

London riots will happen again: expert

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(Phys.org) -- Another trigger event is all it will take for a repeat of the riots that plagued London and other cities across the country last summer, according to an expert from Royal Holloway, University of London.

Fabian Kessl, an academic visitor from the Department of Social Work, believes the [riots](#) are symbolic of a change that is occurring within society and unless the problems are addressed, it is only a matter of time before further riots occur.

Professor Kessl explains: “As long as the politics in England go in the same direction as we have experienced in the last years: disrespecting people's everyday needs, demolishing the idea of the public and strengthening the consumer capitalism - the pre-conditions for a new

political revolt are furthermore given. It's just the question of another "trigger" like the death of Mark Duggan on the 4th of August last year.”

Professor Kessl is undertaking a study into the 2011 riots, analysing the perspectives of those working in the public services following an observation that those working in youth services or youth work did not offer public commentary following the riots.

His research has revealed that both those taking part in the riots and the police responding to the violence described the events as surreal.

The already existing data, like the current report of the Youth Justice Board, show that young people likened the rioting to going to a theme park. One rioter, quoted by the Youth Justice Board-Report said: “It was like when you go to a theme park and go on a rollercoaster – that kind of good scared. Instead of fearing for yourself – it didn’t feel real”. Similarly, a police officer, named in the Reading the Riots Study by London School of Economics and The Guardian describes the events as being “surreal” and “like a movie”.

Much commentary regarding the cause of the riots has focused on the “opportunism”. But Professor Kessl believes that this takes many forms – the opportunity to “get back” at the police, at being a sovereign consumer for a few hours even and to show their anger at racial discrimination. “It was about just being visible, being heard, and also putting down the animosities and battles between the gangs for a little time, because there was a bigger enemy,” as a interviewee said to Professor Kessl.

He believes that unless the underlying causes of the riots are tackled, then there will be a repeat of the events of August last year and that the Government’s tough punishment will not change that.

He said: “The extraordinary dimension of punishment - especially in regard to the sentence of young people made by some courts - symbolises the logic of the current policy of the administration: it's authoritative and not interested in a public discussion on the current English society as the context of the riots of last year. Fortunately discussions take anyhow place all around the country about the riots - between the engaged people, youth workers, artists, researchers, local administration and so on. This can be a good starting point for a different politics on future, strengthening the public again and building up a strong [public](#) service infrastructure.”

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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