally destructive ways. Social stratification becomes thus quite important as it specifies how anomic culture is transformed into action, and in what form (Bernburg, 2002). While acknowledging the limitations of Institutional Anomie Theory in relation to ST and vice versa, the former helps understanding how the anomic culture emerges, is endured and even intensified.

This approach links the emergence of this cultural model with institutional procedures, hence proposing a significant connection to social changes (Ibid). However, there is the risk that as a theory of criminal action, Institutional Anomie Theory, falls into an oversocialized view of how norms and goals affect behaviours. Conversely, ST is directed by the idea that people make choices in the context of their socially constructed realities (Ibid). ST identifies the actual circumstances that transform norms and goals [culture] into crime, thus identifying how anomic culture, assumed in Merton's theory but explained in Institutional Anomie Theory, generates pressure to innovate because of the incongruity of culture with people's actual circumstances (Ibid). It would seem, therefore, that these two theories complement each other. In fact, fairly recent research would suggest that they provide a more comprehensive macro level explanation of crime together than on their own. Although the two theories were not explicitly integrated, these two studies showed that social stratification measured the effects of market dominance in the institutional balance of power on crime rates (Chamblin & Cochran 1995; Savolainen, 2000). A powerful anomic ethic, with structural foundations based on the weakening of non-economic institutions, generates real life situations favourable to destructive street crime. This is especially true when a significant proportion of the population perceive such crime as a means to the end of monetary success, very much as in the case of those involved in the English riots of 2011.

8. A New Social Class in the Making: The Precariat

Class structure has existed for decades if not centuries, and our era is going through a class system reshuffle. This reshuffle is largely due to neoliberal socioeconomic policies initiated in the 1970s. At the very top of this system, there is a small but very rich elite group with global power and influence. A long way below this elite group in terms of wealth and power, there is a group called the salariat, which enjoys the benefits of a long term paid contract and associated benefits such as holiday entitlement and sick leave among others. Below the salariat, there is a group called the proficians. This group does not desire secure contracts, rather, members of this group move around from contract to contract empowered by electronic media, and make substantial earnings from doing this; this group is growing in number. Below them, in terms of income, we find a shrinking working class, where the

welfare state and system of labour regulation was devised with this group in mind. After this shrinking working class, we find the emerging precariat. Below this, at the very bottom of the class system in terms of income, reside the unemployed and the “uneducated” precariat (Standing, 2011).

Having positioned the precariat in a globalized structure, Professor Standing (2011) delineated its characteristics. Firstly, the precariat is not an underclass; rather, it is a class in the making, rather than a class in itself. Thus, while elements of the precariat undergo analogous forms of insecurity they do not share a communal idea of what sort of good society they would like to form. The precariat is a detached labour source moving in and out of jobs with no secure function in the labour market. Members of this class undergo the seven forms of labour insecurity. They often have fewer rights than full citizens, sometimes losing rights along the way, in many ways similar to the 13th-century denizens² (Standing, 2011). Most importantly, the precariat has no job-related identity around which their lives could be broadly structured. There is no pride in belonging to the precariat. Therefore, they have slight or no future outlook and little social memory (based on shared values, communion in reciprocity with others and empathy) which could be used to form a nourishing identity via peer group collaboration (trade unions). In turn, this generates stress in relationships with others causing them to be opportunistic and detached.

The precariat has different manifestations. For instance, some have fallen out of working class communities, driven out by growing insecurity and scarce resources with which to develop their position in society. Migrants, who often come from a worse environment, are included. Young people are wandering into the precariat too. This dynamic often leads to anger, especially for those with a higher education (Ibid).

8.1 The Precariat's characteristics

People trapped in the precariat are in a perilous situation which is likely to trigger a struggle on society. Standing (2011) argues that this group is subjected to four types of strains: anxiety, anomie, alienation and anger.

Anxiety is a key characteristic of this group's state. Insecurity generates unpredictable risks for these people, and the gratifications and achievements known to those higher up in the social system are unknown to the precariat. The thought that a job provides an identity to be proud of is void and phoney to the precariat. The idea of a job as an important channel to achievement, meaning an identity, security and happiness is an illusion for the precariat. Their experience of employment is simply the opposite (Standing, 2011).

Anomie is also a growing issue for the precariat. Their day-to-day experience is one of hopelessness, where a break to a better life is just not possible. Expectations are gloomy, social mobility rare if at all possible, and the likelihood of enhanced and protected material living standards appears inaccessible. Thus, this group is progressively barred from normality. This manner of exclusion is contributing to the growth of a specific attitude, or mindset, among the precariat. The mixture of exclusion and uncertainty prompt this group to jump around activities to keep opportunities available by increasing networks and activities. This process is in turn very stressful and linked with a number of social illnesses (Ibid).

Alienation derives from the fact that people trapped in the precariat are compelled to do too many activities which they do not want to do in the domain of employment. Such activities

² Denizens were people in the 13th century England who did not belong to the local community and thus had fewer rights than the local citizens (Standing, 2011)

merge to produce an image of the self which is different to a more desired idea of the self as an independent person who exerts control over how one's life is to be lived. However, such ambitions are shattered by low pay and economic insecurity. At the same time, those in the precariat are not capable to assume positions and occupations which can support the prospect of an integrated and independent self. The precariat is at the same time over-employed, working long hours in low paid and insecure jobs in an effort to make ends meet, and underemployed. Additionally, these jobs do not require many of the skills and enthusiasms which characterize a prosperous human being. Thus, they become alienated from themselves, from each other and from those outside their group (Ibid).

Anger, predictably, stems from the combination of the other three features. This is producing growing anger among them, spiralling into seething anger (Ibid).

8.2 What caused the precariat and why is it growing

Multiple factors, which differ according to geography, have promoted the expansion in the precariat. Growing globalization and the related rise in neoliberal institutions, policies and perspectives have produced substantial changes in social solidarity. This is echoed in increasing individualism and competition as organizing values in economy and society (Standing, 2011). This process has come with the undoing of agencies of collective solidarity such as trade unions. Standing (2011) argued that this can noticeably be seen in the work of Friedman and Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society, where a crucial value is that commodification involves the regulation of social institutions to favour jobs and a reorganization of the role of the state, away from social security and towards support for markets, in order to boost returns to capital; very much what institutionalized anomie theory argues. Standing (2011) further argued that an important feature in this sequence of events is the Faustian Pact to liberalize markets across the world, globalization. This had the outcome of multiplying the world's labour supply, an extra two billion workers, all coached to lower living standards than those in developed countries. Such a discrepancy cannot be weathered and a process of meeting between these different standards has started.

The resulting increase in manufacturing jobs, powered by cheaper labour and production costs, in the developing world and former European eastern-bloc countries, has come with rising state subsidy for jobs in the developed world; this was done in order to prevent the total failure of labour markets in the developed countries (Ibid). This has caused growing and unmanageable cost and played a pivotal role in the market crash which we have witnessed recently. Thus, the bankers are not solely to blame for such crashes. The circumstances for creating the financial bubbles which finally exploded in 2008 were mostly generated by governments pursuing market liberalization (Ibid). Granted that governments facilitated the conditions in which such profits increased, it would have been conceivable for them to maintain an equal sharing of banks, but they did not. Thus, we have the growing inequalities, rising mal-distribution of income and the numerous forms of insecurity for many people. Three systems of labour flexibility followed by consecutive governments pursuing market liberalization influence further these trends. They are:

Numerical flexibility, which means security for workers must be decreased as it swells costs and decreases profitability. Thus, employment protection was decreased substantially by temporary contracts, zero hour contracts, outsourcing etc. (Ibid).

Another such system is what is known as *wage system flexibility*. Salaries have gone down and in order to make work attractive, entitlement to social income for the growing precariat has been taken away. Everywhere, the precariat is losing entitlements such as state insurance

benefits, paid holidays, sick pay, training and employment security. Simultaneously, the salariat has been gaining these entitlements. This process has caused increasing social inequalities in addition to wage inequality. Another element of this flexibility is a move away from universal to means tested benefits. Standing (2011) strongly contends that this generates what he calls poverty traps. This is worsened by the progressively more precarious character of employment, together with a growing number of behavioural tests upon which entitlement to benefit is based (Ibid). These arrangements go together with the re-establishment of the idea of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Standing (2011) mentioned the USA as an example where 33 states already have, or plan to have, a urine test for drugs as part of the means testing system for entitlement to benefits. To add insult to injury, the claimant has to pay for the test.

Furthermore, the postponement in payment of benefit due to the procedure of testing is leading to what Standing (2011) calls the precarity trap. After losing a job, going through the numerous means tests takes time. This is further harmful to those affected who may lose, for instance, savings, accommodation and friends. Such process is often exacerbated if after such a long period a low paid insecure job is recommended across town. Even though the rational choice might be not to take it, such action could lead to more pressure and stress to accept it, as a way of decreasing the state cost of such means testing plans (Ibid).

Functional flexibility is a technical term for the elimination of job security and the clouding of the job description. With such elimination, the prospect to cultivate an occupational identity and sense of purpose and meaning in work also vanish. Standing (2011) gave a few examples of this. A French telecom company examining a rise in employee suicide rates found it to be linked to the diminished independence and destruction of job security, related to modifications in employment circumstances occasioning in work relocation throughout France. Occupational undoing, away from professions and crafts in the direction of state regulation of the terms of reference, has amplified competition and made some professions more accountable to consumers and less to their own professions. For instance, a law created in 2007, also known as the Tesco law, has made it possible to offer legal services via staff not trained in law (Ibid). This degrades services for consumers, but also fragments work-related life and identity and multiplies the numbers of precariat in liberalized markets as the race to the lowest price increases.

This kind of commodification is also seen in universities. What were once places of learning and cultural growth have been diminished to industrial processes manufacturing degrees and graduates with maximum revenue. The creation of human capital through degrees as 'job tickets' is degrading the noble cultural characteristics of the education system, such as critical thinking and dialogue. This is producing greater than before status frustration and anger, as the potentials of higher education are lost (Ibid).

This is causing a temporal blurring, where in a tertiary society, a growing number of people find it hard to entirely differentiate between working and not working time. More people are working more of the time with little extra compensation. This process of plummeting value created in the market for money also weakens and devalues other forms of work. For instance, raising children or caring for elderly relatives becoming a factor to the continuation of gender inequality (Ibid). This is reflected in statistics about work and value which are so partial and narrow as to exclude much of the work which women do.

8.3 The Identity and Direction of the Precariat

Potentially, all of us risk falling into the precariat. Most people are just one step away from economic insecurity and a growing anxiety which is related to this fear of potential poverty. This anxiety has been nicknamed 'bag lady syndrome' (Standing, 2011).

Young people are prominent among the precariat, comprising those with university degrees who work in jobs which do not need the level of education they have. Elderly people whose pension entitlements are declining, or non-existent, and can no longer rely upon family are also in the precariat. A growing number of people are being criminalized and find it more difficult to rehabilitate. Many workers from developing country who export their labour are in the precariat. For instance, China often wins infrastructure building contracts in other countries, with the requirement that they can bring their own, very cheap, labour force to do the work (Ibid). This labour force comprises prisoners who would not need to be paid. The precariat also consists of the many young people not in education, employment or training. Young people, whose higher education qualifications do not really help them to find proportionate employment; women, whose work is often not appreciated; migrants; and disabled people (Ibid). The implications of progressively marginalizing rising numbers of people across the globe need to be better understood.

Standing (2011) summarized two possible developments: the politics of Inferno and the politics of Utopia. The politics of inferno are a treacherous option, comprising a growing number of denizens, rising inequality and utilitarian approaches that come to dominate the public debate about happiness. This guarantees greater happiness for the middle upper classes. The Panopticon state³ penalizes more people for stepping outside of means tested routine. In this scenario, the unemployed must be persuaded to blame themselves for their state and libertarian paternalism stresses that we all agonize from too much information and therefore make errors in our behaviour and so must be pushed to reach the right conclusion (Ibid). In doing so, liberties are progressively fragmented, producing growing stress and detachment in society. The rise of insecurity breeds intolerance, supporting the loss of altruism and social solidarity. Being afraid of dropping into the precariat signifies that growing numbers are more easily enticed into neo-fascist agendas which blame other marginalized groups, such as economic migrants, for the strain they find themselves in (Ibid).

On the other end of the spectrum, we find the politics of utopia. This scenario suggests that we are at the point of a global transformation. The old panache of social democratic political parties has no vision of agency to question the rise of the far-right and the centre is pulled in that direction. Subsequently, a growing number of people are looking for an alternative. Three principles related to this development can be learned from history: firstly, all progressive movements are expressed by an emergent mass class seeking to answer its own requirements and address its own insecurities. Secondly, all progressive movements are characterized by new systems of struggle and collective action; during the industrial revolution, this was the trade union movement. However, this is less pertinent in the 21st century. Finally, all progressive movements are characterized by three corresponding efforts. The first is for recognition, and one could characterize the 2011 'Occupy' protests in such way. The second is for representation, and one can argue that the precariat's voice is presently missing from the negotiations of the state. The third is a struggle for the relocation of the key resources of society. In former industrial societies, these resources were around production such as wages

³ The "panopticon" refers to an experimental laboratory of power in which behaviour could be modified. Originally developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault, Jeremy Bentham proposed it as a circular building with an observation tower in the centre of an open space surrounded by an outer wall. This wall would contain cells for occupants. This design would increase security by facilitating more effective surveillance.

and profit. For the precariat, in the 21st century, the fight is likely to be around the politics of the time, public space and the commons, the acquisition of quality knowledge and financial capital (Standing, 2011). The rioters were arguably part of this new marginalized social class who, over the years, had been stripped down of most, if not all, the legitimate means to obtain the success imposed by a strong and powerful cultural diktat.

9. Crime, Consumerism, and the 2011 English Riots

9.1 The 2011 Riots and the Precariat

Considering the severe level of socioeconomic inequality prevailing in parts of London and other inner cities in England, the rapid transition between the micro-political protests for the killing of Mark Duggan to the aggravated shoplifting, looting and violence that took place could have been anticipated, particularly by the authorities. Criminology normally finds refuge in well-established and orthodox criminological theories to explain these behaviours, neglecting perhaps to underline the toxic rather than the progressive and liberating consequences of consumer culture (Hayward, 2012). Emeritus Professor David Downes said that Criminology is a rendezvous discipline, a subject where multiple subjects meet, and its liveliness and intellectual interest, are due to this enviable position on the busy crossroads of sociology, psychology, law and philosophy (Young, 2003). It seems reasonable, therefore, that a broader socio-economic analysis to explain complex criminal behaviours such as rioting is in order. Criminology should perhaps reconsider structural inequality and its effect, an argument which was first advanced by Durkheim (1982). Riots remain complex phenomena to explain and this is in part reflected by the range of explanations given by the rioters themselves: from political motivation rooted in the death of Mark Duggan and the perceived threat from the police by these communities to more opportunistic ones such as “getting paid” (James, 2011).

However, beneath these mixed motivations of social inequality and injustice, there were neoliberal socio-economic policies brewing and igniting the anger and frustration of the rioters. Ironically, a shared ideological upbringing of neoliberal triumph. Most rioters, like everyone else, had been brought up under the dogma of consumer symbolism and culture but without a unifying political ideology. Most of them had been trapped in chronic unemployment which prompted a deep seated cynicism and inertia (Standing, 2011). Consumer culture, embedded unemployment and inertia have nowadays become basic features of contemporary culture and form core characteristics of those we call *the precariat*. To explain events such as the 2011 English riots we must move away from the traditional idea of criminality as a consequence of faulty parenting and the failure of formal education. Instead, we ought to frame them in the context of an ever changing world beset by economic instability and political uncertainty; a world where the elites seem determined to advance neoliberal policies whatever the costs to society and wherever possible. Social unrests are increasing due to economic policies that are based on extreme scarcity and resource depletion, and where capitalism seems to be reaching its growth's limits (Ibid). These policies are encouraging individualism over solidarity, envy and competitions for status which in turn is creating tension between people and subsequent anomie. Arguably, with only this shallow consumer culture to compensate for its marginalized status, part of the population is forced to release its dissatisfaction by going against the norms. The rioters were able to find collective support among themselves and to articulate and discharge their anger and frustration caused by their socioeconomic and political anomie. These individuals are left to suffocate over the

bleak reality of their material condition combined with a long-lasting sense of exploitation, irrelevance and isolation (Standing, 2011). Left to themselves, they were, and still are, unable to move away from the uncertainty created by such isolation; they were angry but at the same time quite unable to understand and explain the reasons behind their anger. For those who feel caught up in this marginalization, the end result is a deep seated, incoherent and harmful anger (Ibid). It follows that this inability to succeed, either as an individual or a collective, with only certain failure as an outcome, while the mainstream media constantly project on them the mystical successes of consumer capitalism's winners, these young people had no other way to discharge their frustration and anger but through rioting on the streets of London and England.

9.2 The voices of the rioters [the precariat]: why they did it

What will follow are the voices of 17 individuals who had been involved in the violence in London and Birmingham. These following extracts, in *italics*, are taken from the research conducted by Treadwell et al (2013). What one can gather from them is that engaging the police in street violence was not the primary concern for some of these young people. Killa, who was 30 at the time, and his views and activities demonstrate this point quite clearly. He and his friends had criminal records, mostly for drug dealing, and they were regular police targets on the streets of North London. Despite this, their primary concern during the riots was not to take revenge on the police:

Killa: So the man got stabbed [Mark Duggan, who was in fact shot by metropolitan police officers] and some of my Jamaican friends knew the guy back in the day, so we went down Tottenham protesting. Right then we heard some woman got hurt and that they was trashing places and, when we heard that, we thought easy money, quick money. The man who was stabbed was an excuse. It was there [the opportunity], we need money, we are going to rob and steal. It wasn't like I was trying to get back at society, I was taking what I could.

G: Swat is like, bruv. Get me? Opportunities come and you can't let them go, know what I'm saying?

Ten friends of Killa and G split up in two vehicles and went on a two-day rampage of Tottenham and East Ham, raiding shops such as Argos, Currys and various phone, computer and jewellery shops. A younger group of interviewees made similar remarks. Will, who was 20 at the time, together with his friends Craig, then 17, and Steve, then 15, were also from a deprived estate in East London:

Will: So people heard that there was rioting in Tottenham, yeah? After that, everyone just started rioting [brings himself forward on the sofa]. Right, basically people started overhearing the rioting and we were trying to get the government back in any sort of way for the killing [of Mark Duggan] because there was no reason for it and everyone just thought to join in and take advantage of it.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Will: We have to pay for everything every day, this happens every day. Payback.

Interviewer: Payback against what?

Will: Killing, police, getting the government back in any sort of way ... sort of.

Despite these remarks, later in the interview, after offering weak accounts of their actions against the police, they recognized that money and consumerism were the primary motivations and suggested that they made £20,000 between them during the looting. Here, we can clearly recognize the socioeconomic marginalization discussed earlier (Standing, 2011). We begin to note and feel this sense of anomie, detachment which leads them to an articulation of anger through violence:

Interviewer: Ok, I am going to challenge you now. You say it is about the police but you can't ignore how much you looted.

Steve: It's just that guy [Will]. Some people use it as an excuse. Like dese days, people haven't got as much money as they had. I done it because I needed money. Like, it's hard to explain. People wanted to get back at the police, but at the same time get some bits.

Craig: Money for me was the main reason.

Steve: Like people was using the police as an excuse because no one wants to admit 'yeah I am a bit poor' or 'I need a bit of money because I am poor' but they do make an excuse that just because that boy died. When I saw everyone do it, I thought 'why can't I do that?' I felt a bit jealous. It was like everyone was out there getting that money and I was sitting indoors.

Craig: Same here.

Interviewer: But why do you think you need to be part of it?

Steve: Because I am sitting at home and people are walking out with big TVs

Craig: ... Clothes

Steve: £300 pair of jeans and I am thinking 'hold on a minute, I am here but I need to get in there' to be honest.

The ubiquity of the consumerist motivation is exposed by the fact that, after selling the stolen goods, they went back with the earnings to the very stores they had looted to buy legitimate goods. Here we can appreciate how the consumeristic ideology of success and status given by material possession has taken hold of these individuals' ability to act accordingly. Shaggy, a 27-year-old law student at the time, with a particular fondness for 'Gucci, Fendi and Louis Vuitton', stole two top-of-the-range AppleMac laptops from PC World and sold them for £800. He then spent the money on his favourite designer labels, buying a Vuitton Speedy 65 bag for his girlfriend who is 'well into dat shit, boy'. Freddie, 20 at the time, had a criminal record and was 'into expensive, limited edition sports clothes'. Although originally giving the typical criticism of the police, this was undoubtedly not his primary motivation:

Freddie: Fuck the police, I am going to get what I can. We arranged to steal stuff. We didn't just go out and see what we could get, we got together to discuss it and which vehicle we would use ... we decided on a Corsa and a White van. It was organised bruv. We thought by stealing from the shops we'd be getting back at the police. We did Argos when we found out it

was being raided, then Wood Green JDs [a sports chain in North London] and then East Ham Foot Locker [another sports chain in East London]. We sold some but kept a lot of it ourselves. I had about £1500 in trainers, but we had electrical stuff, tracksuits, hats, and the lot.

Interviewer: How much did you steal, like what was it worth do you think?

Freddie: When I worked it out, £7,000.

For these individuals, the original cause of the riots was trivial, and the words of *Marcus* and *Ricky*, recorded during the riots in Birmingham, exemplify this point well:

A youth clad all in black, his hood up and face masked by a bandanna, and, carrying a concrete street brick in his hand, turns to the crowd. The police occupy the far end of the street. His mate encourages him: 'come on, throw it at them [the police]', he looks at him and then retorts: 'Fuck off. I'm gonna need this to put through a window. I didn't come here for a protest; I come here for garms [clothes] man'. (Interviewers notes – Birmingham riots)

Marcus: I missed out yesterday, but it was a proper earner. I ain't going home today until I am sorted. I can get a good wage here and sort myself for the week man, maybe a month even. Fuck it, I'm on it.

Ricky: Have we done Black's yet? I fucking wanna get some stuff there man, like a North Face or Berghaus ... I'm fucking loving this man It's a good day for shopping.

In Birmingham, guns were fired at the police, and three Asian storekeepers were run over by a car and killed (BBC News, 2011). However, apart from these very serious incidents, the riots seemed to have been characterized by the unrestraint and enthusiasm of a village Fête; but also inconsistently stained by the mark of negativism and compliance. Young people smashed into stores and appeared at the same time both elated and violently disgruntled. With the police briefly held back, the short-lived collapse of law and order stamped out an unruly opening in which the rioters acted out their ugliest and most extreme impulses and took the chance to indulge in an excessive spell of consumption way beyond the everyday norm. This was the only thing that temporarily stirred their blood, as some interviewees in Birmingham suggested:

As I stand outside a pub a young man in a bobble hat strides past swigging from a bottle of wine stolen from the Tesco store across the road. He smiles at me and nods, before asking me for a cigarette. I offer him one and we chat: 'Where you from mate? Got anything good yet?' I tell him I haven't. He looks at me in disbelief and tells me, 'you'd better get a shift on son, it's not like any other day today is it ... not just some normal, routine shit day, same-old-same old. I mean its mental innit, it's just crazy, you can come out, get what you can, it's like everyone is on one, it's just like a party today, you got to join in! (Interviewers notes – Birmingham riots)

The looting of designer stores is not just consumerism gone mad but is entrenched with a surrounding pessimism and a social vacuum, anomie. As *Reece*, one of our interviewees from Birmingham describes *'there is no alternative'*, *'this is the only game in town'*, *'this as good as it gets'* and other related clichés are examples of the spirit of those involved.

“Look man [I went because] I don’t want to be the one that misses out while every fucker else is on it. What am I going to do man, sit in my house and smoke while this goes off? I ain’t got no real grievances or shit; I don’t buy this conspiracy shit and all the government’s fault thing. It wasn’t to bring down the fucking government or reclaim the streets or some shit like them people sat in tents and that [here he is referring to the Occupy movement]. I went to get me some of what I’ve seen others getting, because if I didn’t, man, what would that make me? What else can you do?”

Interviewer: So what have you lads heard then? Where you heading?

One lad in the group has hidden his face behind a black scarf and wears a black hooded top and gloves says: ‘I’ve heard its going off down Corporation Street now so we are going to go and have a go at the Rolex place on New Street man, get some fucking Rolex, get some fucking Cartier (laughs) ... I am here ’cos I’m a criminal man, fucking, that is what I do. I ain’t gonna lie to you. We’re not here to fuck about, are we boys? We want to get some decent designer gear and make some money’.

As the reader will appreciate, the rioters did not resent the super-rich and their successes; they voiced no disgust at the extravagant lifestyles of celebrities or banking elites, and no indignation at neoliberalism’s great socioeconomic and political letdowns and inequalities (Chomsky, 2017). That politics is corrupt, and the ideal of social justice is absent from their rhetoric. Testimony to this is the fact that most of those interviewed had never heard of Mark Duggan, the individual whose death kick-started the riots, but they surely knew about Prada and Rolex:

Ty: The only people round me with cars and money, they’re dealers. Look at the cars on their drives, man, and it fucking shows crime pays, man. Now I am gonna have me some of this.

Jase: I have had jobs, worked in construction clearing 300 pound a week, man, then all that dried up, fucking I got laid off, what can I do, man? I’m not working for shit money. I’m not doing 60 hours a week in a supermarket to earn less. Fuck that, why should I? I am here to get me some decent gear. That’s it, basically.

Karl: I am 23, never had no job, been in care, in Brinsford, Glenn Parva. I got fuck all to lose man, fucking Babylon [police] can’t do shit anyway, fuck them. We run this town now, not them pricks man, I am gonna take as much as I can get. I want to get watches man, I want me a fucking Rolex.

Dexter remarks openly on what he understands as the misdirection of some of the accounts originally presented by some academics and politicians, eliciting on both social reality and the true objects of libidinal drives:

Dexter: What is all this shit about protests that is being talked? The riots weren’t fucking protests, but these pricks like your fucking politicians, and your university people and that, they talk such shite!

Interviewer: Thanks

Dexter: Oh, not you, but you are not like them you know, you get it. All these people though, honestly giving their opinions, they haven’t got a clue. Fucking protests, what, the riots? Like

the lads from round here are gonna bother going up town for a protest! It was for 10 pairs of free Adidas. It's a fucking joke, anyone can see it's fucking fantasy.

Dexter: IF (adds emphasis) they are caught, they are hardly going to say, 'I am doing alright, but I just thought fuck it, I will go for it, get as much sweet stuff as I can'. No, they are going to say anything they can to get people on side, it's like 'oh poor me, these are all the reasons I did it. It's 'cos you took my EMA [education maintenance allowance, a recently withdrawn UK welfare payment offered to young people in full-time education or training] away. It's the police, it's the government'. The truth is though that's just shit. They saw a chance to get some nice gear. That's why I went out ... I heard this one lad on telly, the prick was saying 'it was a protest against the government' in a police interview after he had been lifted. What a dick, why would you say that? You are not going to get it any easier saying that sort of shit once you have been lifted are you? He should have gone 'no comment' (Laughs) Look, Birmingham has poor kids; it's got lots of kids who aren't poor as well and some of them were looting. I made about a grand from all the stuff I got, I was hiding things, phones mainly, in the bags then in a little place I got, then later I'd go back and pick them up. It was just easy, everyone was on it. Everyone I know was there, on it. It was just like a party man, really for two nights the city was ours, you get me. And I got me some nice stuff out of it. We just took decent gear, iPhones, Pandora bracelets, trainers. That is why we done it.

What can be gathered from these interviews was the rising distrust that early empirical explanations were failing to examine what appeared to be a deeper level of attitudes, beliefs, motivations and material realities related with segregated populations. A great deal of the data collected from these interviews, and past research on segregated populations, indicates that it is worth exploring the option that many of the current justifications are being constructed in close connection with today's shortened post-political philosophies or bureaucratic explanations (Chomsky, 2017).

Certainly, neither during the riots nor on the following days was there much discussion of the riots as a political or ethical protest. Such explanations were practically lacking in all interviews, to a point precisely captured in the following exchange:

I stand talking to Frankie outside the local off license. Just like on the day of the riots he has a can of strong lager in one hand, a spliff in the other, but now he has on a new T-shirt, trainers and wrist watch. He is still dreaming of the next big score, or being rich and successful. The riots are now fading into memory, just a few nights of distraction and excitement against the general monotony of life in the post-industrial city. He has been watching the commentary on the riots and is keen to give me his take: 'all these commentators are saying "it's about this and that", fucking big "I know" cunts that don't know fuck all mate, they are lapping up the shit they are being told now the lads involved are saying, "I've lost me EMA, I am on my arse, it's the government, it's the police, it's this, it's that"'.

Interviewer: And what about you mate, what do you think the riots are about?

'It's none of that shit. Basically, most people think like me. I want good gear, but I don't want some shit job, I don't want some fucking training course. I don't wanna work for some prick. I want to get up when I want, have a smoke, have a few tots [drinks] and do fuck all, I don't know man, all this shit about the causes that gets talked, it's all bollocks isn't it? When it comes to the riots most people were there like me, 'cos they wanted some free shit and have a bit of a laugh.'

The rhetoric in these interviews is not new, and one only has to look beneath the surface to appreciate that the ideas of dissent or political rebellion were implausible. A significant proportion of England's youth, and perhaps globally, are losing confidence in the future forced upon society by neoliberal capitalism and its global financial institutions (Standing, 2011; Chomsky, 2017).

10. Results and Discussion

Some of those interviewed said that engaging the police in street violence was not their primary concern. Even though some had criminal records and were periodically targeted by the police, their primary motive during the riots was not retaliation for the killing of Mark Duggan. People like *Killa, G* and their 10 unnamed friends, who initially descended to the street to protest against what they saw as an unlawful killing, as soon as they heard people started "*trashing places*", they decided to join in. For them, it became an opportunity to make some "*easy money, quick money*". They went on looting for two days phone, computer and jewellery stores. Three other young boys, aged between 20 and 15, all of whom came from a deprived estate in East London gave similar accounts, where "*take advantage of it*" (the riots) "*to get the government back in any sort of way for the killing*" are indicative remarks of hidden anger and frustration. Later on, during the interview, they admitted that money and consumerism were their primary motivations, suggesting that they had made around £20,000 between them. In these remarks, we can begin to infer a sense socio-economic marginalization symptomatic of *the precariat*. We start to see and feel this sense of anomie, disengagement which encouraged an expression of anger through violence. There is a sense that they thought these luxury items were due to them, they just could not get them otherwise. After being challenged by the interviewer *Steve* admitted that he felt almost left out, marginalized "*Like dese days, people haven't got as much money as they had*" and while angry at the police they were also hungry for consumeristic items "*People wanted to get back at the police, but at the same time get some bits*". *Craig* is very blatant about it and says "*money for me was the main reason*". ST proposition that it is society that put strains on people and forces them to *innovate* in order to fulfil its cultural objectives is quite eloquently expressed by both *Steve* and *Craig*: "*people was using the police as an excuse because no one wants to admit 'yeah I am a bit poor' or 'I need a bit of money because I am poor' but they do make an excuse that just because that boy died*" and "*When I saw everyone do it, I thought 'why can't I do that?' I felt a bit jealous. It was like everyone was out there getting that money and I was sitting indoors*".

The pervasiveness of the consumerist incentive is uncovered by the fact that, after selling the stolen goods, they went back with the earnings to the same shops they had looted to lawfully buy the same items. In this example, we can value how the consumeristic dogma of success and status, given by items symbolizing success, had taken hold of these people's capacity to act within the norms. To obtain what they had been taught to want they had to find novel solutions, in Merton's words to *innovate*. *Shaggy*, who was 27 at the time and studying law, encapsulate this argument very well. He had a penchant for designer items and stole two Apple-Mac laptops and sold them. With the proceeds he made he went on to buy a designer handbag for his girlfriend who in his own words was "*well into dat shit, boy*". Similarly, a then 20 years old with a criminal record named *Freddie* who was also "*into expensive, limited edition sports clothes*" admitted that the shooting of Mark Duggan was not his primary motive for stealing: "*fuck the police, I am going to get what I can*" and "*we arranged to steal stuff. We didn't just go out and see what we could get, we got together to discuss it and which*

vehicle we would use ... we decided on a Corsa and a white van. It was organised bruv". "We sold some but kept a lot of it ourselves. I had about £1500 in trainers, but we had electrical stuff, tracksuits, hats, and the lot".

From these extracts, we can gauge how the riots had been about looting and represented an opportunity to take forward the consumer and financial interests of the self. I will argue, however, that consumerism, was not just a primary motivation among many, but rather a default position. These individuals came from structural and relative poverty coupled to a state of chronic unemployment. Their lives were constellated by injustice, austerity measures, resulting in the closure of youth clubs and so on. The free market economy, embraced to different degrees by successive governments, had stripped away any social safety cushion these people had to escape poverty (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Worryingly, these are all fundamental characteristics of *the precariat*. A dangerous mix which eventually intensified the craving to seize something for free to the point of no return. They lacked an alternative to the consumeristic ideology surrounding them and, certainly, they lacked the legitimate means to achieve the materialistic success advertised all around them. They had neither an exciting ideal, nor a voice to argue within the political framework of the time (Standing, 2011). The brief but complete breakdown of law and order could only lead to some consumer items being sold for less than their value or kept in order to strengthen the ornamental appeal of the self. This frustrated life on the margins, and the ongoing perception that some people were entitled to live better lives could not be vented any other way because they lacked an effective political representation (Ibid). Nobody out there was speaking for them, quite the contrary; most commentators were blaming them for their predicaments (The Mayor of London and the then Prime Minister chiefs among others). A socioeconomic discontent that could have once been expressed through trade unions or other political means was now vented through anger and frustration. For the rioters, the shooting of Mark Duggan had been nothing more than an excuse, a triggering device. Sadly, nothing has really changed for these people; they did not obtain recognition in terms of better living standards and or job opportunities. Just a bunch of consumeristic items that have already gone. Rioting did nothing good for them at all; paradoxically, as in *Shaggy's* case, it fueled consumer spending thus further advancing the pervasive and pernicious ideology of consumer capitalism which is arguably the original sin for the precariat's marginalization.

Most of them did not go to the streets to protest against the police for the killing of Mark Duggan. They did so to steal; it was an opportunity to *innovate* and get something for them as the next extract eloquently explains: *A youth clad all in black, his hood up and face masked by a bandanna, and, carrying a concrete street brick in his hand, turns to the crowd. The police occupy the far end of the street. His mate encourages him: 'come on, throw it at them [the police]', he looks at him and then retorts: 'Fuck off. I'm gonna need this to put through a window. I didn't come here for a protest; I come here for garms [clothes] man'. Marcus's and Ricky's accounts further enhanced this argument: "I missed out yesterday, but it was a proper earner. I ain't going home today until I am sorted. I can get a good wage here and sort myself for the week man, maybe a month even. Fuck it, I'm on it" and "have we done Black's yet? I fucking wanna get some stuff there man, like a North Face or Berghaus ... I'm fucking loving this man It's a good day for shopping".* Unlike in other parts of England, Birmingham witnessed some shootings aimed at the police and three people died. These were the worst incidents, whereas the rest of the riots seemed to have been about taking advantage of the brief breakdown of law and order to steal and loot.

As argued by Bauman (2011), most rioters just wanted some consumer culture's symbolic items. These were nothing more than consumer disturbances that had no clear alternative, but to satisfy the capitalist ideology and its consumers to the tackiest terms. The riots heralded the return of broken-down and excluded consumers, fixed by a conceptual explanation of social value and cultural significance, an explanation that, however, neglects the unpleasant and often successful drive not to appear broken-down and excluded (Ibid). What emerged from the interviews of these socially and economically marginalized individuals from poor council estates and unable to obtain the lifestyle endorsed by consumer culture through conventional means, was that the power of money reflects all the values they need. To them, consumerism and excess are indicators of success and failing to be recognized in this symbolic reality echoed cultural insignificance and no life (Žižek, 2011). Thus, attaining an identity in this way becomes very valuable, albeit *precarious*, and failure in doing so is deemed unacceptable. The fact that the riots were short-lived rested in the absence of a political objective (Standing, 2011). Those involved were just venting their anger and frustration towards an unjust system that had pushed them to the sidelines. Thus, this collection of angry and frustrated individuals could not coalesce into a united front demanding progressive and lasting changes through a political narrative (Ibid). Their situations and positions were weakened by a weak economy, where jobs were scarce and low-paid, by years of welfare cuts advanced by a political class determined to blame them instead of helping them. In a contextual reality of an ideology that promotes individuals elevation above the collective, and that compels people to look on in envy at the materialistic success of others, the future for these people is bleak.

This system creates more losers than winners and its negative outcomes cannot be expected to end anytime soon. Furthermore, this alienation vented in short, albeit violent disturbances should not be dismissed as examples of temporary transgression but rather considered as the new consumeristic norm (Hall et al, 2008). As Žižek (2008) argued a new conception of enjoyment is brewing, an enjoyment that commands personal pleasure and new experiences as the norm, even though this can be barely said to be enjoyable. Today's liberal culture, where pleasure is mandatory, and where what constitutes disobedience is determined by the same authority that restrains conformity, quickly develops a culture where individuals cannot enjoy that which they are instructed to enjoy (Ibid). Thus, enjoyment becomes a feeling, a baffling rush of extreme pleasure with a brief symbolic life, a rush of hyper-reality, just like what some of the rioters reported. This consumer ideology surrounds people with devices, games and lifestyle ornaments while they update their social statuses. It renders them bored, disenfranchised and depressed while at the same time forcing them to play along to this race of overindulgences without really enjoying the ride. This, in a way, further their marginalization, while indulging in an extreme stint of consumption that is way outside their norm, as the following extract reveals: *'you'd better get a shift on son, it's not like any other day today is it ... not just some normal, routine shit day, same-old-same old. I mean its mental innit, it's just crazy, you can come out, get what you can, it's like everyone is on one, it's just like a party today, you got to join in!*

The looting of designer items is not only the victory of consumerism. As Institutionalized Anomie Theory contends, when the market economy infiltrates and weakens non-economic institutions, there is a strong risk that market values deteriorate into an anomic ethic which encourages the pursuit of self-interest by any means necessary (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). It follows, that when non-economic institutions are debilitated, unbalanced, and permeated by the market economy the worst aspects of capitalism materialize themselves. Consumerism is encircled by negativity and a social vacuum that represent the absence of an alternative that

could swing our minds with the same impetus and desire. This is a system that is now controlled by corporate and financial elites and supported by complacent politicians (Chomsky, 2017). An alarming democratic void. Those involved in the riots confirmed this through their rhetoric: *“there is no alternative”, “this is the only game in town”, “this as good as it gets”*. Reece verbalized this argument quite succinctly: *“look man [I went because] I don’t want to be the one that misses out while every fucker else is on it”. “It wasn’t to bring down the fucking government or reclaim the streets or some shit like them people sat in tents and that [here he is referring to the Occupy movement]. I went to get me some of what I’ve seen others getting, because if I didn’t, man, what would that make me? What else can you do?”*

As Hall et al (2008) research on opportunistic offenders and consumeristic motivations revealed, the 2011 riots made the otherwise relatively slow criminality of marginalized estates to intensely speed up, bringing with it a larger community. When asked by the interviewer where they were heading and what they had heard, a group of youth wearing scarfs, hoods and gloves to conceal their identities answered: *“I’ve heard its going off down Corporation Street now so we are going to go and have a go at the Rolex place on New Street man, get some fucking Rolex, get some fucking Cartier (laughs) ... I am here ’cos I’m a criminal man, fucking, that is what I do. I ain’t gonna lie to you. We’re not here to fuck about, are we boys? We want to get some decent designer gear and make some money”*. Again, an urge to get what is believed to be due to them seems to transpire from these exchanges. Their primary motive is clearly to gain some monetary reward through stealing items that represent economic success and status.

10.1 Behind the politics of marginality

As argued by Standing (2012) the promotion of a neoliberal political economy have separated individuals and communities from their common history, taking us to a present-day reality where political commitment to altruistic measures are not only ridicule in mainstream narratives but effectively dismantled. Reading carefully through these interviews one notes that for the rioters the social does not matter, and they exist in a reality where each person is all out for themselves. They have embraced the mantra of the neoliberal ideology where everyone is in competition against one another for economic supremacy; they just lack the legitimate means to achieve that (Merton, 2011). A testament to this is the fact that some of those interviewed had never heard of Mark Duggan, and were only concerned with the ideology of consumerism and money: Ty *“The only people round me with cars and money, they’re dealers. Look at the cars on their drives, man, and it fucking shows crime pays, man. Now I am gonna have me some of this”*. Jase *“I am here to get me some decent gear. That’s it, basically”*. Karl: *“We run this town now, not them pricks man, I am gonna take as much as I can get. I want to get watches man, I want me a fucking Rolex”*.

For most of these individuals from deprived areas, criminality is a way of achieving status. As they chase respect in the society they ascribed significance to consumer items. Failing to display such itemized success and or to obtain these items through intimidation, normalized in masculine cultures, would result in social marginality for them (Hall et al, 2008). On the other hand, showing possession of the designer items endorsed by current culture guaranteed a degree of respect and authority. Dexter’s comments are related to what he perceived as misconceptions of what the riots really were about: *“what is all this shit about protests that is being talked? The riots weren’t fucking protests, but these pricks like your fucking politicians, and your university people and that, they talk such shite!”* *“Like the lads from round here are gonna bother going up town for a protest! It was for 10 pairs of free Adidas”*.

Dexter: IF (adds emphasis) they are caught, they are hardly going to say, 'I am doing alright, but I just thought fuck it, I will go for it, get as much sweet stuff as I can'. No, they are going to say anything they can to get people on side, it's like 'oh poor me, these are all the reasons I did it. It's 'cos you took my EMA [education maintenance allowance, a recently withdrawn UK welfare payment offered to young people in full-time education or training] away. It's the police, it's the government'. The truth is though that's just shit. They saw a chance to get some nice gear". This point is important: the riots had not just stemmed from the killing of Mark Duggan but were more an excuse to attain free goods and consequent status. Dexter, for instance, contends that all those who had said otherwise were lying. As I argue in the methodology section, when interviewing people we can never forget their motives and their subjectivity, and this is, of course, true for the rioters as well. However, what we can infer from these interviews is that most of the research that has gone into looking at these behaviours has neglected to look deeper into the attitudes, beliefs, motivations and material realities associated with individuals who live in deprived and segregated areas in today's consumeristic society. Dexter's case is telling: he came from a poor council estate, with a problematic family history and a criminal record.

However, even though socioeconomic inequality is arguably rising (Wacquant, 2009b), he did not say that his primary motivation was the injustice of his poverty. This has been corroborated by some research showing that while some criminality and social disorder are somehow entrenched in the neoliberal policies of exclusion, they are not solely caused by poverty and negative sentiments of social injustice (Lea, 2002; Reiner, 2007). The working class has fought for social justice and against poverty since the inception of the industrial revolution; an era in which crime rates decreased substantially. A development that generated economic growth, productivity and better wages (Standing, 2015). However, over the last few decades, things have taken the wrong turn for the working class and the most marginalized, the precariat. The current state of anomie arguably derived from the creation of socioeconomic settings where crushed and depoliticized individuals and multiplying identity groups were pitted in competition against each other in a flawed meritocracy. The problem is that general industrial productivity is no longer the bench mark of meritocracy. What counts now is the individual's ability to add symbolic value to items as they go up and down in today's capitalism unstable consumer economy (Standing, 2011; Chomsky, 2017).

These people's certainty of a marginal existence as losers of such an economic system is now a norm for them. Today's society is ridden with unstable employment and thus economic uncertainty, coupled with an absence of a helpful and unifying political voice (Ibid). The only political discourse is that regurgitated over and over by the Conservatives or the liberal left. Unfortunately, these voices fail to present consumerism for what it is: an empty and duplicitous ideology, devoid of altruism and compassion. It promises what it cannot deliver and it is contagious and pervasive, attacking and dismantling social protections in the name of profits (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Bauman (2011) illustrated this idea really well when he talked of how we are trained from birth to death to treat shops as we treat pharmacies where we can find the drugs to alleviate our sorrows and live in common with others. Supermarkets have become our temples, shopping lists are our prayer books and strolling down the shopping malls has become a form of pilgrimage. I shop therefore I am he says (Ibid). I am not suggesting that looting and theft are new features of urban disorders, as they have both been features of riots before. However:

“[T]he ‘riots’ that occurred in England during the early part of August 2011 can only be properly comprehended if they are located in the context of a society that is becoming

increasingly consumerist in its orientation. Ultimately, rather than signalling any breakdown of society or any pathology on the part of the rioters, the events of August actually represented conformity to the underlying values of consumer culture and showed how far the diktats of that culture have been internalized by the participants” (Moxon, 2011: pp.16)

The riots were not really perceived as a political or even ethical protest. *Frankie* really encapsulated this point in the following exchange with one of the interviewers: “*all these commentators are saying “it’s about this and that”, fucking big “I know” cunts that don’t know fuck all mate, they are lapping up the shit they are being told now the lads involved are saying, “I’ve lost me EMA, I am on my arse, it’s the government, it’s the police, it’s this, it’s that”*. Asked what he thought the riots were about *Frankie* answered that “*It’s none of that shit. Basically, most people think like me. I want good gear, but I don’t want some shit job, I don’t want some fucking training course. I don’t wanna work for some prick. I want to get up when I want, have a smoke, have a few tots [drinks] and do fuck all, I don’t know man, all this shit about the causes that gets talked, it’s all bollocks isn’t it? When it comes to the riots most people were there like me, ’cos they wanted some free shit and have a bit of a laugh”*.”

What emerged from these voices was that the ideas of rebellion and political agitation were unlikely. A substantial proportion of young people in England, and I would argue in most Western Societies, are dropping the illusion of a bright future. They are segregated and marginalized by an ever aggressive neoliberal agenda that has permeated economic institutions as much as non-economic institutions diminishing, if not completely annihilating, the cohesive characteristics of the latter in favour of the isolating and competitive features of the former (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Presently, there appear to be no viable alternatives to the status quo, neither political nor economical. As capitalism stretches to its limits, chronic unemployment, underemployment and their related feeling of despair appear to be here to stay for the long haul to become normal conditions of existence. Finding potential satisfaction only in increasingly difficult to obtain consumer items, individuals are forced to look to themselves to resolve their never ending problems (Standing, 2011). As ST contends, it is this denial of opportunity that generates criminogenic strains by creating structural barriers that are impossible for these individuals to overcome. This is particularly true for those living in marginalized areas, as observed by Cohen (1955). People from disadvantaged neighbourhoods will face special challenges in trying to succeed and attain status in conventional institutions such as schools, jobs and families which embody middle-class values (Ibid). Therefore, while unable to achieve status in the respectable society they are fed the idea that they are welcome to try. Furthermore, as Institutionalize Anomie Theory argues, the non-economic institutions that are meant to mitigate the *criminogenic strains* created by the lack of opportunities in the face of constant commands to succeed, have been infected and, by and large, rendered ineffective by the market economy (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013). Years upon years of such policies have created a new marginalized and frustrated social class, *the precariat*. Elements of this new class were definitely involved in the 2011 English Riots. As a consequence of the neoliberal socioeconomic policies of the 21st century, what started as a protest by family and friends of Mark Duggan, quickly turned into one of the major public disturbances in the UK since the 1980s.

11. Concluding remarks

Riots, like all crime, are complex phenomena which are by definition difficult to explain. As I discussed above, economic hardship alone cannot explain what happened in the streets of

England in August 2011; for most of the rioters poverty had little effect, since economic variations did not greatly change their already overall precarious situation. However, they were most at risk from experiencing anomie, not just because they were poor, but, as they all stated in their interviews, because they believed in the culturally and economically celebrated ethic of achieving social status through obtaining the latest gadget or fashion item. ST alone, however, cannot help us. This is where Institutional Anomie Theory enters the fray, as it pays attention to the different organisational causes to anomie. Institutional Anomie Theory concentrates on the institutional sources of the anomic ethic itself, and it attempts to make clear the institutional processes that aid and strengthen this anomic ethic. This perspective connects the dots between this new anomic cultural model and the institutional procedures, hence proposing a significant association to social changes. As I argued above, these two perspectives work better together than on their own (Taylor et al, 2013). The concept of the Precariat as a new global social class has been criticized because it does not provide concrete evidence for its alleged global status; most of its argument revolves around the status of workforces in the UK and the US (Breman, 2013). However, Standing's research in Asia and Africa (Standing, 2015), seems to speak for a global trend. Whichever position one may wish to take, the crucial matter is that these competing arguments should be settled on the basis of an objective analysis aiming at generating greater social justice.

It follows that a critical analysis of consumer culture and neoliberal socio-economic and political policies is in order. Notwithstanding the greed and misconducts of the financial elites that caused the 2008 crisis, the political class, except for a small insignificant proportion of it, continues to advance and protect the interests of said elites to the disadvantage of most people. Adding insult to injury, these injustices are aggravated, and in some cases caused, by austerity measures imposed by governments. What is discouraging is the insignificant criticism that is directed to this widening social inequality and injustice, and the systematic decline of democracy, while the anti-social behaviour of the financial elites is protected and in some ways promoted (Chomsky, 2017). The rioters, like the rest of us trapped in hectic lives with no time to think and gather together to create a better alternative, seemed to be roused by the ruling consumeristic ideology to grab what you can. To be a winner in this dystopian realization of consumer capitalism, people compete against each other to attain and display symbolically charged consumer items that will elevate the self over the collective (Standing, 2011). The rioters were nothing more than just enthusiastic opportunists with no apparent political alliance trying to pursue unattainable goals.

From the interviews analysed in my thesis we can quite clearly see that these people were neither rioting to protest for lack of work in one of the wealthiest country in the world, nor did they see themselves as disenfranchised consumers without a role to play today's consumeristic society. They actually saw themselves as part of it, and regardless of their clear economic marginalization, they embraced the competitive spirit that is the system's central drive. They accepted its corruption, political apathy and its practical cynicism, all features that infused a belief that an alternative way of life was not available. The rioters had been marginalized from society in that they could never have achieved its cultural goals through institutional means, but at the same time, made to accept and pursuit its consumeristic ideals and social hierarchy (Merton, 2011). They had been used, discarded, and left with no unifying political representation that could speak and act for them (Standing, 2011; Chomsky, 2017). These people, left to fend for themselves in a socioeconomic structure that encourage a competitive individualistic culture, were, and still are, locked in a permanent struggle, which fragmented them into an atomized and alienated horde of competitive individuals. Young people were especially ostracized, without a political narrative that speaks to and for them,

but that has entirely embraced the dicta of neoliberalism to its full extent. There is a dangerous reality looming over us now, what Standing (2011) calls the politics of inferno. This option entails the creation of more denizens, increasing inequality and a cynical and narrow approach to the public debate about well-being and happiness. The politics of Inferno guarantees greater happiness for the elites. In this scenario, the marginalized must be convinced to blame themselves for their status. In doing so, liberties are progressively fragmented, producing growing stress, detachment and toxic anomie. The further rise of insecurity will generate more intolerance, supporting the loss of altruism and social solidarity (Standing, 2011; Rosenfeld & Messner, 2013; Chomsky, 2017).

It follows, that as the precariat fight against this consumeristic ideology that had pitted them against each other in a political vacuum, they also recognize that it will be impossible for them to attain the lifestyles that they had been indoctrinated into believing they should want and pursue (Merton, 2011; Standing, 2011). Inevitably, this creates the toxic anomie that led to the riots. What they realized is that within such a hyper competitive system, where they lack the tools to compete on an equal level with their better-off peers, most of them are going to be in a perennial state of loss, insecurity and the resulting marginality. The fact is that this *precarious* condition that scorns the “beautiful life” is real and tangible to many (Standing, 2011). Without the return to more inclusive socio-economic and political policies that stop making the rich richer and the poor poorer, it is difficult to see a future without more rioting and similar disturbances. As discussed earlier, riots are complex events that do not stem out of just one cause. It is imperative that a more holistic approach is taken: thus, all the local injustices that led to the killing of Mark Duggan such as systematic stop and search of ethnic minorities, the many personal and structural inequalities that pushed young people like him to follow similar paths of delinquency in segregated areas, and the multiple other reasons why people took to the streets to protest and then loot, must be studied in depth. I will argue that to do so successfully, it is imperative that criminology take on consumer culture in a more decisive and critical manner. Not doing so would negate the groundbreaking work and strides that had already been made thanks to both ST and Institutional Anomie Theory. It would also mean neglecting how far neoliberalism has reached into the social fabric of modern-day society.

As ST already put forward, if denial of opportunity generates criminogenic strains, then expanding legitimate opportunities should help towards reducing those strains. As Merton (2011) argued we should focus on developing programs that give the marginalized educational resources, job training and an equal access to employment that pays. *Mobilization of Youth* (Empey, 1982: pp.241) was one of such programs developed with ST in mind during the 1960s. However, these types of programs can only be implemented if there is a political narrative supporting equal opportunities and investment in segregated communities by galvanizing unions and educating people to protest against welfare cuts and to boycott unscrupulous property owners. There ought to be an overall encouragement to unite against political and economic entrenched interests. To decrease the criminogenic effects resulting from the great stress on monetary success and its conflict with the limits on the means to achieve it, it is vital to reduce its strong materialistic pressures and at the same time the creation and support of more socially viable norms (Merton, 2011). Standing (2011) has for some time proposed the implementation of a universal social income devoid of any means tested measures. The research he conducted among marginalized communities in India support such proposition (Standing, 2015). Standing (2011) also suggests social policies that promote employment regulations allowing more family time and better schooling. We should campaign for holistic policies that promote cultural regeneration, good parenting, teaching,

learning and helping the community (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). The main issue today is that advanced capitalism has not only become the principal framework of economic activity but that it has trickled over into social and non-economic institutions that were meant to offset its most crude and cynical aspects. As Rosenfeld and Messner (2013) eloquently put it, when non-economic institutions remain healthy they can prevent market values from decaying into an anomic ethic which encourages the quest of self-interest by any means necessary.

What ought to be done is revitalizing the labour movement. Reasons for doing so include scale, history, and the ways people cooperate, gain understanding, and become committed to working together for common goals that will benefit all. The labour movement has always been and will continue to lead any progressive activities; unfortunately, it has been ruthlessly spoiled by corporate and government programmes going back decades. This neoliberal period has intensified during the Reagan and Clinton presidencies in the US and the Thatcher and Blair governments in the UK (Chomsky, 2017), going back to the financial crisis of 2008, really just a housing bubble that burst and led to the financial crisis (Chomsky, 2017). At one point the federal government of the United States had almost nationalized the auto industry. There were choices to be made at that point. If there had been a functioning Left speaking for the masses, it could have influenced those choices (Ibid). Such political movement was not there, so it did not influence the choices that were taken. One choice that was taken was to pay off the owners and managers, reconstitute the industry as it was before the crash and hand it back to the former owners and have it go back to its old activities. An alternative course of action would have been to have handed the industry over to the stakeholders, the workforce and the community. Instead of having them produce cars, have them own and run and manage it and produce what the country needs, which is not more cars, but new, reliable and green modes of mass transportation (Ibid). Of course, the same goes for the financial institutions which were rescued using public money only to be handed over to the same people who crashed them in the first place (Ibid). It appears that for the time being the left has not only failed to realize an alternative to neoliberal capitalism but that it has lost the ability to imagine one (Fisher, 2009). Fisher's theoretical work is powerful because it conveys the urgency that neoliberalism demands a collective malady, a shared depression and fear of frustrated expectations. Our social values are taken from a landfill of choked hope. Looking at today's society, dissidents from both the right and left persuasion of the political spectrum are tormented by the painful understanding that something is profoundly wrong; that there must be more to life than current status quo. None the less, the unifying philosophy of late neoliberalism is passive despair. It seems that the best people can do is numbing themselves with empty consumption, feeble careerism, and intermittent chemical intoxication (Ibid).

Believing on the work of psychologist Oliver James, Fisher (2009) noted a remarkable association between the rise of industrial capitalism and the rising normalization of mental illness. As capitalism became the norm, so did unhappiness. Every day misery is normal because misery is what the system asks of people. Dependency on anti-depressants, disastrous personal relationships and chronic unemployment: this is the price we pay for supporting the ridiculous demands of capital (Ibid). If we were able to stop blaming ourselves for the sorry state we are in, and instead, coalesce into a united and progressive discourse, positive and progressive change would arguably ensue. Since the financial crisis in 2008, and especially with the ongoing trauma of a populist rise, the left has a new chance to redirect everyday despair into a cause for a new political consciousness (Fisher, 2009). The traditionally Marxian vocabulary of historical materialism, solidarity, and class antagonism has been inarticulate to our political language for a long time. Fisher (2009) noted that the left's evils are its never-ending rehearsal of old discussions rather than developing and establishing a

future that is positive and viable. By making neoliberal capitalism the new problem, the left can renovate old Marxian political language and make it comprehensible to everyday people who desire one thing: the feeling that it is possible to live a fulfilling and meaningful life.

‘You don’t hate Mondays’ reads a popular meme. ‘You hate capitalism’. While it sounds shallow, a slogan like this, one that generalises neoliberalism itself, and not the individual’s problematic relationship to it as the issue, should be the left’s new mantra. Today, it is no longer enough that we take neoliberalism seriously. We need to start taking it personally. A good argument can be made, therefore, that the fundamental principles of capitalist and market societies are simply inconsistent with human survival (Chomsky, 2017b).

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1: A SUMMARY OF WELFARE REFORMS AND CUTS

The cuts affect all aspects of government expenditure including education, health, legal aid and welfare services. This is a summary of the cuts most likely to affect low-income households:

Benefit cap trialled from 15th April 2013, introduced to Scotland 15th July 2013

- Saving: £275 million in 2013-14
- 56,000 households affected by an average loss of £93/week
- Cap on the total amount of benefit that working-age people (16-64) can receive (approximately £350 per week for a single adult, and £500 per week for a couple or lone parent regardless of the number of children they have)
- Set at the average earnings of a UK working household, the cap will mean that people of working age will receive up to a maximum amount, even if their full entitlement is higher.

Spare room subsidy (Bedroom Tax) introduced 1st April 2013

- Saving £409 million in 2013-14
- 660,000 claimants to be affected, at an average loss of £14/week
- Those with one spare bedroom will lose 14% of their housing benefit
- Those with two or more spare bedrooms will lose 25%.
- Up to two children (of the same gender) under the age of 16 are expected to share
- Families with severely disabled children, foster carers and families of armed services personnel will be exempt.
- A year on, only 6% of social housing tenants affected have moved home, whilst 28% of affected tenants have fallen into rent arrears.

Universal credit trialled from April 2013, initially intended to be rolled-out in three phases between 2013 and 2017

- Initial cost estimates totalled £100 million; due to delays and setbacks, more recent estimates stand at £2.4bn
- 3.1 million households will be entitled to more benefits, at an average gain of £16/month
- While 2.8 million households will be entitled to less
- It will combine: Income support; Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); Income-related Employment Support Allowance (ESA); Housing Benefit; Child Tax Credit; Working Tax Credit
- Roll-out has been severely delayed due to major IT problems and internal government friction.
- As of December 2013, more than £40m has been written off on software and computing costs. Whilst, roll out to at least 700,000 ESA claimants is due to be delayed beyond the 2017 schedule.

Replacing disability allowance (DLA) with personal independence Payment (PIP)

- Saving: £2,240 million.
- The introduction of more stringent medical test and regular retesting.
- Reduction in a number of payment categories.

- 170,000 claimants, one fifth of current DLA claimants, expected to be ineligible for PIP. By 2018, 500,000 will be ineligible.
- 150,000 will get a higher award, according to the DWP. By 2018, 780,000 will receive the same or more than they do currently.

Replacing incapacity benefits with employment support allowance (ESA)

- The introduction of ESA for new claimants from October 2008. Existing incapacity claimants to be assessed from autumn 2010.
- A new, tougher medical test: the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).
- New conditionality for ESA Work Related Activity Group – claimants are subject to sanctioning

Benefit rises capped at 1%, below-inflation

- 4.1 million households affected by an average loss of £0.90 a week
- 9.6 million households will be affected by 2014-15 losing on average of £3 a week

Council tax benefits

- Replacing it with an alternative fund at 90% of the previous budget, from April 2013
- Is likely to affect 3.1 million English households with an average loss of £138 per year.
- In Scotland and Wales, devolved administrations have prevented the reduction from falling on claimants

Changes to eligibility criteria to receive legal aid

- Eligibility to claim legal aid was capped at a household income of £32,000
- Those earning between £14,000 and £32,000 will have to take a means test.
- Family law cases including divorce, child custody, immigration and employment cases were expected to be badly affected.
- Savings: a minimum £350m from £2.2bn legal aid bill.

Source: Roberts K, (2014) Food Precarity in Britain: A Case Study from Wester Hailes, Edinburgh. MA (Hons) Dissertation, Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh.