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European Languages

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Al Jazeera

London's burning

9/9/2011

Tensions are running high after police shot and killed a man accused of being a gangster in the London borough of Tottenham on Thursday.

At first there was a small and reportedly calm protest by members of the man's family; but within hours the protest had escalated into arson, violence and mass looting. Parts of the borough in north London were left in ruins after crowds set fire to cars and buildings.

And there were more disturbances on Sunday night - eight kilometres away in Enfield, with shop windows smashed.

Later the British police condemned a wave of "copycat criminal activity" across the capital.

So after a weekend of destruction, looting and arson across London, we ask: What are the root causes of the violence, why did the riots break out so suddenly and why has it become such a vicious and destructive affair?

Inside Story presenter Stephen Cole discusses with guests: John Pitts, the director of the Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime at the University of Bedfordshire; Mehdi Hasan, a senior political editor at *The New Statesman*; and Martin Bentham, the home affairs editor at *The Evening Standard*.