"The whites have become black":
Plan B's and George Amponsah's Representations of the 2011 English Riots and the Echoes of Stuart Hall's "New Ethnicities"

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"[N]othing really has changed. Some kids at the bottom of the ladder are deeply alienated, [...] they've got no organised political voice, no organised black voice and no sympathetic voice on the left."
(Stuart Hall on the English riots, qtd. in Williams 2012)

Introduction

In his review of John Akomfrah's experimental documentary *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013), Adam Elliott-Cooper highlights the growing necessity to revisit Hall's scholarly and activist legacy today. Elliott-Cooper takes issue with the contemporary left for failing to properly respond to a persistent institutional racism during neoliberalism and particularly argues that the 2011 English riots, following the shooting of Mark Duggan by police in Tottenham, are proof that an approach informed by Hall's theoretical and activist work on race, ethnicity and policing is now more needed than ever in order to come to terms with the problems underlying the riots. In fact, the years after the riots have seen an increase in scholarship indebted to the "political and critical tradition of British cultural studies best exemplified by the work of Stuart Hall", functioning as a "backlash against [...] current forms of post-ideological scholarship", as Imogen Tyler describes her own current work on social abjection (2013: 215).

In the following argument, I regard the English riots as a test case that can shape a dialogue between Hall's work on ethnicity and difference, and younger currents in cultural studies. In particular, I will focus on the interplay of race and class that seems to be at the heart of the riots, and which has surfaced in many responses to them, most infamously historian David Starkey's statement about the looters and rioters who, in his words, were "whites [who] have become black" (BBC 2011). I will approach such

sentiments by taking my cue from the fields of Critical Whiteness and Intersectionality Studies – fields of inquiry which only recently have come to fruition within a British context and which in the current moment seem to gradually return to theses and arguments put forth by Hall in earlier decades. I will trace these theoretical similarities by critically looking at the discursive responses to the riots and the resurgence of scholarly interest in Hall's work on race/ethnicity and its interplay with British nationalism(s), class and state violence.

In addition, I will look at the frameworks within which the riots have been interpreted in public discourse as well as in recent cultural texts. I will in particular examine David Starkey's aforementioned response to the riots and its implications for the way 'black' British culture is considered from the perspective of hegemonic (Anglo-)British whiteness and juxtapose it with alternative strategies of re-framing this contemporary racial discourse and its semiotic repertoire. The latter becomes manifest in rapper Plan B's song "Ill Manors" and its accompanying music video directed by Yann Demange (2012), as well as George Amponsah's film *The Hard Stop* (2015), which documents the aftermath of Mark Duggan's death and its effects on his family and community. All these attempts at coming to terms with the riots, despite their diverging intentions, draw on and are themselves product of an intricate network of symbolic and material referents, at the heart of which lies a deeply conflicted sense of race and its intersections in contemporary Britain. By dissecting this complex network of references, one can productively heed Hall's call for 'decoupling' ethnicity from its problematic and dangerous intersections (1996b: 447).

In his seminal article "New Ethnicities", Hall ultimately arrives at the question of black and diasporic representation and aesthetics, reflecting on a debate he had with Salman Rushdie about the films *Handsworth Songs* (1987) – an experimental film which investigated the 1980s riots and which was re-discovered as a seminal riot text by cultural critics in the aftermath of August 2011 – and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). The debate addressed by Hall in "New Ethnicities" about John Akomfrah's film *Handsworth Songs* and its aesthetic as well as its representational-political value centred around the "new politics of representation" expressed by young black filmmakers such as Akomfrah – a new style of representation which entailed "unsettling, recombination, hybridization and 'cut-and-mix'" (1996b: 448). Hall considers these films as texts that convey a new sense of black-British experience which is increasingly coming into its own – aesthetically speaking – through new representational texts such as Akomfrah's early film or more mainstream films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Hall is concerned with the experience of diaspora and ethnicity in a changing British cultural landscape. These, however, are no longer debates of acute importance for the questions and problems being raised by the English riots, its representations and responses to it. The notion of a new sense of black identity and what Hall called "*diaspora-ization*" (1996b: 448; emphasis in orig.) are no

longer sufficient explanations of what newer texts try to convey in the wake of the 2011 riots. Rather, the English riots find aesthetic representation and expression in what I would tentatively (and somewhat clumsily) call a "post-new ethnicities landscape." I would consider "Ill Manors" and *The Hard Stop* as paradigmatic texts reflecting this new landscape and its troubled semiotics of race and class. In these texts – as in the films mentioned by Hall in the 1980s – certain people force themselves into representation during and through the riots.

Coming to Terms with the Riots

Between 6 and 11 August 2011, a wave of civil unrest spread across several London boroughs and other English cities. The so-called "English riots" cost the lives of five people. In retrospect, they not only posed a challenge to policing and social infrastructure; rather, the riots have similarly challenged sociological, political and cultural explanatory models. There are many ways to explain and narrate the riots that erupted in the London borough of Tottenham. The fatal shooting of the unarmed black suspect Mark Duggan on August 4 was followed by a public outcry and protests against police brutality in the borough of Tottenham and can thus be considered the trigger event. However, it does not suffice to consider this event as the sole reason for the riots. It cannot explain why the riots did not confine themselves to the black communities of England's metropolises and the boroughs immediately affected by potentially racist policing. After all, the almost 15,000 people participating in the rioting and looting could not be pinned down to just one disenfranchised ethnicity, but also included young white people. Questions of class and poverty were therefore quickly raised in the ensuing post-riot discourse. Consequently, the riots must be considered as a challenge in cultural semiotics that calls for a nuanced analysis that takes into consideration aspects of race, class and their different sites of intersection.

The modes of representation at work in explaining the riots strongly resemble similar mechanisms of associating race with crime that were examined by Stuart Hall and others in their 1978 study *Policing the Crisis*. Hall and his co-authors detected a correlation between the 1970s crisis of the working class and the "structural mechanisms of racism" (1978: 332). They concluded that the representation of urban crime at that time constructed "black crime" as the "signifier for the [economic] crisis" (339). In 2011, the English riots can be seen as another instance in which "*race* has come to provide the objective correlative of crisis" (333). In fact, the riots challenge the widespread notion of a 'post-racial' society that some sections of British politics would have entertained in the

early 2000s.[1] The vehemence with which seemingly outdated essentialist conceptions of race came back to the fore in many reactions to the riots led some commentators to comparisons with the situation of the 1970s and 80s.

Paul Gilroy has referenced the 1981 Brixton riots in a speech commenting on the riots (2011), and Mark Fisher has made similar connections in relation to John Akomfrah's film *Handsworth Songs*. According to Fisher, Akomfrah's film

> seems eerily (un)timely. The continuities between the 80s and now impose themselves on the contemporary viewer with a breathtaking force. [...] This is why it is important to resist the casual story that things have 'progressed' in any simple linear fashion since *Handsworth Songs* was made. [...] The assumption that brutal policing and racism were relics of a bygone era was part of the reactionary narrativisation of the recent riots: *yes, there was politics and racism* back then, *but not now, not anymore…* (2014: 221)

Consequently, the discourses evoked in discussions of the 2011 riots are the same ones that Stuart Hall engaged with in his writings on the shifts in black cultural politics and "new ethnicities" throughout the 1970s and 80s.

However, I would claim that the riots are not merely an echo of the 1980s race riots. Even more than those earlier riots, they also display characteristics which necessitate a more comprehensive analysis of what Stuart Hall and his co-authors defined in the 1970s as the "synchronisation of the race and the class aspects of the crisis" (1978: 332). In the 1970s, this synchronisation revealed itself in forms of strict policing of disenfranchised urban areas. In 2011, many comments on the riots exposed this conflation of class and race to be a strikingly complex and at times even aporetic pattern. Politicians, critical thinkers, and academics were eager to incorporate the 2011 riots and their possible systemic causes into their already existing intellectual or ideological frameworks.

Slavoj Žižek even claimed that "[t]his was zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing" and that "[i]n their desperate attempt to find meaning in the riots, the sociologists and editorial-writers obfuscated the enigma the riots presented" (2011: n. pag.). Žižek's provocative statement can be considered as the logical endpoint of a discussion which had become increasingly confusing in its search for answers and explanations, from PM David Cameron's condemnation that the riots were the symptom of a "slow-motion moral collapse" (2011: n. pag.) to historian David Starkey's assertion that "nihilistic black gangster culture" was to blame for everything (BBC 2011). While I do agree with Žižek that attempts to boil the riots and their causes down to one single meaning will not suffice, I contend that his stance ultimately evades the discussion of the

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[1] Steve Garner examines the notion of "post-racial" as the factor of a neoliberal society and introduces the concept of the "neoliberal postracial state" (2016: 34). See Garner (2016) as well as Feldman (2015) for further elaborations on the notion of the "post-racial" society.

actual political and cultural problems which were expressed in the riots after all. This de-politicisation, as Steffen Liebig argues, renders the actual social causes for the riots invisible (2014: 2).[2]

The *Guardian* newspaper and the London School of Economics' social research inquiry, published as *Reading the Riots* (Newburn and Lewis 2011), was therefore fittingly titled, as the various approaches to the riots' causes and effects can indeed be described as interpretive readings. Taking my cue from this conception of the riots, I want to provide a "re-reading" of the most prominent responses to the riots, their major argumentative trajectories and the intersectional identities at stake. Finally, I want to show how "Ill Manors" and *The Hard Stop* open up possibilities to approach the riots. These cultural texts provide the opportunity of a re-reading because they critically negotiate the different takes on the riots. They do so by reflecting the media coverage of the riots and playing with their semantics of race and class. Ultimately, they aim at what Imogen Tyler, in reference to Jacques Rancière, calls the political "redistribution of visibility" (2013: 149). I would also consider this redistribution of visibility along the lines of Stuart Hall's argument about the "struggle to come into representation" fought by black artists as part of a larger "cultural politics designed to challenge, resist and, where possible, to transform the dominant regimes of representation" which he put forth in the light of challenging new texts and works of art (such as Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs*) in the 1980s (1996b: 442). While the texts I consider here have not been exclusively produced in such a manner as to correspond to what Hall referred to as the "new forms of cultural practice" (447) (Plan B, after all, is a white rapper), it is precisely with regard to questions of intersectionality and social abjection connected to the semantics of race prevalent in the riot discourse that I use this framework. I follow Imogen Tyler's argument that the 2011 riot discourse builds on and continues a figuration of the underclass in racialized terms, and is consequently part of a larger discourse of whiteness which figures the underclass as "contaminated whiteness" (2013: 187).

In the context of the 2011 riots, the redistribution of visibility can be understood as a reaction to the three major trends emerging throughout interpretations of the riots: 1) the riots are predominantly a racial issue, with similarities to the race riots of the early 1980s, specifically the 1981 Brixton riots, 2) the riots are an outcome of class issues under neoliberalism and excessive consumer culture, and 3) the riots were so unique because

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[2] For an argument along similar lines, which, however, adds more nuance, see Alain Badiou (2012). Badiou, while sympathetic with the assumed initial cause of the riots (the protest against state violence and racist oppression), objects that "I know full well that [this kind of riot] destroys and plunders without a concept, just as the Beautiful, according to Kant, 'pleases without a concept'. [...] [I]f riots are to signal a reawakening of History, they must indeed accord with an Idea" (21). Within the typology proposed by Badiou, the English riots can be called "immediate riots": "The subject of immediate riots is always impure. That is why they are neither political nor even pre-political. In the best of cases [...] they make do with paving the way for an historical riot" (26).

they constituted the first on British soil to heavily rely on modern communication technologies to an unprecedented degree. The use of new social media and mobile devices "ultimately altered the dynamics of collective action" and led to the emergence of a "new form of 'mediated crowd' membership – an interactive community that traverses and intersects geographic and virtual arenas" (Baker 2012: 177). As I will show in the following section, the first is the most central trend. However, as my later analyses of representations of the riots demonstrate, they gradually intersect with the other two trends.[3]

"Black Gangster Culture" and the Intersections of Race

The first trend is best exemplified by historian David Starkey's statements on "black gangster culture" on the one side, and a more nuanced, subtle assessment like the one provided by Paul Gilroy on the other.[4] David Starkey's controversial intervention during a discussion on *BBC Newsnight* lends itself to a multimodal analytical perspective to dissect the symbolic and political patterns of representation which are at stake in the riots. In doing so, it is crucial to focus on the intersections of blackness, whiteness and class. During the lively discussion, Starkey tried to make sense of the riots by saying that

> the substantial section of the chavs [...] have become black [...]. The whites have become black. A particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion. And black and white [...] operate in this language together, [...], which is this Jamaican patois that has been intruded in England, and this is why so many of us have this sense of literally a foreign country [...]. (BBC 2011)

Starkey's rhetoric figures the so-called underclass in racial terms, a reconfiguration that happens along the lines of a porous dichotomy of whiteness and blackness.

In Starkey's logic, "gangster culture" clearly represents a substitute for lower class status confounded with what he believes to be "black" culture. Defending his words in a subsequent article in *The Telegraph*, Starkey elaborated on his curious notion of a whiteness which gradually becomes black. According to this article, the white working class has lost a "common sense of identity" throughout the last few decades, and

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[3] Drawing on *Policing the Crisis* (1978) by Stuart Hall et al., Stephanie Alice Baker argues that "speculation surrounding the role of new social media in igniting the 2011 English riots represents a new form of moral panic. [...]. While the country experienced recurrent incidents of rioting throughout the 20th-century, the speed and scale with which the 2011 riots evolved distinguished the events from previous incidents of civil disorder. [...]. As the country tried to make sense of the riots, the impression emerged of a technology-obsessed, deviant, youth culture" (170).

[4] I have elaborated on David Starkey's comments and their semantics of race and class elsewhere. See Schmitt 2018a and 2018b (44-46). 2018b also includes an extensive examination of the 2011 English riots and the matter of whiteness.

for too many, the void has been filled with the values of "gangsta" culture. If all the people of this country, black and white alike, are to enter fully into our national story, as I desperately hope they will, they must do so on terms of reciprocity.

In other words, I must be as free to comment on problems in the black community as blacks are to point the finger at whites, which they do frequently, often with justice, and with impunity. (Starkey 2011: n. pag.)

One could, of course, dismiss Starkey's comments as one misled and inappropriate intervention among many in the days after the riots. After all, commentators and politicians had to come to terms with the sheer immensity with which the riots unexpectedly hit Britain at that time. Unfortunately, however, these comments are not without precedent as they directly refer to abjectifying figurations of class such as the chavs who have been a constant figure in demonisations of the lower classes.[5] These, in turn, are influenced by much older class stereotypes dating back to the 19th century (see McClintock 1995: 119). In addition, these comments re-activate racist notions of black culture, which, as Mark Fisher put it, were thought to be a thing of the 1980s.

As Stuart Hall observed in the time after the Winter of Discontent, race is "the modality in which class is lived" (1980: 341) – and Starkey's comments indicate that this still holds true for contemporary British culture and that the identities at stake in the riots must be assessed from an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality contends that identities and subject positions cannot be studied by isolating identity categories and privileging one over the other (such as race or gender over class or vice versa). Intersectionality[6] can provide significant insight into the question why a population like the white working class can enjoy the potential privileges of whiteness in one context and be stigmatised as a social group in another context. Coupled with Hall's Gramscian analysis of racism under capitalism, an intersectional approach can help to come to terms

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[5] I use the term figuration rather than stereotype here, following John Hartigan Jr., who argues that "[f]iguration is a drastic improvement over stereotype in that it captures the active way people subjected to certain debasing images are able to inhabit them in complex ways that involve critique and elaboration" (2007: 16). In addition, following Imogen Tyler, the concept of figuration highlights the different discursive and media sites across which figures such as the chav materialize in that it presupposes an understanding of "mediation not only as representational (in a more structuralist sense) but as a constitutive and generative process" (2008: 18-19). For further elaboration on her "figurative method", see Tyler (2013: 8-10). I have used and elaborated on this approach extensively in Schmitt 2018b (50-72 and passim).

[6] There has been an ongoing debate concerning the conception of intersectional identities. While many intersectionality scholars contend that only multiply marginalised and oppressed groups and subjects can be described as intersectional (such as black women), I contend with scholars such as Devon Carbado that it is vital for an understanding of the hegemonic dynamics of class, gender and race to broaden the theoretical scope of the concept of intersectionality. Rather than "disciplining and policing" the "boundaries of intersectionality" (Carbado 36), the aim should be to employ intersectionality as a "general theory" to also "engage men, masculinity, whiteness, and sexual orientation" (Carbado 2) in order to facilitate a more thorough analysis of hegemonies based on race, class, gender and sexuality. In this article, I use intersectionality in this broader and hopefully more productive sense. See my work with Evangelia Kindinger in Kindinger and Schmitt (forthcoming) as well as the individual contributions therein for an elaborate discussion of the controversies surrounding intersectionality.

with Starkey's comments and their underlying racial and class dynamics. Hall used Gramsci to negotiate the problem that thinkers of the left usually have with "the non-reductive approach to questions concerning the interrelationship between class and race":

> Either one 'privileges' the underlying class relationships, emphasizing that all ethnically and racially different labour forces are subject to the same exploitative relationships within capital; or one emphasizes the centrality of ethnic and racial categories and divisions at the expense of the fundamental class structuring of society.
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> Though these two extremes appear to be the polar opposites of one another, in fact, they are inverse, mirror-images of each other [...]. (1996a: 435-6)

Here, Hall shares many of the convictions underlying intersectionality theory according to which race and class oppression are not two extreme poles at the ends of a continuum. In fact, none can be privileged over the other, as both forms of oppression more often than not mutually reinforce each other. It is therefore never 'class *or* race', but rather 'class *through* race' and vice versa. Intersectionality theory can account for this conceptual flaw. As Jennifer Nash puts it, identity categories such as race, gender and class are "*social processes* that inform each other, but which operate in distinct and particular ways" (2008: 12). This is exactly what is at work in interpretations of the riots such as Starkey's. In that respect, the riots mark a point in recent British history at which we see the social processes of whiteness, blackness and class identity mutually reinforcing each other. These social processes indeed display, to come back to Mark Fisher's argument, the "continuities between the 80s and now" (2014: 221). These echoes also particularly consist of intersectional issues which were already at the heart of Hall's argument in "New Ethnicities": "The end of the essential black subject also entails a recognition that the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity" (1996b: 444).

The discourse concerning the 2011 riots, however, clarifies that these issues remain at least partly unresolved. This becomes evident in Starkey's insistence on 'culture' as constituting the field of contestation. He emphasises that he is referring not to skin colour, that is, a physical marker of 'race', but to black and white *cultures*. However, this use of the term 'culture' ('black culture', 'gangster culture' etc.), directly recalls what Hall has described in "New Ethnicities" as the "fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject" (1996b: 442). An interpretation of the riots which diagnoses 'black culture', and, more precisely, the negative stereotypisation of 'gangster culture' as the root of the problem is not only a dangerous and accusatory oversimplification of the complexities at the heart of the events of August 2011. Such a thinking is above all the return to a form of 1980s cultural, or 'new'

racism which meticulously evades the term 'race' and all its connotations, all the while maintaining the same stereotypes and essentialist notions of what 'black' means in a culture defined by the hegemony of whiteness.

In her analysis of Starkey's speech, Ann Phoenix refers to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its collective publication *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982) and argues that Starkey re-creates old cultural-racist binaries of white and black culture: "Starkey presents a 'new racist' argument that had already been deconstructed in the early 1980s [...]. By binarising black and white while pathologising blackness, he creates afresh an old racialised hierarchy of belonging" (2012: 63). Phoenix, who stresses the intersections of race, culture and gender evoked in Starkey's response, argues that this pathologising perspective evades the "underlying political and socio-economic causes of the riots" (65). However, following Hall, one might argue that Starkey's emphasis on "culture" is evocative of his implied notions of social class. In another passage of his *Newsnight* monologue, Starkey says about Tottenham's Labour MP David Lammy, whom he refers to as "an archetypal successful black man", that if "you are listening to him on radio you would think he was white" (BBC 2011). Starkey tries to stress the linguistic differences between those black men who speak "this Jamaican patois" and the "archetypal successful black man" whose linguistic register is "white" – which is "synonymous with education, eloquence and success"; a logic which "implies that blackness is devoid of these characteristics and that any person who has these attributes can be thought of as white" (Phoenix 2012: 63). Thus, Phoenix argues, whiteness and blackness are being essentialised as "good (and English)" and its respective antithesis (62). Within the context of Hall's Gramscian approach, these ethnic categories thus become expressive of social hegemonic relations.

If one is to understand the complex nature of the riots and their implications for race and class today, it is crucial to look at this notion of hegemonic Anglo-British whiteness. After all, for Starkey, it is a white English working class which is somewhat out of touch with its own culture and was consequently lured by the temptations of "black gangstas" and their "Jamaican patois". In this context, Stuart Hall shares sensibilities with the project of Critical Whiteness Studies when he calls for recognising English whiteness as a racialized ethnic category which, "because it is hegemonic, does not represent itself as an ethnicity at all" (1996b: 447). Hall's argument bears similarities with the so-called "invisibility thesis" in Critical Whiteness Studies, popularised, among others, by Richard Dyer, who describes the project of Critical Whiteness Studies as "making whiteness strange" and thereby visible as just another racial category (1997: 4). The riots, which were not only an expression of the black population's frustration with police violence and oppression but also made visible the white lower classes in the form of the chavs, thus

highlight white intra-group differences.[7] Considering the riots in that respect means deconstructing the hegemonic and monolithic, seemingly self-evident and invisible notion of Anglo-British whiteness and thereby to heed Stuart Hall's call to engage with today's "new ethnicities" and to consider the modalities of race and class as mutually expressive of each other. In addition, I would argue that this endeavour can in a further step help to advance Critical Whiteness Studies within a European and British context.

In the past few years, a number of British scholars have engaged with questions of Whiteness Studies.[8] Vron Ware proposes considering whiteness as an "interconnected global system" (2001: 184) to account for the subtleties with which whiteness takes effect in different cultural and historical contexts. Whiteness and race in general can thus be understood as being in a constant process of becoming.[9] This notion ties in with the invisibility thesis (Dyer 1997: 3, 207). It helps to explain why, on the one hand, "whiteness is synonymous with Englishness, forthcoming as a hidden normative code that determines who is in or out on the basis of birth *and* complexion" (Ware 2001: 193). On the other hand, however, "the content of Englishness, like whiteness itself, appears to be of a volatile nature, easily evaporating when put under pressure" (192). The 2011 riots, and especially Starkey's reading of them as the expression of a white working class practically turned black by a corrupting 'gangsta culture', point to a recent development that puts English whiteness under pressure. They also mark the historical continuum within which the intersection of race, ethnicity and class identity must be considered anew. The notions of an abject English working class can be traced back to what Vron Ware has described as the "racialization of the indigenous urban working class" as "subhuman" due to their "inferior economic and social status" in the 19th century (191). Considering the riots within this historical context helps to abandon what Hall defined as the "language of binary oppositions and substitutions" (Hall 1996a: 442) that still dominates much of the discourse on race, ethnicity, and class. It further helps to deconstruct the often fatal intersections of these categories in the current cultural symbolic order.

Eventually, this ties in with the second strand of interpretations of the riots best exemplified by Zygmunt Bauman's verdict that "these are not hunger and bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers" (2011). Based on his previous arguments about contemporary neoliberal consumer culture, Bauman claims that those deprived of the opportunity to participate in this consumer culture experience not only an "absence of pleasure", but also an "absence of human dignity". Bauman's argument

[7] For an examination of white intra-group differences in Britain with a focus on the intersections of social class, see Garner 2012.
[8] For an overview of the influence of Critical Whiteness Studies in Britain and Europe, see Schmitt 2018b: 15-20.
[9] See Wiegman 1999 for an elaboration about the notion of "becoming", rather than "being", white.

implies that, in a class-based society, consumption is about the ability to properly represent oneself as an active and legitimate member of society – it is part of the symbolic capital needed to make oneself visible. Here, the consumer argument crosses paths with the third trend of interpretations. In a talk responding to the riots, Paul Gilroy has addressed the issue of political representation and visibility: "I think the question shouldn't be 'was there politics in this rioting and looting', but is there politics in this country?" (2011) Comparing the riots to the Brixton race riots of 1981, Gilroy identifies the fundamental difference in the changing "relationship between information and power". In other words, the media tactics that allowed for a high visibility of the riots also are an integral part of the racialisation of the lower classes. As I have argued earlier, this echoes what Stuart Hall and his co-authors have described as the "synchronisation of the race and the class aspects of the crisis" in the 1970s (1978: 332). This synchronisation revealed itself in the form of strict policing of disenfranchised urban areas. In 2011, this was best exemplified by what Imogen Tyler has called the "penal pornography" of the so-called "naming and shaming" campaigns with which media outlets tried to support the prosecution of the rioters (2013: 193). Consequently, reading the riots and re-reading the interpretations of them ultimately means looking at the forms of representation, both symbolically and politically, which are at stake in the riots and which are being challenged in Plan B's "Ill Manors" and Amponsah's *The Hard Stop*.

The Abject Spectacle of the Council Estate: Plan B's "Ill Manors" (2012)

Having peaked at number six in the UK Single Charts at its release, Plan B's "Ill Manors" (2012) can certainly be regarded as one of the most-widely received pop-cultural responses to the riots. The lyrics of London-based (white) rapper, musician and filmmaker Plan B often revolve around the struggles of working-class life in London and the intricacies of race and class in contemporary Britain. He frequently relies on transmedia storytelling. Despite his beginnings in hardcore rap, he has since displayed an artistic versatility that has attracted a mainstream audience. His musical response to the riots is no exception. In the following, I want to focus on the intricate interplay between the song's lyrics and the accompanying video clip directed by Yann Demange.

The lyrics of Plan B's song imagine an "urban safari", with the speaker in the poem assuming the persona of a tour guide in most of the stanzas. Opening to the view of a London council estate as seen from the roof of a building, the song's first lines announce, "Let's go on an urban safari / we might see some illegal migrants / Oi, look, there's a chav / that means council-housed and violent". In sketching the council estates through the ironic point of view of an imagined "safari", the urban ghettoes are likened to the jungles of Africa, recalling 19th-century descriptions of the London slums as resembling "darkest Africa" (Marriott 1999: 95). The stereotypical inhabitants of these estates are described

as (black) illegal immigrants and (white) chavs, as if to ironically prove David Starkey right in his observation that "black and white operate in this […] together". The use of animation in the video's safari scenes stresses the lyric's ironic content and renders the housing estate as what Stuart Hall has called "the Spectacle of the Other" (1997).

The presumably middle-class white safari-goers are later addressed with the chorus line "Oi, I said oi! / What you looking at, you little rich boy? / We're poor round here, run home and lock your door!" These lines offer an ironic and sarcastic affirmation of the stereotypes surrounding the so-called underclass, including the chavs and the black British population singled out by commentators like David Starkey. The notion of these groups being stigmatised as the outcasts of society is reinforced with the later line "We got an Eco-friendly government / They preserve our natural habitat / Built an entire Olympic village / Around where we live without pulling down any flats". These lines ridicule the notion that the "illegal immigrants" and the "chavs" of the first stanza might be viewed as a separate non- or sub-human species whose living conditions in the housing estates are not the outcome of symbolic and material boundary work, but in fact a natural consequence of these groups' inherent qualities. This is put into a sarcastic perspective with the reference to the preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games, which were already in full swing around the time the riots happened and immediately affected the living conditions in disenfranchised areas around London.

In the video clip, these groups are shown as an ethnically mixed alliance of urban outcasts who indulge in pastimes stereotypically attributed to this group, including drug abuse and 'happy slapping', i.e. the physical abuse and violation and the simultaneous recording of this crime via smartphone or any other video recording device. Staged scenes of spectacle and violent excess are cross-cut with actual footage of the 2011 riots well-known from the news coverage of the time. These mixings and juxtapositions suggest a continuity between these stereotypical activities and the violence and chaos of the riots. This can be read as a performative reflection on the construction of ethnic and class stereotypes prevalent in the British media, which are the subject of the lines "Think you know how life in a council estate is / From everything you've ever read about it or heard / Well it's all true, so stay where you're safest / There's no need to set foot out the 'burbs". The lyrics' hyperbolic affirmation of stereotypes is combined with the meta-reflexive use of the very media technologies that are used to disseminate such stereotypes.

This is first evidenced in an animation scene in which the camera zooms in on the picture accompanying a newspaper article on council estate kids being the "scum of the earth". In this animation, the picture and the stereotypes represented therein come to life. Another revealing scene shows a gang 'happy-slapping' their victim. Here, the smartphone not only becomes the device for documenting the committed crime, but is also rendered as the medium through which gangs organise themselves. With these filmic strategies,

Demange's video reflects on the label 'media riots' by demonstrating the multiple meanings the use of communications and media technology can have in the context of the riots and the dissemination of class stereotypes. Similarly, the supposed destruction of the camera lens and/or the screen simulates the breakdown of the fourth wall. At the same time, these scenes evoke an alienation of media consumption habits. The audience is simultaneously seduced into indulging in the mediated spectacle of Othering and violence while at the same time having to confront the dissection of the medial and technical preconditions of this spectacle.

Thereby, to return to my initial thesis, visibility is redistributed. Representation is here no longer a one-dimensional affair which allows for the privileged to see the lower classes within a certain pre-established frame, be they 'illegal immigrants', 'black gangsters' or 'chavs'. Rather, the medial gaze is reverted by those Others who are traditionally its object. In that respect, "Ill Manors" pays attention to a crucial aspect of the "redistribution of visibility" in the case of the riots: the problem with the stereotypes of blacks and chavs is not so much the fact that they are not visible enough – quite the opposite. These stereotypes are circulated in the media to such a degree that they are in fact hypervisible. Nothing could exemplify this better than the 'name and shame' campaign of newspapers like *The Sun* (Tyler 2013: 193). This campaign draws on the fact that through CCTV surveillance, the widespread use of modern recording devices, such as cell phones, and the ability to almost immediately share these recordings through the internet, the images of the rioters and looters are ubiquitous. The representation of the riots in the media could furthermore build on an already existing repertoire of stereotyped and caricatured images of chavs. "Ill Manors" achieves a redistribution of visibility by deconstructing such stereotypes through *re-affirming* their hypervisibility in an exaggerated and parodic manner: while the video could be criticised for celebrating the riots' spectacle of violence and destruction, this 'celebration' can also be read as deliberately ironic and hyperbolic. Rather than attempting to merely oppose the stereotypes by 'truthful' depictions of de-essentialised black and white lower-class subjects, the video and song work with and through the stereotypes themselves, confronting the viewer with such an excess of stereotyped violence as to explode such pre-conceived notions.[10]

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[10] In that regard, it should be noted, of course, that mainstream studios and labels backed the "Ill Manors" project. Warner produced the video, while the single was released by Atlantic Records. To discuss the implications of these conditions of production for the potentially 'subversive' character of Plan B's project and how it engages with representational regimes would require an article in its own right.

Re-Distributing Visibility: George Amponsah's *The Hard Stop*

Despite their obvious genre differences, George Amponsah's documentary resembles "Ill Manors" in terms of their strategy to dissect the visual regimes at play in the racialized riot discourse. The film's main subject is the aftermath of the Mark Duggan killing and its effect on two of his close friends, Marcus Knox-Hooke and Kurtis Henville. Amponsah follows the two men throughout the years after the riots until the 2014 verdict of the investigation into Duggan's death. Thus, it is not so much the riots per se which are at the heart of the documentary, but rather the social conditions of the community affected by them. Strikingly, the film opens with a text overlay quoting Martin Luther King saying, "a riot is the language of the unheard" before cutting to a montage of news and eyewitness footage of the 2011 riots. The soundtrack is a similar collage of news reports, some of which describe the riots as "the worst disturbance in a generation", and police radio evoking the titular "hard stop" which would lead to Duggan's death. The opening sequence thus suggests a continuity between the American Civil Rights Movement (through the reference to Martin Luther King) and the immediacy of the recent riots in England. It further aims at a high degree of emotional immersion, achieved by the visceral and affective nature of the riot footage.

But the use of authentic footage also serves a different function, which becomes evident in the course of the film. While the film keeps narrative discourse to a minimum – there is no voice-over and only a few text overlays to indicate specific contexts – the way it incorporates imagery of the riots as well as of the shooting of Mark Duggan exposes the visual regimes of race and ethnicity at work in contemporary Britain. This is evident in the scene where Marcus and Kurtis assess eyewitness footage of the shooting in order to reconstruct the event. Amponsah's film thus offers a meta-comment on the hegemonic interpretation of such imagery, be it through the media, by commentators like David Starkey or, eventually, in the courtroom, by having it dissected by those who, to use Stuart Hall's words, "struggle to come into representation" (1996b: 442). In that, Amponsah's film, while admittedly much less avant-gardist and radical in form, shares sensibilities with a film like John Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs* (or, for that matter, his later *Stuart Hall Project*)*,* which in the 1980s was advocated by Hall as an example of "new forms of cultural practice" (447) and "a cultural politics designed to challenge, resist and, where possible, to transform the dominant regimes of representation" (442). It is a film about the political implications of the visual and symbolic repertoire of race and class in contemporary Britain and the hegemonic struggle over it.

Its subjects, Marcus and Kurtis, are obsessed with processing the visual evidence of the killing of their friend as well as of the riots. For Marcus in particular, this is of vital importance since video footage of himself smashing a police car during the initial protest is used as evidence against him as his actions are deemed to have had a 'domino effect' for

the unfolding riots. Thus, *The Hard Stop* demonstrates how such imagery is embedded in a discursive environment in which questions of ethnic and social belonging intersect with the hegemonic discourse of the law. For Marcus and Kurtis, working through these images is not only a means of taking action, but also a means of coming to terms with their own position in British society as well as with their origins. The film follows them in their recollection of the past. Kurtis in particular is, in his own words, "haunted" by his criminal past, which he considers to be the result of his upbringing on the Broadwater Farm housing estate – the childhood home of Marcus, Kurtis and Mark Duggan, and an epitome of the racial and social tensions at the heart of the 2011 English riots.

Through the use of old TV footage, Amponsah links the recent riots to the 1985 Broadwater Farm riots which unfolded after a black woman died of a heart attack during a police raid and after a police officer was killed on the premises. Again, a sense of continuity between the events of the 1980s and the present is insinuated and worked through. Through a sequence of 1980s documentary footage, the audience learns that Broadwater Farm is "typical of inner city black deprivation" and echoes "old slums" of the Victorian past. At the same time, Amponsah's film, by tracing the peculiar continuities, demonstrates how even well into the present the estate is haunted by the events of the 1980s. A community activist comments on the stigmatization when he says that Marcus "grew up in the shadow of what happened in the 80s... police hated him since day one". The stigmatizing and abjectifying history of the intersections of race and class, the "endless reconfiguration of abject others" (Tyler 2013: 9), is thus inscribed into the urban map of London as well as into the bodies of its residents.

The inevitability of the past is therefore a leitmotif of the film[11], and Kurtis is particularly preoccupied with hauntings and remembering. "It's good to keep those things", he says while browsing through his collection of birthday cards and old photographs. Yet, he concludes that "it's just memories – you can't turn the hands of time back". This melancholic notion is echoed in the process of mourning Duggan's death whose anniversary is a central scene in this film which attempts a re-positioning of "the essential black subject" (Hall 1996b: 444) by unearthing the history of its articulation as synonymous with housing estate crime and deprivation. Ultimately, I would argue that the film's investment in reminiscing the past, while often an individual affair for its protagonist subjects, on a larger cultural scale amounts to what I would call "racial mourning"[12] – the mourning of unresolved conflicts within British culture that erupt in the present as echoes from the 1980s. By positioning Kurtis and Marcus (and their version

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[11] The relationship of the present with the past is another sensibility that Amponsah's film shares with Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs*. See Ingrid von Rosenberg's analysis of *Handsworth Songs* and its treatment of the past "interwoven into the present" (2018: 29).

[12] My use of this expression is inspired by two similar concepts, namely by David L. Eng and Shinhee Han's psychoanalytic examination of whiteness and racial assimilation of Asian-Americans which they describe in terms of "racial melancholia" (2000), and Paul Gilroy's notion of "postcolonial melancholia" (2004).

of the story of Mark Duggan) at the centre of the narrative, and by emphatically extending the focus beyond the matter of the riots and their causes and illuminating their much more complex personalities and histories, the film offers a counter-narrative which scrutinizes the essentialist notions of the "black gangster culture" (BBC) allegedly responsible for the riots.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the riots, as a contemporary manifestation of the intersections of race and class, must be considered with regard to their historical modalities. A multimodal historicising approach must take into account the different historical moments which influence the symbolic apparatus of race and class today and how they culminated in the riots. In that context, Stuart Hall's arguments in "New Ethnicities", even while being the expression of a very particular cultural-historical moment, prove very timely indeed. Discourses of multicultural Britain, or even of a 'post-racial' society, notwithstanding, the riots, their causes and the responses to them, become a discursive prism through which unresolved cultural conflicts come to light. A film such as Amponsah's *The Hard Stop*, I would argue, would not be conceivable without the early work of a director like John Akomfrah or the debate addressed and furthered by Hall in "New Ethnicities." Yet, the film (and other representations of the riots) must also be seen within this new environment of which Starkey's ugly statement that "the whites have become black" must unfortunately be considered a symptomatic expression. This is no longer the ethnic and representational conflict addressed by Hall – it is not exclusively the diasporic experience which is at stake here. Rather, it is the new forms of racial and social belonging which, among others, have their roots in the problems addressed by Hall, but which are no longer fully and satisfyingly encompassed by the notion of diaspora or blackness or "new ethnicities." One would have to add the notion of "new classes" which compliments the older notion of "new ethnicities" in order to make sense of what is at stake in the riots and the responses to them.

The body of the 'essentialised black subject', however, still seems to be one of the main sites into which these conflicts of race and class are inscribed. To assess these zones of conflict, one must consider the vectors with which race intersects. This also means to critically reflect not only on the status of black subjects, but also on the centre of power, that is, whiteness as a hegemonic racial identity. This, ultimately, serves the task, proclaimed by Hall, to 'decouple' the problematic intersections of race and ethnicity. Re-visiting Stuart Hall's examinations of the modalities of race and class, which defined the 'new ethnicities' in the 1980s, offers ways to re-think the historicity of the riots and their racial symbolism.

In a way, then, as Stuart Hall commented in the months after the riots, "[n]othing really has changed" (Williams 2012: n. pag.). This sense of uncanny continuity is also suggested and worked through in the cultural texts dealing with the riots, of which Plan B's "Ill Manors" and George Amponsah's *The Hard Stop* are prime examples. Yet, these texts also indicate the possibility to critically and productively interfere in the riot discourse of race, whiteness and social class. The song and video "Ill Manors", as the work of a white artist who primarily reflects the position of those who, according to David Starkey, "have become black" (BBC 2011), troubles notions of a polluted whiteness[13] and the hegemonic racist connotations of such a notion. *The Hard Stop* unearths the individual and collective histories which are entangled with the crisis of which the riots were a consequence and expression. What both texts do, then, is to re-negotiate and de-naturalise signifiers of race and social class which, in turn, are never without history, and, more often than not, prove to be remnants of the past taking effect in the present.

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[13] See Schmitt 2018b for an examination of the white working class and underclass as embodiments of "polluted" or "tainted" whiteness.

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