

Kim Allen and Yvette Taylor

*Placing Parenting, Locating Unrest: Failed Femininities, Troubled Mothers and Riotous Subjects*

**Introduction: Placed Parenthood, Intersectional Inequalities**

Classed forms of placed personhood increasingly compel future-orientated and self-regulating subjects that ‘fit’ into contemporary economic and social formation. These forms of personhood, spoken of as moral character and behavioural ‘traits’, are increasingly attached to *placed parenthood*: as that which (self)locates in the right moral and material terrain. In this article questions are asked about the entanglement between placed parenthood and wider inequalities, as (dis)located on the gendered practices of mothers’ labour. On the one hand, ‘tight, white, middle-class mothers’, positioned as cultural and national bearers of future, are tasked with bringing forth neo-liberal citizens (Baraitser 2009, Gillies 2006, Parker 2010). On the other, excessive, mis-fitting, working-class and black mothers are positioned as deficits, responsible for social, cultural and economic crisis where certain femininities flounder and fail. Particular places, as embodied sites of locating ‘unrest’, ‘austerity’ and ‘rioting’, are both condemned for weakening neighbourhoods, communities and, by extension, the country. These assertions of place and people, or placed personhood, are increasingly cast as a global world-ranking of cities coming-forward and taking up more space (Gosling 2008; Paton 2010).<sup>1</sup> These processes are witnessed in the example of and responses to the English Riots of 2011, which provides a case study for this article, casting light on intersections of class, race, gender and sexuality in forms of placed parenthood.

There is a (re)generation of new-old ‘gender regimes’ at play here in locating worth and worthlessness (Walby 2002, 2009; Taylor 2012a). Mothers, charged with rearing a generation of future-citizens, are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own trajectories, to enterprise their way out of ‘traps’ (MacDonald et al. 2001) and to assemble a range of efficiencies, networks and capitals in order to envisage and pursue a fulfilling and productive future. They must and do come forward and claim space as theirs (Adkins 2009; McRobbie 2009; Evans 2010).

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Relentlessly individualising discourses of opportunity, choice, responsibility and aspiration are re-played. Yet only *certain* social subjects are able to mobilise and spatialise their interests in order to achieve legitimate subject-positions in these new landscapes. There are some rehearsals here even as we are told much is to be learnt – and must be learnt – in ‘new times’; we are told we must bear the brunt of economic recession, to ‘toughen up’ as resilient workers, citizens and mothers (where parenting is collapsed and condemned as *still* a ‘mothers’ responsibility). We are told by politicians to be ‘thrifty’ and withstand the ‘necessary’ measures of austerity government (Cameron 2009). Elsewhere it has been asked ‘when opportunities are to be negotiated by the discerning individual consumer-worker-resident, what does it mean to be future-oriented, to move through these new ‘flexible’ and ‘resilient’ landscapes?’ (Taylor 2012a, p.2). The answer is that not everyone gets to ‘move’; resilience is marketed as a capacity of only the rightful, righteous middle-class parents who can invest in their future selves – and those of their children – and ‘appear’ in place, according to logics of choice, attainment and embodied accomplishment (Bourdieu 1984; Adkins 2002; Allen and Hollingworth, forthcoming; Skeggs 2004; Reay et al. 2007). There is a profound ‘ugliness’ in placing parenthood as a part of heightened class inequalities which celebrates the *choosing* future-citizen and condemns other ‘failing femininities’. This article aims to chart some of the ‘ugliness’ of parenting, as *placed parenthood* attaches to specific classed locales and subjects as that which ‘fails’ and ‘troubles’ the future.

Attending to the intersections of placed parenthood and the ugliness of class and gender involves a critical move away from classed notions of hesitant subjects simply unwilling to individually re-orientate themselves towards their already, always future-orientated (middle-classed) counterparts. To live with the structural violence of class should not come to signal individual tardiness or backwardness (being in the wrong place or in the wrong time) but rather *enduring* and continuous tensions. These tensions are all of our troubles, owned as a social responsibility rather than as individual (in)capacity. In locating individuals-in-place, we are concerned also to give attention to the intersections of class, gender, race and sexuality within debates on celebrated and condemned people and places. The ‘ugliness’ of parenting intersects with these inequalities, identities and social normativities, with future-orientated ‘features’ represented in an unstated white, heterosexual middle-class family ‘face’. This representation persists even as others are tokenistically represented, often appearing as interesting examples and exceptions (‘diversity’ too is enterprised in

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these future-orientated markers/markets). As with whiteness and middle-classness, heterosexuality need not name itself in the new-old landscape of public condemnation, parental crisis and prolific vilification – despite widespread feminist intervention *against* the heterosexual family as efficient economic unit and all-round social providers (Jamieson 1998; Binnie et al. 2006; Binnie 2011; Taylor 2009; Armstrong 2010). Once again life is breathed into this form of family as a necessary life-sustaining force for all.

In ‘intersecting’ issues of parenting – and specifically the collapsing of parenting as mothering – alongside matters of place, it is our intention to be mindful of the place where we come from and the places, positions and politics we take with us. An intersectional frame able to keep ‘in place’ a concern with intersections of class, race, gender and sexuality is aimed for here. ‘Intersectionality’ has been subject to much theoretical debate (see Crenshaw 1995; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Lewis 2009; Lutz et al. 2011). Sometimes invoking this term in the present risks casting the debate as already passé, over and done, where nothing useful can be added (Taylor et al. 2010; Taylor 2012c). But there is a profound worth in committing and returning to consider the potentials of applying ‘intersectionality’ where, arguably, ‘understanding complexities posed by intersections of different axes of differentiation is as pressing today as it has always been’ (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p.75).

Debates on ‘intersections’ force an awareness of the social divisions that are thought of as enduring, as against those that are seen as simply old and settled, variously casting inequalities as added extras. Constituent parts of ‘class’, ‘gender’, and ‘sexuality’ are added or scored out in accordance with academic trend or political promise, with heterosexuality (dis)appearing in a very different way than queer sexuality and queer parenthood (see Weeks et al. 2001; Taylor 2009).<sup>2</sup> Intersectional positionality and analysis may always, necessarily, fail and cause us more ‘trouble’ here. As Haschemi Yekani et al. state:

It will never be possible to address all fields that produce constitutive outsides along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, nation, locality, age, ability *etc.* simultaneously and equally; specific research requires that certain aspects of identity formation will be privilege. (Yekani et al. 2010, p.78).

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Yet there is a productive necessity in such ‘failures’; they cast light on the places we take up, cannot and do not inhabit, with some subjects, both as disciplinary matters and embodied beings, taking up more space than others.

Our desire might variously fail too, in that our attentiveness to ‘intersectionality’ doesn’t necessarily by and through itself create the future feminist subject,<sup>3</sup> capacitating only our own professional mobility, rather than acting as an intersectional practice of a ‘public sociology’ (Taylor and Addison 2011). The question of broader social futures, both ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’, is one we hope to hold close as an urgent measure of academic engagement and practice across time and place. This calls for a different attentiveness to claims made for and by ‘future subjects’ (Taylor 2012c). As some are recognized as activating their own (and their families’) futures, others are condemned as failing, irresponsible, wasteful, wasted and out-of-place. This is a distinctly intersectional process, discussed here in terms of class, race, gender and sexuality (see also Reynolds 1997). These sticky ‘failing’ intersections are circulated in economic measures (lived in as positions of employment and unemployment), in educational journeys (as waste and potential), now contained and ‘cut-back’ and situated in parental ‘troubles’. Across these places, inequalities ‘stick’ as waste and as wrong (Ahmed 2004; Skeggs 2004; Allen and Hollingworth, forthcoming; Tolia-Kelly 2010), as a past residue attached to those behind the times and without worthy futures.

### **Gender and the Riots: A Case in Place**

The after-effects of last year’s summer riots continue to be felt, reverberating long after the dust has settled. In the absence of any public inquiry, academics have played an important role in bringing critical perspectives to bear on the complex causes and consequences of the summer riots.<sup>4</sup> Academics have unsettled the easy answers and smokescreens offered by the government, such as the assertions made by British Prime Minister David Cameron and London Mayor Boris Johnson that rioters were driven by pure criminality, greed, opportunism and moral decline. Such critical interventions have called attention to the role of growing inequalities and injustices, associated with the government’s austerity agenda, in contributing to the recent unrest. However, thus far a gendered analysis has been somewhat absent from this critical intervention.

The London School of Economics (LSE) and *The Guardian*’s ‘Reading the Riots’ project<sup>5</sup> claimed that ten percent of those involved in the riots were female. But while the dominant images

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of rioters have been masked and hooded young men, one of the most striking features of the media coverage and policy responses to the riots has been the hypervisibility of women. Within this, the figure of the ‘troubled’ mother has emerged as a locus of concerns around parenting, youth and ‘proper’ citizenship in an age of austerity. The troubled mother of the riots is produced as ‘another species’ through her difference to the responsible, resilient, middle-class mother who represents ‘quality mothering’ (McRobbie 2012) and reflects the norms of contemporary citizenship. The historical positioning of working-class (single) mothers as a locus of national concerns around morality and repository of middle-class fear (see Gillies 2005, 2007; Jensen 2010; Lawler 2000; Reay 1998; Skeggs 2004) was evident in August 2011. In the immediate aftermath of the riots we saw a strident blaming of ‘poor parenting’ within poor communities, which spoke almost exclusively against *mothers*: A Guardian/ ICM poll found that 86% of the public cited ‘poor parenting’ as the main cause of the riots (Prasad and Bawden 2011). Meanwhile single-mothers featured implicitly in David Cameron’s explanation for the riots as the outcome of a ‘slow motion moral collapse’ in which he emphasised ‘Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort’ (Cameron quoted in Stratton 2011).

As single-mothers were blamed for failing to bring up their ‘feral’ children properly (Phillips 2011), these debates were suffused with a long-standing narrative of troubled mothers which re-fuelled debates around welfare dependency and the (un)deserving poor in an age of austerity. Public discourses of feral youth and failing families elide and mask questions of structural disadvantage, individualising inequality as the outcome of personal ‘ills’ and individual pathologies rather than systematic material inequalities. In 2011, David Cameron announced a ‘crackdown’ on ‘chaotic families’ as a response to the riots (Communities and Local Government 2011), dispatching ‘family troubleshooters’ to tackle a ‘responsibility deficit’ in problem communities revealing how the riots engendered an even greater hyper-surveillance of particular forms of parenthood. Again, working-class and lone-mothers are constructed as ‘both the problem and the solution to national ills’ (Skeggs 1997, p.48) targeted as key to addressing the ‘feckless’ culture of the unemployed and undeserving classes. Re-configurations of family are re-made around the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality (Gillies 2007; Taylor 2009; Armstrong 2010): public discourses of ‘troubled families’ and poor parenting are not only easily and problematically collapsed into one of ‘failed mothering’.

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These ‘riotous responses’ also operate to uphold the logics of heterosexuality as (re)productive and (re)generative, thus failing to recognize the complexity of contemporary family formations.

Such positioning, the sticking of regenerative or failing maternal subjects to and in place, is evident in other locales, internationally. Despite differences in welfare regimes, educational provisioning and the private financing of post-compulsory education, debates in both the UK and US frequently position the middle-class white child as the new potential victim of a ‘lottery’ system that robs them of their inherit right to elite educational access. The grief – and joy – in failed/fostered futures re-appears regularly in the American and British press. *Time* magazine’s front page recently declared ‘The Truth About Tiger Moms’ attaching future economic competitiveness between the USA and China onto children’s achievements, as accumulated and transmitted through families (and specifically via mothers’ gendered labour).<sup>6</sup> This news feature produced much commentary on practices of good parenting as bringing forward future citizens – yet this hope/practice for the future is not to be transmitted to all. Witness the criminalisation of Tanya McDowell, a homeless mother charged with the crime of sending her son to a better school by lying about her address in the context of locational and classed stratifications around educational provision, as reported in the *New York Times*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this placing of parenthood within a context of global austerity measures and growing socio-economic inequalities travels and sticks beyond the UK – at least to other Anglo-American, highly neoliberalised contexts.

In the rest of this article we draw out the intersections of placed parenthood and the ugliness of class, gender, race and maternal subjectivities by focusing on three cases within the English riots of 2011: the rioting mother; the resilient citizen-parent; and the repenting ‘riot girl’. To do so, we draw on national broadsheet and tabloid press articles, online discussion boards, social networking sites, political speeches and statements. These are not presented as an expansive and representative media analysis but illuminate the wider public discourse around the riots and riotous subjects. Specifically, they seek to enhance our understanding of how ‘the maternal is currently imagined, represented and figured in public discourse’ (Tyler 2010, p.1).

### **The rioting mother**

In the midst of media coverage of the rioters, the story of white mother and mixed-race daughter Clarice and Chantelle Ali – photographed together looting shops in Hackney, East London –

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attracted particular attention. Media reports and readers' saturated condemnations of the working-classes as lazy, irresponsible and immoral had a gendered edge. Here, the working-class mother is charged with 'bad parenting' squandering her life and that of her child. Mother and daughter are marked as 'vermin', beyond human. They are 'oxygen stealers', failed femininities and unworthy subjects, as in for example this reader's comment on a Daily Mail article:

Well done Clarice, you've ruined your child's life! No doubt she will go on to destroy her child's life and the cycle will continue indefinitely as we continue to fund this via the welfare state, effectively giving the green light to such appalling behaviour.

What a pair of oxygen stealers. When they're out don't give them any benefits – they've had their chance, they were looked after by the state and taxpayers – and look how they repaid us. Until we start getting tough, vermin like this will continue to stick their hands out and abuse the system whilst also draining the system even further and costing more money through criminal activity (Gye 2011).

This encoding of the rioting mother and daughter recalls and reproduces a common set of class signifiers 'in which the underclass is not only represented but also shaped by disparate discourses of familial disorder and dysfunction [...] and dependent, fecund and excessive femininities, of antisocial behavior, and of moral and ecological decay' (Skeggs 2004, p.87). Clarice and Chantelle are positioned as sucking the life-blood out of community – and capacity – rendering the State's 'good tax-payers' exhausted and frustrated by their diseased criminality: these 'vermin' are seen to breed, decay and drain in their 'appalling' cycles of life-as-death. Clarice is positioned at the bottom of a class hierarchy of parenting (Jensen 2010, p.7). As we have argued elsewhere, 'the fantasy of the 'good parent' and the 'good child' who can be resourced and propelled into the future is a profoundly classed and (hetero/homo-) normative discourse and practice which re-circulates in current times' (Taylor 2012c, p.76). Clarice is accused of failing to transfer potential to her child, to produce the right aspirations and future orientations in her daughter. Respectable, regenerative lives, coded in the bodies of some youth, are replaced with only deathly potential, where the bad youth of today lacks life affirmation (Vittelone 2008; Taylor 2011).

These responses reveal the affective landscape of class (Skeggs 2004; Wetherell 2012; Taylor 2012a) marked by 'visceral aversions, recognition, abjection and the markings of taste' (Reay 2005, p.911). Race, class and gender intersect in this affective process of othering and the dehumanizing of particular maternal figures as 'beyond human'. Imogen Tyler's work on the symbolic figure of the

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'Chav mum' is valuable here. Looking at how popular cultural figures such as the 'comedy' television character Vicky Pollard from *Little Britain* (BBC) produce affective responses of 'class disgust' which move across popular culture to political discourse, and shape wider social perceptions and practices of othering within public space: 'The figure of the chav mum, Vicky Pollard, Pramface, Slummy Mummy, becomes a body imbued with negative affect, this affect then travels, it circulates and leaks out into public space and shapes everyday perceptual practices' (2008, p.29). Vitaly, Tyler also reveals how class disgust, embodied in chav hate, is 'intimately tied to issues of racial difference' and expressive of longstanding anxieties around racial mixing:

The chav foregrounds a dirty whiteness – a whiteness contaminated with poverty. This borderline whiteness is evidenced through claims that chavs appropriate black American popular culture through their clothing, music, and forms of speech, and have geographical, familial and sexual intimacy with working-class blacks and Asians. This intimacy is represented by the areas in which chavs allegedly live and their illegitimate mixed-race children. (2008, p.26)

We see these anxieties around inter-racial 'breeding' playing out in another online forum discussion about Clarice and Chantelle in which comments draw on particular racialised and classed signifiers of the 'chav mum':

The mother especially is a disgrace to the human race, a worthless, vile, nasty, inbred animal.  
 Lucky kid. A moral-less, obese, mudshark mother, and absent muslim father.  
 I blame the mother for breeding with their kind! As soon as you see a white mother with a Niglet you know its bad news.  
 The mother is a filthy, ugly, race mixing white scumbag and her daughter is the half breed equivalent.

(Anonymised comments, online discussion forum)

Affective responses of disgust, shame and hate can be located as forms of 'social abjection' (Tyler, 2009, p.87): 'violent exclusionary forces [...] that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste, the dregs and refuse of social life'.

The discursive positioning of the rioting and looting mother and daughter also speak to wider 'vicious differentiations' and dis-identifications (Wetherell 2012, p.111) of class and placed personhood, where judgments of working-class others are made through evaluative assessments of their behavior, character and lifestyle practices and 'choices'. Specifically, and as this special issue



exposes, these evaluations are increasingly imbued by and dependent on contrasting sensibilities of ‘thrift’ and ‘greed’ in an age of austerity. Indeed, the riots were commonly positioned as ‘a consumerist feast’: Media reports cited young rioters stating ‘it was like Christmas [...] Snatch and grab, get anything you want, anything you ever desired’ (Topping and Bawdon 2011). As Angela McRobbie (2012) states, ‘being poor does not exclude the poor from th[e] constant exposure’ and relentless targeting of a hyper-consumer culture that they cannot afford to participate in, yet that offers the promise of ‘value’ and status denied elsewhere as opportunities for educational and work ‘success’ diminish (Allen and Mendick 2012a; Roberts and Evans 2012). Yet as we witness in the media reporting of the riots, such desires are especially marked as abject, inappropriate and unacceptable. Sensibilities of austerity and ‘responsible’ consumerism (re)produce an idealizing of middle-class forms of personhood based on deferred gratification, restraint and modesty (Skeggs, 2004, p.99)<sup>8</sup>. While the middle-classes ‘make do and mend’, ‘keep calm and carry on’, taking up the sensibilities of austerity parenting (see Jensen in this issue of *SiM*), the working-classes are represented by excessive desires and orientations (Jensen 2012). The rioters are located as a greedy, ‘get-rich-quick, *X-Factor* generation’ (Allen and Mendick 2012b; Taylor 2012b) who are materially fixated, unable to sacrifice and become ‘austere’ for the good of themselves, their children and their communities.

The rioting mother and daughter are held responsible for inequality because of their failure to take up the practices of austerity. As Jensen states (in this issue), “‘New thrift’ culture produces and circulates fantasies of the classed Others against whom austerity is positioned as necessary, and who need to re-learn the lessons of frugality.’ Within a new ‘cultural politics of wanting’ (Jensen in this issue), ‘inappropriate’ desires for the material, ascribed to the working-classes, sit its alongside what Val Gillies (2012a) describes as a return of Victorian discourses of idleness which litter the statements of Coalition politicians who locate the poor as ‘lazy toe-rags’, resistant to work and too dependent on state ‘hand-outs’. These powerful narratives of the working-classes restrict and suppress alternative discourses that foreground the socio-economic context of the riots and current austerity – rising unemployment, benefit cuts, growing numbers of families dependent on food banks – thus individualising the events and holding the poor morally responsible for their plight.

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### The Big Society's Respectable Citizen-Parent

As Tyler reminds us 'the *chav* mum represents a thoroughly dirty and disgusting ontology that operates as the constitutive limit for the clean white middle class feminine respectability' (2008, p.30; see also Tyler 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming). Our understanding of the process by which mothers like Clarice Ali are produced as Other can be enhanced by critically examining the media's attention to another mother of the riots: 'Mumpreneur' and 'yummy mummy' Liz Pilgrim, owner of Ealing 'baby boutique' *Baybe* which was raided in the August riots. In news reports, Pilgrim declared her shock at the actions of the 'feral rats' who looted her store and the 'lack of responsibility' among their parents (Alleyne and Ford Rojos 2011), calling for the government to take a 'hard line' on those responsible:

They were like feral rats [...] The number of young people I saw [...] the parents must be to blame. Why were they out at that time of night? Where has respect gone? Where have values gone? [...] It's a mindless mob mentality [...] We don't want this namby pamby, messing around approach. I feel sick. I feel in shock. It is just so upsetting. It is mindless – a community turning on itself. Who would have thought there would be mob rule in Ealing?<sup>9</sup>

Again, the rioters are positioned as beyond human, an unruly mob who lack control or respect, value-less, let down by poor parenting. As with the responses to Clarice Ali, the rioters evoke disgust, nausea, shock, distress. Through these affective responses, boundaries are drawn between us and them, the responsible and the unruly, the 'good' and the 'ugly' parent and child.

As Allen and Osgood remark 'in the figure of the Yummy Mummy, a very specific configuration of motherhood (occupied by white, heterosexual, middle-class professional women), is celebrated as a desirable identity; one that embodies female choice, autonomy, consumerism and aesthetic perfection' (2009 p.7). This is echoed in new (re)presentations of and by 'queer' *middle-class* parents who have, it seems, inherited a 'new future' and are now also concerned with accumulation, transference and asset building (via children), as an assimilatory 'fit' rather than a strident standing-out (Taylor 2009, 2012a). Within the riots, Pilgrim plays a performative role in reproducing hierarchies of 'good' parenting where maternal femininities can only gain value when they adhere to models of neoliberal femininity determined by economic productivity and flexibility – as opposed to young, lone and non-working/'work shy', welfare-dependent mothers (Tyler 2011b, p.22). Pilgrim's mature age and her status as a 'mumpreneur' and business owner are central here. The Mumpreneur, a term used to describe mothers who start their own business so as to combine work and childcare

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through ‘flexible working’,<sup>10</sup> embodies idealized norms of middle-class, heterosexual, ‘responsible’ maternal subjectivities oriented around a ‘new sexual contract’ (McRobbie 2009) that demands women participate in the labour market and individually negotiate her dual role of mother and worker. In the relational production of good and bad parenting, Pilgrim as Mumpreneur thus represents both the norms of self-sufficient, responsible ‘quality mothering’ and ‘clean’, respectable forms of whiteness (Tyler 2008), against which rioting mothers like Clarice Ali are judged.

Pilgrim also becomes the site for the articulation of ideals of active citizenship, entrepreneurship and placed personhood associated with austerity and the ‘Big Society’ agenda.<sup>11</sup> In place of state support, citizens must come forward and take responsibility for their local communities and fix ‘Broken Britain’. As Giddens (2011) claims, in the Coalition’s vision of the Big Society, ‘the state withdraws from many of its current obligations, to be replaced by strong citizens groups, reinvigorated communities and a renewed sense of social responsibility and individual empowerment.’ The rhetoric of the Big Society has masked deep cuts to welfare, the brunt of which women and working-class families have shouldered (Vittelone 2004; The Fawcett Society 2012; Save the Children 2012). This masking of a shrinking state has been enabled through, and productive of, new positions of active and responsabilised citizenship and ‘caring’ and agentic parenting. Indeed Gillies notes how these discourses decontextualise parenting practices and possibilities from their socio-economic context, where particular forms of parenting and citizenship are framed as the result of individual character, will and orientation (ethics of care, personal responsibility) rather than access to unequally distributed resources:

Beyond political discourse, the implications and consequences of Big Society philosophy are highly class specific, particularly in relation to family policy [...] the well-off are enabled to use all their means in pursuing the best interests of their children, while the poor are to be responsabilised through the removal of services and practical and economic support. High profile emancipatory policies have included giving parents the right to start up and run their own ‘Free Schools’ and enabling communities to take over responsibility for local amenities such as parks and libraries. Such initiatives are presented as opportunities for those who *care enough* about their children’s wellbeing to become more agentic. [...] Those unable or unwilling to participate and govern themselves are positioned as corrosively dependent on the state and in need of community-led help to become more active and self-reliant citizens. (Gillies 2012b, p.82, emphasis added)

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The Big Society narrative is also productive of new claims to place. As we have argued elsewhere:

In times of economic crisis, when individualism is stand-in or re-placement for the Welfare State, people are encouraged to act for their ‘community’ [...] Statements on city capacity seemingly propel residents forward as, to use the North East example, ‘Passionate People’ able to create ‘Passionate Places’. These affecting statements [...] work to brand city, and citizen, movement as positive as opposed to a residing, or residual ‘stick’ of past places and out-of-date residents’. (Taylor 2012f)

In the riots, while the working-classes were positioned as lacking, responsible for the degeneration and destruction of their *own* communities – ‘a community turning on itself’ – the middle-classes claim their position as ‘respectable’, ‘defiant’ ‘resilient’ citizens of Cameron’s Big Society. These ideal subjects come forward not only as victimised shopkeepers and small business owners like Liz Pilgrim. They also appear as volunteers, wielding brooms as part of #RiotCleanUp or hosting community tea parties on streets littered with the skeletons of cars set on fire in the riots (see images below).<sup>12 13</sup>



**Images of Hackney community tea party, held next to the Pembury estate on Clarence road, the main site of the riots in Hackney. Some of the written ‘post it’ messages by local residents include: ‘Hackney is, was, always, Great’; ‘I love Hackney...Save our shops and bring positive change’; ‘Peace in London’. Copyright Kim Allen**

In David Cameron’s description of Dan Thompson, organizer of #RiotCleanUp operation, we see how the middle-classes are reaffirmed as the desired citizens and ‘rightful’ residents, committed to repairing and improving a ‘Broken Britain’:

Dan Thompson watched the riots unfold on television. But he didn’t sit there and say ‘the council will clean it up’. He got on the internet. He sent out a call. And with others, he started a social movement. People picked up their brooms and reclaimed their streets. (Cameron quoted in New Start 2011, p.18)

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Independence and mobility are central to these claims to rightful citizenship. The active, responsible mobility of the middle-classes who ‘didn't just sit there’, and who ‘reclaimed the streets’ in the ‘right’ way, is produced and claimed through their difference to the ‘idle’, state-dependent rioting underclass (Gillies 2012a). These rightful citizens were ‘sweeping scum off the street’ (Reynolds et al. 2011) and restoring, marking and claiming their place as part of wider set of practices of in/exclusion, acceptance and rejection, entitlement and othering that characterise the metropolitan paradox (Back 1996).

More broadly in the UK, many city councils now act as ‘place-shapers’, actively seeking to rebrand regions. In these neo-liberal projects, residents are positioned with a responsibility to be *active* citizens, through, for example, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. Place and person become intertwined in the calls to transform and regenerate (Allen and Hollingworth, forthcoming). The appraisal of ‘those who can’ move forward as active citizens shaping place in the right ways, implies that some cannot: residents are then blamed for their own decline and seen as responsible for their own ‘degeneration’. This resonates with long-standing discourses that pathologise the poor as irresponsible, beyond help, and at odds with the contemporary ‘city publics’ practised by desired citizens who are able to activate, claim and improve space (Paton 2010; Taylor and Addison 2011; Taylor 2012a). A broader ‘city publics’ as concerned with equity, welfare and redistribution is displaced and entirely re-placed with a self-orientated ‘enterprising’ privatized response. This limited response is self-congratulating of its own ‘responsibility’ and condemning of those who ‘fail’ heightened efforts: in times of ‘cutting back’ parent-citizens are told simply to be more ‘efficient’.

### **The Repenting ‘Riot Girl’**

Writing about the media commentary of the 2011 riots, Aisha and Ann Phoenix (2012) illuminate essentialising racist discourses circulated across the British press in which the social unrest was located within ‘black gangsta culture’ and young black masculinity in particular. The most notable example of this was the English historian David Starkey’s remarks on BBC’s *Newsnight* that ‘the white had become black’.<sup>14</sup> Phoenix and Phoenix argue that the racialised coverage of the riots echoes the ‘new racism’ of the 1970s and 1980s (Brah 1999; cf. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982), reviving ‘old racialised hierarchy of belonging’ (2012, p.63). They position the

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resurgence of debates around the crisis in young black masculinity following the riots as an ‘example of how “new racist” cultural arguments always intersect with gendered constructions’ (2012, p.65).

In our final case, we develop Phoenix and Phoenix’s intersectional analysis by attending to the intersections of race with gender as well as class and sexuality in the case of another female ‘riotous’ subject. Indeed, alongside the marginalisation of mothers has been an exceptional focus on the young female rioters, most notably 18-year-old Chelsea Ives who was jailed for two years after being found guilty of burglary and violent disorder. The public interest in Chelsea was undoubtedly informed by her status as a ‘talented athlete’ and 2012 ‘Olympic Ambassador’.<sup>15</sup> There is much to unpick here both about how particular classed, racialised and gendered youthful bodies come to be (re)positioned and (re)inscribed within regenerated city-scapes and within a neoliberal postfeminist climate.

In her work on female individualization and neoliberalism, Angela McRobbie uses the Deleuzian concept of luminosity to examine the spotlighting, shimmering effects of power ‘which bring women forward, as individualised subjects, and which attribute to these women, a range of capacities such that they can be understood as agents of change’ (2009, p.6). Elsewhere, Gonick et al. (2009, p.2) write: ‘Girls and women are constructed as the ideal rational actors who have succeeded in re-inventing themselves, adapting to shifting global market forces as the new reflexivity winners in educational achievement and employment’. Particular attention is called to the racialised (and classed) articulations and interpellations of ‘successful’ girlhood:

There is a re-drafting of gender hierarchies [...] which has repercussions for questions of social class and race and ethnicity. The coming forward to young black and Asian women, along individualised pathways, entails the granting of unusual, if not exceptional, and exemplary status [...] black and Asian women [...] live their class identity through the modality of race as Hall argued, but their femininity also comes forward as a key factor in the more meritocratic society, such that the intersection of gender and ethnicity finds new social meaning and significance. (McRobbie 2009, p.7)

Indeed, feminist scholarship has disrupted the celebratory rhetoric of the ‘top girl’ of neoliberalism (McRobbie 2007), illuminating its regulatory dimensions and the ways in which inequalities of class and race structure young women’s claims to this position of the ‘top girl’ (Baker 2008; Evans 2010; Hey 2010; Gill and Scharff 2011; Ringrose 2007; Walkerdine et al. 2001). In the case of Chelsea Ives, race and class become central to her particular luminosity, in which her success is double-edged,

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short lived, always ultimately failing. Chelsea's blackness is central to her figuring as Olympic Ambassador, the 'face of London' where the city makes its claims on and through Chelsea as 'multicultural'. Chelsea's blackness is incorporated as a sign of the city's 'diversity' yet race features only aesthetically. Indeed, in a socio-cultural context marked by a retreat from anti-racist discourse, race cannot feature as a political category, for to speak – and attend – to the patterns and processes of racial inequality and discrimination that shape the lives of London's youth would call for structural remedy and would engender unhappy feelings that rupture the national image of the UK as a place of 'happily diversity' (Ahmed 2008, p.123). Thus 'disadvantaged' urban young women become encoded as future-oriented, agentic subjects who stand for the city's pride, hope, and 'multiculturalism' which have 'global' effects and affects beyond the Olympic city:

The girl of today has been imbued with youthful potential, able to take-up her place in the world of work, to move between 'public' and 'private' spaces with ever more visibility and confidence, to juggle her time more effectively and achieve a 'balance' between career and care [...] As an abstraction this girl is perhaps very appealing; what's not to like about her? She's efficient. She finds herself called upon by academics, politicians, media commentators, all asking, guessing, how far she can take us, the family, the community, the nation, in extending forward into a global world. (Taylor 2012a, p.4)

Chelsea's story shows us how fragile this positioning is, as her 'exemplary' status is used against her. After reports of her involvement in the riots, London Mayor Boris Johnson called her 'unfit' to represent our country: she was the girl who threw away her – and the city's – chances (Harper, 2011). Meanwhile, a *Facebook* page was set up called 'Chelsea Ives you are a disgrace for the London Olympic Games'.<sup>16</sup> Race, class, gender and sexuality come together powerfully in the inscription of the failing femininities of the English riots of 2011. News articles on Chelsea's 'downfall' contrasted her 'disheveled' look in court hearings to her 'smartly dressed' appearance as Olympic Ambassador (Daily Mail Reporter 2011) and emphasized the illiteracy and 'street' vernacular used in her *Facebook* posts about the riots (Syson 2011), recalling the 'Jamaican patois' emphasised by David Starkey in his controversial statements on *Newsnight*.

In addition, media reports featured photographs of Chelsea which drew upon a common set of racialized, gendered and classed signifiers, presenting her as 'Ghetto trash', while reportage accentuated her hyper-sexualized femininity. Journalists noted that 'on her social networking

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profiles, she can be seen in a series of provocative poses and revealing clothes' (Daily Mail Reporter 2011). Chelsea becomes positioned as deficit through her racialised otherness, placed within a set of dominant regimes of representations where black subjects are understood as more body than mind, and where black female bodies are pathologised and marked as deviant through connotations of excessive, wild and dangerous sexuality, in contrast to the white femininity as the hegemonic standard (Collins 1990; Hall 1981; Hooks 1990; Mirza 1992; Phoenix 2009; Young 1996). As Mirza reminds us, the black female body is 'inscribed with meaning from those who wish to gaze upon her and name her. She is an object; not the subject of her story' (1997, p.17). In the riots, Chelsea Ives became the site for the articulations of long-standing, and new, anxieties around gender, race and urban youth.

Chelsea's race and class places her outside of the category of the successful 'top girl'. She is luminous not in her success but in her failings. Those on the periphery of idealised models of autonomous and ambitious young womanhood, embodied by the white, middle-class heterosexual girl, are 'more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings than would have been the case in the past' (McRobbie 2009, p.7). We argue that in an age of austerity – marked by cuts to youth services, a dramatic hike in university fees, the withdrawal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), and rising young unemployment – gendered, classed and racialised processes of belonging and social abjection, inclusion and exclusion are becoming further entrenched and their effects further individualised.

Working-class, black, female selves are always-already failing and, increasingly, such failings must be repudiated, corrected and left behind in order to become intelligible neoliberal subjects (Allen, under review; Allen and Osgood 2009; Phoenix 2009; Walkerdine et al. 2001). The play 'The Riots', performed in London in the wake of the riots, included first-hand testimonies from individuals involved in last summer's events. Excerpts from Chelsea's letter to the play's writer, Gillian Slovo, stood out amidst a sea of male voices. In her letter, penned from Holloway Prison, she apologised for her actions and appeared to challenge the media's construction of her as 'council estate scum':

The public seem to automatically place me in an unnamed category for thick, low-lived [sic] individuals which is not me at all. I haven't even had the chance to speak for myself

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[...] The public just need to know I'm only accountable for my actions and not everyone else's and I'm sorry. (Chelsea Ives, quoted in Slovo 2011, p.50)

Chelsea's mother, Adrienne Ives, who turned her daughter over to the police, also spoke publicly about her daughter's need to take responsibility for her actions. Like Chelsea, she refused the pathologised placing of both mother and daughter.

Chelsea just got caught up in the moment, as many did. She is accountable for her actions. It was fun at the time for them but I can't imagine it was much fun for the victims or normal people watching [...] People label everyone involved as from broken homes, council estates, no future, nothing. That's not her [...] We are not on benefits, we have a dinner table we sit round. She is not from a broken home. We work. Everything was done fairly. It could have been a lot, lot worse and she has to deal with it as best she can. (Adrienne Ives, quoted in Freeman and Moore-Bridger 2011)

In some ways we could see both mother and daughter's challenge to their categorisation within regimes of 'placed personhood' as a sign of agency, an articulation of oppositional meaning which disrupt negative representations of black (and working-class) femininities that reproduce colonial (and bourgeois) relations (Phoenix 2009). However, these statements are also replete with repentant, confessional tones, reminding us of the historical legacy in which the working-class have been forced to 'tell' themselves in particular ways in order to prove themselves as respectable, reflexive, moral 'subjects of value' (Skeggs 2002, 2004). Thus, attempts at 'fighting back' can also operate to reinforce rather than disrupting existing relations of power and economies of personhood. In Adrienne's rejection of the labeling of her daughter as a child with 'no future', we see how the status of 'good parent' and the 'good child' must be proved though emphasising an investment in futurity and potential.

The needs of mother and daughter to repent, to dis-identify from the pathologised 'underserving' working-class in order to prove their 'respectability' and reinvent themselves as 'good enough' parallels with Jade Goody and her mother, Jackie – another mother and daughter who were publicly persecuted for their 'failings' and had to show their desires to improve, as willing to take up middle-class values (Allen and Mendick 2012a; Tolson 2011). Yet as Tyler and Bennett (2010) suggest, such attempts to transgress class boundaries are consistently denied, mocked and, ultimately, deemed failures.

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## Conclusion

As we have illustrated in this article, classed forms of placed personhood circulate in representations, articulations and embodied practices, propelling some forward as agentic, sweeping future-citizens (with brooms) while others are rendered stuck and stalling (unable to stand-for a post-Olympic global city). While some are congratulated as future-orientated and self-regulating subjects ('yummy mummies' and 'top girls') who 'fit' into contemporary economic and social formation, others ('ghetto trash', 'inbred chavs' 'feral youth' and 'riotous mothers') are condemned as excessive, destructive and out of place. Forms of personhood, spoken of as moral character and behavioural 'traits' and pathologies, are attached to *placed parenthood*: as that which (self)locates in the right moral and material terrain.

As we have noted, this (mis)placement intersects class, race and gender: good subjects – made through good parenting and in particular via 'good mothers' – are tasked with *self-optimizing* and bringing forward their own futures and those of their families within an age of austerity. The English riots of 2011 casts light on intersections of class, race, gender and sexuality in forms of 'placed parenthood'. Responses to the riots reveal a profound 'ugliness' circulating around placed parenting and attached to specific classed locales and subjects as that which 'fails' and 'troubles' the future.

As austerity bites, classed and racialised distinctions and boundaries of failed and ideal femininities, good and ugly parenting – played out on the bodies of black and working-class mothers and daughters – are likely to become ever more accentuated. For mothers, at the sharp end of public spending cuts, hierarchies of 'good parenting' will become even more deeply felt, while for young women, the spaces and possibilities to find value are being diminished. Critical engagement with the complexity of these intersectional positionings and placing of personhood within the broader social, cultural and economic landscape will thus continue to demand our attention.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com/2012/09/02/characterising-cities-passionate-people-passionate-places-passionate-politics/> Accessed 10.09.12

<sup>2</sup> These exhausting resuscitations happen over certain sociological categories, applicable to 'class' as to 'intersectionality' (see Taylor 2012e).

<sup>3</sup> This raises questions of what kind of futures we might hope for and instigate beyond a neo-liberal brand. Current desires and discontents can be situated alongside debates on 'future feminist subjects' as emerging from somewhere, as

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involving a history of activism, debate and academic labour. While we mustn't forget about where 'we've' came from, as we seek expansion of who the 'we' is in these shifting debates across time and place, care has to be taken to avoid rehearsal of past scholarship as a debt to pay, a truth to convey or a burden to shake off in moving to 'new' terrain. Several feminist authors have challenged the linearity of feminist stories of 'now' and 'then' - including Lisa Adkins (2004) and, more recently, Clare Hemmings (2011), problematising the 'loss' of feminism as failure is attached to a younger generation, as incapable of heeding wise words and repeating history-as-future.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the British Sociological Association (BSA) 'Sociology and the Cuts' blog featured a series of articles providing sociological analyses of the English Riots of 2011; In September 2012, London South Bank University and London Metropolitan University hosted a one day conference entitled *Collisions, Coalitions and Riotous Subjects: The Riots one year on*. <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/ahs/news/010612.shtml> Accessed 12.09.12. See also Allen et al. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots> Accessed 29.08.12

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2043477,00.html> Accessed 04.10.12

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/nyregion/some-see-educational-inequality-at-heart-of-connecticut-case.html> Accessed 04.10.12.

<sup>8</sup> In September 2012, there were media reports of the rise in the number of families using food banks in the UK, coinciding with this, an appeal launched by the charity 'Save the Children' to support the growing numbers of children living in poverty. These reports provoked responses from readers and public commentators suffused by a class hatred, oriented around notions of (ir)responsible spending: 'I work full time and earn only 15k a year, I manage to feed 5 of us very well and have fresh food every day, I however do not have sky TV or contract phones, like some of the friends I have do, there is no need to have poverty amongst [sic] children now, the parents need to stop spending on themselves, cigs and booze, mobile phones, new clothes and spend the money on their kids !!' See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-19478083> Accessed 21.09.12

<sup>9</sup> See also <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14456964> Accessed: 29.09.12

<sup>10</sup> See for example, <http://mumpreneurs.me.uk/> and <http://www.mumpreneuruk.com/> Accessed 27.09.12. It is also worth noting that under the Coalition government, sole enterprises and small businesses have been identified as central to the economic recovery and survival through austerity. The riots were variously reported as attacks on small business and the government provided a £20m aid 'rescue' package aimed at helping small-business owners affected by the riots. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/8696135/Riot-hit-retailers-thrown-lifeline-by-David-Cameron.html> Accessed 21.09.12

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-overview> Accessed 02.10.12

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-08-09/david-cameron-responds-to-london-riots/2831910> Accessed: 01.10.12

<sup>13</sup> #RiotCleanUp was a campaign which organized and coordinated 'clean ups' of areas of the country affected by the riots, operating through social network site *Twitter*. See: <http://www.riotcleanup.co.uk/> Accessed 21.09.12

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14513517> Accessed: 27.10.12

<sup>15</sup> In preparation for the 2012 Olympic Games in, thousands of London residents were recruited as volunteers to welcome visitors and athletes. Ambassadors were to be the 'the face of the games' and recruitment campaigns emphasised particular affective attachments to the city: 'You must have a passion, enthusiasm and pride for London that easily rubs off on everyone else. Whether you were born in Bow, study in Stepney or work in Westminster, your excitement and affection for London will help bring the city to life for visitors in 2012' <http://www.londonambassadors.org.uk/About/have-you-got-what-it-takes> Accessed 12.09.12

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Chelsea-Ives-you-are-a-disgrace-for-the-London-Olympic-Games/155794731167701> Accessed 01.10.12

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