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PART B6

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## Reflections on Connections: Social Segregation and the London Riot

By Anne-Marie Slaughter  
Aug 14 2011, 6:22 PM ET [2](#)

*Hyper-connectedness co-exists with growing virtual and physical segregation of like-minded clusters, deepening cultural divides and giving rise to a new politics of rage*



The best thing I read last week on the London riots was by a 28 year old Briton, Ben King, who identifies himself only as a university graduate who studied intellectual and cultural history. His analysis managed to combine the tropes of both the right and the left, explaining how the increasing *disconnection* between the worlds of the rioters and the rich created a situation in which the looters had no "moral regard" for either the police or the rest of the city. He insists, rightly, that they still need to be held responsible for their actions, but

observes: "These youths and Politicians Inc are more alike than they realize: Both are closed systems and both have moral regard for their own groups first and foremost."

We hear about connectedness every day. Indeed, Tom Friedman writes today in the New York Times that we are not just connected but "hyper-connected" -- his theory of everything is that this degree of inter-connection makes the rich richer, takes things away from the middle class because they have to compete globally, and allows them to organize quickly and effectively to express their anger.

But at the same time, we hear how the technology that allows all this connection creates the possibility for far more separation: Eli Pariser's filter bubble, social networks where you can hang out with and listen to only the like-minded, people who chat with their colleagues around the world but no nothing of neighbors around the corner. This growing separation is physical as well as virtual. In another Sunday Review article Sheryl Gay Stolberg quotes Bill Bishop, author of *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*: Americans now choose "in their neighborhoods and their churches, to be around others who live like they do and think like they do." (By the way, three cheers for Trish Hall, who was appointed the new editor of the *Times* op-ed page back in the spring and has overseen the complete revamp of the Sunday Review; it is suddenly something with a whole raft of articles I actually want to read, rather than a desultory round-up of the trends of the week.)

Put these trends together and you get *both* growing connection and growing separation. The separation is most devastating when it cuts young people off from their own futures, from any sense of personal growth, prosperity, and even the more inchoate sense of possibility. One of Secretary Clinton's favorite sayings is that she works for a world in which every individual has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential. But where connection is selective it creates and amplifies exclusion, skewing the distribution of opportunity even further. In the Middle East, including Israel, young people are using technology to help them fight back for a future of hope. In Britain and the United States we are seeing a growing politics of rage.

Those of us who are connection junkies should perhaps focus more on inclusion than connection per se, or on *reconnecting* communities that have been stratified and separated. Moral regard requires that an individual see a reflection of her own humanity in another. But without some degree of physical proximity and human connection - in public spaces, schools, workplaces, and political discourse, we are holding mirrors up only to ourselves.