



## Fox-Trotting the Riot: Slow Rioting in Britain's Inner City

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### Abstract

In recent years there have been significant discussions and arguments raised relating to the position and behaviour of those who live in Britain's poorest neighbourhoods, however there has been little in the way of solutions put forward by any of the political Party's. August 2011 was a flashpoint in the history of these debates, the civil unrest which took place during that month has led to further and continuous on-going social and political debates relating to welfare, unemployment and a sense of disenfranchisement within specific neighbourhoods in the UK. This paper focuses upon a community in Nottingham, St Ann's, a council estate housing 15,000 people, who rely upon social housing and public services to as they say to 'keep their heads above water'. The families who rely upon public services, welfare benefits and social housing are the poorest and most disadvantaged people in Britain, and since 2010 are being subject to harsh cuts in their welfare benefits. They are also the most vulnerable to unemployment caused by shrinking the size of the public sector, as they were to the loss of the manufacturing industries in the early 1980s under the Thatcher Government. This paper examines the lives of those who live on this council estate; rely upon social housing, local services, and when the employment market shrinks welfare benefits. The paper addresses the key argument that there has been a significant change in representation of how council estates and working class people who live in them have been negatively re-branded and stigmatised over the last 30 years. Although the focus of the riots has centred around five days in August 2011, this paper introduces families, and individuals who have been part of this ethnographic research over an eight-year period. Thus arguing that the disturbances in 2011 were an unintended consequence of a significant neighbourhood and community decline over a generation, but which has been exacerbated since 2010 with the Coalition Government's austerity measures.

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### Introduction

**1.1** The fatal shooting of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old man from Tottenham, North East London, sparked off the civil unrest and rioting that took place over five days in August 2011 and was shown around the world through extensive media coverage. Thus initiating widespread debates about English inner cities which focused upon the morality, the values, and the behaviour of those who live within them, the riots resulted in the resurrection of the Conservative Party rhetoric of 'Broken Britain' and, more notably, allowed a space in English politics for the fear and loathing to return regarding 'The Underclass' (Lister 1996; see also Tyler 2013). This paper discusses how the poorest in the UK have been living, and managing through a period of adversity over many years, and argues that to focus on those five days in August 2011 is both misleading and disingenuous to those communities that are experiencing harsh austerity cuts, the de-stabilisation of their local communities, and a shift in policy focus from welfare to the criminalisation of the poorest members of our society (Skeggs & Loveday 2012; Wacquant 2008).

**1.2** Although most critiques of the English riots start from the point of the death of Mark Duggan, and the subsequent protest in London during August 2011, the argument being made in this paper, begins much further back. I focus on those families relying upon public services, welfare benefits and social housing, living on the St Ann's council housing estate in Nottingham during the recent period of harsh austerity and cuts to those local services and benefits. This community in Nottingham, like many throughout the UK, has become vulnerable to unemployment caused by the shrinking of the public sector, and earlier waves of de-industrialisation during the 1980s under the Thatcher Government. This has led to *intergenerational* experiences of unemployment where there are now households on some council estates with adults who have not experienced regular and stable paid work for decades.

**1.3** There have also been significant changes in representation of the working-classes in communities like St Ann's, (Skeggs & Loveday 2012), Skeggs (2004), and Lawler (2005, Lawler 2007) argue that council estates and working class people who live in them have over the last 30 years with successive

Conservative and New Labour Governments become negatively known and stigmatised as 'the other other'; dangerous, and a threat to British society through their values, practices, and reproduction. Consequently being a resident of a council estate in the UK in this century has a different meaning – a stigmatised status – from being a resident of a council estate in the last century when social housing was connected to the employed working class.

**1.4** Bill Silburn and Ken Coates (1970) study in Nottingham during the 1960s showed that keeping extended families together in working class communities allowed networks to grow positively around work, and local services. However, Coates and Silburn's later study (1980) noted that by the early 1980s those council housing estates, and particularly the larger estates that replaced the terraces of the 1950s and 1960s during slum clearance had become a stigmatised tenure. The working class residents who live on council estates today are not a homogenous group as they are often portrayed in wider public and media discourse; they are also no longer employed within similar and traditional occupations of manufacturing in the large factories and engineering works that Coates and Silburn (1970, 1980) described as vital to the community. The residents of council estates in the UK are made up of those who work in what is left of the traditional industries employing working class people: factory work, warehouses, and low level engineering and maintenance. However, there are new service and care industries which have provided, albeit low paid, and often part-time employment in local authorities and public sector organisations as teaching assistants, youth workers, childcare assistants and also within the large chain-operated supermarkets.

**1.5** Haywood and Ghail (1996) and then Skeggs (1997) noted in their work related to young working class adults in the UK during the 1990s, that employment and labour markets had been restructured, with heavy consequences for the working class. Accompanied by much lower social housing stock in the UK and the changes in social housing policy which has a strict criteria of who can apply based upon vulnerability, and need (Power 1997; Power & Houghton 2007; Gough et al 2005). As a consequence of policy changes to social housing 'need' there are a large and significant resident group who are not employed either through sickness, disability or unemployment. However, there is also a cultural element to being working class in the UK, which is as significant to class inequality as the economic material forces which produce it. There have been unintended consequences to the labour market reconstruction, the dominance of neo-liberal politics, and the subsequent changes in social policy. The costs of which have been a sharp stigmatisation, and re-branding of working class people as 'valueless', in particular those who live on council estates. The stigmatisation of specific groups, particularly related to locality, have been central in producing new ways of exploitation through the fields of culture, and media, inventing new forms of class differentiation, and class antagonism.

**1.6** The dominance of neo-liberal ideology within British politics, policy and practices, in both public and private sectors over the last thirty years has had, and continues to have, devastating effects upon working class communities all over the United Kingdom (Atkinson et al. 2012; Welshman 2007; Gough et al. 2005; Levitas 2005; Lister 2004). This paper focuses upon one of those communities outside of London, which also witnessed rioting, and civil unrest during the 'English Riots' of 2011, and has known and experienced the devastating effects that de-industrialisation, and neo-liberal politics have had on communities outside of the more prosperous areas of the south East of England. St Ann's is a council housing estate in Nottingham in the East Midlands region of England. This local community is home to approximately 15,000 people, the estate is located 2 minutes' walk from the City Centre, and is a community, which relies heavily upon social housing and public services.

**1.7** Ann Curtis (1985) used the term of the 'slow riot' to explain the anger, desperation but also locally situated criminality within particular inner city African American communities in the United States. A slow process, which relates to unemployment, poor housing, loss of aspiration, and feelings of hopelessness when focused upon a particular group of people who are then concentrated and segregated in what Wacquant (2004) argues as the 'hyper ghetto' (Wacquant 2008: 196–205). In this paper, I deploy this work to argue that rather than protest and 'rioting' beginning and ending in August 2011, there has been a process of 'slow rioting' throughout communities like St Ann's for several generations.

**1.8** To do this I draw upon an ethnographic study undertaken over eight years, mapping this community, the family networks, and local understandings of belonging and identity from the perspective of 'the insider'. In relation to this research, and neighbourhood, I am both researcher, and resident, living on this estate with my family and friends for over 20 years. My children have attended the local schools, and as a white working class mother, and resident of a council estate I have experienced, witnessed, and felt the gradual de-valuing of working-class communities, and the stigmatisation of the working class family (Mckenzie 2012a; Gillies 2007). As researcher I have engaged with this community in many ways, through building relationships with local services, and service providers, but more importantly through building trust, recognition, and mutual friendship amongst the community where I live, and who have allowed me to write about them. It is the methodology, the ethnographic mapping, and the deep relationships that has permitted this level of presentation of this community in Nottingham. The relationship has been two-way, the residents give me their stories, their time, and have shared their distress and fears with me. In return it is my responsibility as a sociologist, and researcher to tell these stories, and analyse the 2011 riots in relation to wider class inequalities. Their message is clear 'tell them', 'tell them what its like here for us' which is the intention of this paper. To do this 'telling', I use a selection of transcript interview data, notes taken direct from my research diary, and the memories, and moments I have captured through taking photographs of the estate, and its people. It has often been the small stories, the detail of living in a stigmatised neighbourhood that has had the most impact the ordinariness of class disadvantage. There are complaints and general grumbings on the estate of not being able to get a pizza delivery, or the milkman refusing to come into the neighbourhood. The routine daily practices which most of us take for granted are difficult in this neighbourhood because of the stigmatised reputation that St Ann's is known by. It is this level of detail which highlights the daily struggles of the people's lives in St Ann's in doing

almost anything which contextualises their anger, frustration, and despair. The words, voices and stories I have collected over eight years are sometimes difficult to hear, and to read. They were often difficult to say, although I have used those words within this paper, I have changed the names of those who have said them.

## The neighbourhood

**2.1** The St Ann's estate is amongst the poorest 10% of neighbourhoods in the UK today (ONS 2010), and has a long history of social research, and community studies. I noted earlier that Ken Coates and Bill Silburn (1970) first brought to light the poor conditions the people of St Ann's were living in, raising their children, and working in during the study 'Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen' which was undertaken during the early 1960s. Ken Coates and Bill Silburn conducted this study in response to a paper published by Peter Townesend in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 1954 raising serious questions relating to government assurances that poverty had been eliminated in the UK during the 1950s through social policy, full employment for men and the welfare state (Townesend 1954).

**2.2** Townsend, and Coates and Silburn argued that instead of poverty being eliminated it was taking on new forms, through the tensions between the new demands of the individual consumer and the need for basic public amenities. The Coates and Silburn research in the 1960s followed the 1958 'St Ann's race riot', which took place on the night of 23 August 1958, arising from a violent altercation between local Teddy Boys, and a group of young West Indian men who also lived in St Ann's. Although this was known as a 'race riot', it was an outbreak of anger relating to the poor housing conditions, and the competition for local jobs in Nottingham. This disturbance in St Ann's in Nottingham took place two weeks before the notorious 'race riots' in Notting Hill<sup>[1]</sup>, 'a watershed moment in the development of racialized politics in Britain' (Solomos 2003: 43). The events of both Nottingham and Notting Hill during August 1958, assisted in raising awareness of the tensions building in poorer neighbourhoods in the UK at the time to low wages, poor and inadequate housing, and cultural differences (Keith & Pile 1993: 164).

**2.3** Over decades, this neighbourhood in Nottingham has been subject to harsh decline: an initial loss of manufacturing jobs in the city led to unemployment and insecure low paid work, and a contraction in the provision of public and social goods such as housing and education. Locally, it has become stigmatised with a reputation as a 'place to avoid', supposedly full of crime and drugs, single mums, and benefit claimants. Through media reporting and the moral panics relating to criminality on the estate in recent years, and the perception nationally that council estates have become unsavoury and even dangerous spaces, St Ann's in Nottingham has gained the reputation as both unsavoury, and dangerous. The neighbourhood also has a long history of inward migration; people from Ireland, the West Indies, Italy, Poland, and South East Asia have been documented as living in St Ann's since the early 1950s (Solomos 2003; Johns 2002; Coates & Silburn 1970). The neighbourhood has always been in flux, with people moving in and then, as they become more financially secure, often moving out. However on to gun and gang related crime, the African-Caribbean migrants – mainly originating from Jamaica who arrived from the 1950s – have remained, creating homes, families, and communities, alongside a large population of migrant people from Ireland, and the existing English working class residents. Therefore the estate today is mostly made up of families which have been St Ann's residents for several generations, with a high percentage of mixing from both white and black families on the estate (Mckenzie 2012).

## Being valued and being St Ann's

**3.1** Over the eight years this research was undertaken I was in contact with three main groups of residents, white mothers with mixed-race children, a group of men who lived on the estate who spent much of their time in a local gym, and a group of elderly residents living in a sheltered housing complex. During the early years of this research, I was focused upon a group of mothers who used the local community centre as a meeting place; it seemed in those years between 2004 and 2008 that the men on the estate were 'missing'. The women were not overly concerned about these 'missing men'; the community centre, the schools, the housing office, and the local precinct was their space, and the men had little involvement in the community activities and daily lives of the women. There were many reasons for their absence some of which I knew at the time. Many of the men did not live with the women they had relationships with on a full time basis because it made little economic sense to the family to have a man 'officially' living at the address who was unemployed, or employed in very low paid work. Sometimes the men were involved in the underground criminal economy, which thrives in this neighbourhood, handling stolen goods, and drug dealing at various levels. Having a man full time in your home therefore often carried much risk, and the women told me they did not want the police 'kicking down the door' looking for whoever, or whatever, putting their tenancy at risk. In addition, these men had an occupational hazard of going to jail and were thus unreliable as full time partners.

**3.2** The men, who became the focus of the research from 2010–2012, were often the elder sons, brothers, partners, and 'baby fathers'<sup>[2]</sup> of the women I was involved with at the community centre. They were rarely present in the spaces on the estate the women occupied, often 'passing by'. To 'pass by' is a term which is used by men on the estate to convey their plans for the day and has its origins within the Jamaican community, 'pass-by' meaning to visit, however 'passing by' described a lifestyle, and a transient identity on the estate for men. Searching for the missing men was not as difficult as it might seem, they were never far away and always on and around the estate, but in specific spaces rarely frequented by women and children; they were located in the community but in parallel spaces, a local boxing gym, a barbers shop, and several of the men had their own flats where other male friends and relatives went and played 'X-Box' (computer games).

**3.3** Both the men and the women's lives were full of practices of risk management, but in different ways.

The women had an acute understanding of how they were known and 'looked down on' more widely in society because they lived on a council estate, or were single parents, often living on welfare benefits. Skeggs (1997) noted in her study of women in the North West of England the specific disadvantages regarding women and class, where she identified that there was an understanding and general acceptance by the women that 'being respectable' and adopting middle-class values was important in working-class life if you were to avoid being 'looked down on' and known as 'rough'. The young women in Skeggs' study knew their social position was of lesser value, but were always trying to leave it by using culture, through dis-identifying with being a working-class woman, disengaging with what they thought was 'common', and engaging in the 'respectable' (1997: 81–94).

**3.4** The women in St Ann's never denied where they thought they were positioned, often saying we are 'at the bottom', or 'lower class' they recognised their de-valued position because of where they lived, and their constant interactions and associations with the welfare system, and statutory services (Gillies 2007). However instead of looking for value in what Skeggs has described as 'middle class values', the women in Nottingham found value for themselves and their children from *within* the community, and through engaging in a local culture they described as 'being St Ann's'. This was a local identity which was valued and had meaning for the women within the estate, but was often ridiculed, demeaned and de-valued by those on the outside.

**3.5** Being a person of value is important in St Ann's as it is for any group within society, and there was an overall consensus throughout the estate – and particularly within those families who had lived on council estates for several generations – that they were 'looked down on', and should feel ashamed of their council estate resident status, or worse laughed at and ridiculed. Mandy was a mother with three sons, and her family had lived on the estate 'a long time' she described herself as 'proper St Ann's', however she recounted on many occasions, how she had experienced various forms of class prejudice:

Mandy: 'it's like people looking in I mean it's when you've heard it on the telly about the gun crime and everything I mean my friend she actually made a complaint the other year cos she went to a pantomime at the Nottingham Ice Stadium and one of the people in the pantomime he turned round and said 'oh I don't want to go into St Ann's cos we'll get shot' and they brought that into the pantomime and my friend actually made a complaint about it'.  
Lisa: 'so they actually made a joke and other local people in the audience could laugh at it'.  
Mandy: 'yeah but for us that's not funny'.

As Mandy stated, what was happening on the estate regarding gang related crime was not a source of humour for the residents, especially when your children are living, growing and playing in the neighbourhood. This stigmatisation based upon local knowledge, but also wider assumptions about council estates in the UK, was recounted particularly by the women as the most distressing parts of their lives, they talked about 'never being good enough', 'being looked down on' and 'made to feel ashamed'.

**3.6** This led to anger and defensiveness in the estate, with many residents rejecting these de-valued terms, stating they were proud of 'being St Ann's'. They understood this identity as being 'able to tough it out', they understood 'being St Ann's' as having qualities that had worth and meaning on the estate, and to them as a group. Thus compensating for the exclusion, and disadvantage on offer to them on the outside of the estate, by relying upon what is local, available and, importantly demonstrable, what is proven and what works for those who live within this neighbourhood.

**3.7** This fear and refusal of 'being looked down on' and knowing you are de-valued as a person on the outside of your neighbourhood, is not specific to this group of people in Nottingham on this council estate. Diane Reay (Reay & Lucey 2002) and Simon Duncan (2007) have also highlighted the sapping of self-confidence when a group is subject to stigmatisation, and inequality of opportunities. Therefore, local practices enabled autonomy, an inversion of the dominant value hierarchy that was defined by a negative polarisation to the norms of wider society. By creating an alternative value system, those who are marginalised can create feelings of worth, power and status on the inside of their neighbourhood and amongst those who recognise and take part in that system (Skeggs & Loveday 2012; Cohen 2002; Harvey et al. 2013).

**3.8** Due to the complex nature of the estate, the values, and practices of the residents are often misrepresented. For women, a high value is placed on motherhood and therefore being a mother is given significant status and respect. Indeed, being a mother and coping with the difficulties of living on the estate are often the only things the women cite as being proud of in their lives. Being 'a mother' and a 'sufferer' (another Jamaican term which is widely used on the estate to describe endured hardships) are always listed as personal achievements.

**3.9** In 2009 two years before the English Riots I was talking to some of the young men in the community centre about employment and getting jobs, the discussion turned to drug dealing on the estate and caused a much wider debate involving everyone in the community centre on that day. This discussion was being video recorded by 'Raphel' who was 18 years old and mixed-race, a young man I knew very well. The debate turned to how difficult life was for those who are part of the drug and gang culture on the estate. These themes are illustrated in the following extract, taken from the recording, which forms part of a discussion between 'Della', a white single mum of five children, 'Dread', her partner a black African-Caribbean man in his 40's who spent his time between Della's council house, and a flat he rented in the neighbourhood, and 'Raphel' who was 'Della's' eldest son and lived between his mum and grandma's house both on the estate:

Raphel: 'buoy its tough out there mans killing man, you have to be ready, its not easy to live in Notts especially when you are Stannz (St Ann's) dem man out there wouldn't survive in

here'.

Dread: 'yeah but...if you're gonna die for Nottingham die for Nottingham not just NG3<sup>[3]</sup> die for NG that would make life a lot easier if that's what you want just be NG<sup>[4]</sup> there's enough crackheads here for all of you to sell drugs to them let's be honest about it here... there's enough crackheads for all of you to make money rather than dying let's be honest...killing each other doesn't make sense, life's hard enough here, just do your business and done'.

Della: 'Well I try not to beat myself up about it anymore I'm proud that my son breathes today that's it the way he is he does things which aren't legal but he makes money and he's still alive for now'.

**3.10** This discussion went on to describe the difficulties that Della, Dread, and Raphael had in maintaining a family relationship amidst the problems on the estate. Della could not afford to have Dread live with her full time, she had four children living at home, and claimed housing benefit, and income support, although Della and Dread wanted to maintain their relationship, financially it would have been impossible, she feared that she would lose her benefits, and was not sure whether Dread could cope with the family pressures of the five children whose father was in jail. Raphael was struggling with his mum's relationship with Dread and because of the other four children living at home Della could not risk Raphael permanently living at the address because of his involvement with gang related drug dealing on the estate. However she was proud of her son: he was independent, he made money and helped her out sometimes, and importantly he was valued on the estate, and was respected.

**3.11** There is a real and acknowledged value in engaging in the local culture, which has been heavily influenced by black Jamaican culture, particularly for the mothers who have mixed-race children. Being authentic to the neighbourhood, being known and fitting in are other elements in becoming a person of value on the estate, but also to whom and how you are connected to the estate is equally important, this has been described by the residents as 'being St Ann's'. In particular, there has been an exchange of culture between residents, noting that they are proud of their success in 'mixing', and 'everyone getting on'. While this type of 'cultural mixing' has often been associated with 'youth culture', in St Ann's it is not limited to young people only; it has become a hybrid and interchangeable culture that has grown throughout the whole community over a fifty-year period of the African-Caribbean and white working-class families living side by side. Particular ways of speaking (such as using words originating from Jamaica) and dressing (such as wearing gold jewellery and expensive branded sportswear) are important. How you cook and eat is also relevant to your value on the estate rice and peas and chicken, a traditional Jamaican dinner, is cooked and eaten by most families. These are cultural signifiers and have all been noted as important to what 'being St Ann's' means, and to who is valued on the estate.

**3.12** Consequently the importance of 'being St Ann's' was spoken about frequently by the women, in relation to 'belonging', however a far more comprehensive understanding to what 'being St Ann's' meant relating to 'being a person of value' in the neighbourhood can be gained if we turn to the accounts of the men who live on the estate. Being de-valued, disrespected, and un-heard have been constant fears within this community for many years. This has caused anguish and frustration but never so much as the time directly before the 2011 riots, and the following year since.

### **Anger, defence, and stigma**

**4.1** Over the eight years I was involved in this neighbourhood as a researcher, I noted throughout the research diary there were increasing outbursts of anger within the estate, and I noted tensions and arguments almost daily from 2010. There were fights and arguments between residents, altercations between services and service users, and an increasing police presence through 'stop and search' of individuals on the street, and in their cars. During 2010 I was meeting with a group of men all living on the estate, at a local gym, and barbers shop. The men were surprisingly open in talking with me, and were far less defensive, than I thought they might be, and much less so than the women.

**4.2** The women were far more protective of their profiles, than the men, indicating an acute awareness in the ways in which working-class people and neighbourhoods are represented. The women were used to 'the looks', and the 'snide comments' particularly whenever they came into contact with what they knew as 'official services'. Gina who was 21 and pregnant and lived alone with her six month and two year old sons, their father Jordan was mixed-race and lived between the homes of his mum and Gina on the estate. Gina told me how she felt an acute stigma particularly whenever she went to any of the benefit agencies, although she was studying at a local college she claimed income support and housing benefit, and therefore was in constant contact with 'officials'. Gina explained that every time she gave her address to any 'officials' there was often a silence, as they mentally processed her single parent status, the ethnicity of her children, and then her address in St Ann's: 'I know what they're thinking you can see it ticking over in their brain as you wait for them to think "oh it's one of them from there"'. Most of the women were frustrated, angry and defensive in the ways they were 'spoken to', and 'treated by' the many services they were in contact with on a daily basis.

**4.3** The men at the gym and the barbers did not protect their profiles in same ways as the women, they talked openly about how they made money, their time spent in jail, the problems they had with the police in the neighbourhood and their relationships with their girlfriends, and 'baby-mothers'. This frankness was surprising in contrast to the guardedness of the women, particularly when the men talked about drug dealing, and receiving and selling stolen goods. The women were constantly involved in local schools, Sure Start centres, community projects, housing officers, and benefit agencies where they knew they were scrutinised, and 'looked down on', in contrast the men had very little engagement with anyone from

outside of the neighbourhood, and particularly with statutory services or projects unless it was through the police and judicial system. They had minimum interaction with benefit agencies, and housing departments, which amounted to signing on every two weeks in order to claim job seekers allowance, and some of the men did not do this, simply because they did not want to be connected to any address. They talked to me about the cat and mouse games they played with the police, they knew 'how to get around things': if you have no address and no name the police can't find you, and they need substantial evidence to search an address you do not live at.

**4.4** The men spent most of their time with each other and had strong friendship, and family bonds often introducing new friends to me as their 'cus' (cousin) or their 'fam' (family), sometimes they were blood relatives, mostly the family relationships were more complicated and interwoven within the estate, it was one of those things that if you had to ask how people were related you are definitely an outsider. Networks, family ties, and your relationship to the estate was very important for both men and women but were articulated as part of their identity in different ways, 'Being St Ann's' was the most likely way women would describe themselves and their families, whilst the men subscribed to the idea that 'Stannz' was territory and belonged to them. The men conducted their lives out of necessity in the shadows of the estate, whilst the women lived under the harsh spotlight and judgment of 'the official'. Anger was a natural response to many of the difficult daily interactions within this neighbourhood, the women often responded to the constant interrogation with raised voices, frustration, and depression. The men had constant problems with the police, and distrusted all 'officials' having little contact as possible, which often made family life stressful.

### **The slow steps to the riot**

**4.5** Loic Wacquant (1994, 2008) has noted that the halt in social mobility and the structures of 'new poverty' are far from fully explained, but what is happening within poor neighbourhoods and to working class people are easy to read, long term joblessness, and the proliferation of low pay and part-time employment and the build up of multiple deprivations within the same households and neighbourhoods. There has also been a widening gap between rich and poor, and dissatisfaction and disillusionment with mainstream politics. This level of distrust and disenfranchisement, particularly within working class neighbourhoods, have led to undermine the legitimacy of the social order, and as Loic Wacquant (2008) and Philippe Bourgois (2009) argue, that hostility is directed toward the state organisation of power and repressiveness symbolised and represented in local communities in the police.

**4.6** The hopelessness and the feelings of constant hard work in order to get through any day has been recounted by both men and women, the women describe their lives as 'fighting brick walls', no one listening or caring about any of the problems they have. Val Gillies (2007) and Gillian Evans (2007) have both noted that media, political and policy discourse constantly critique and comment upon working class family life and their lack of parental responsibility. Consequently, and since the riots of 2011 the Conservative rhetoric of 'broken Britain' and 'Broken families' have become ever more pervasive (see Bristow 2013; Jensen 2013). At the same time the increasing difficulties and stress of family life in poor neighbourhoods are rarely understood. Yvonne was a single mum and worked part-time at the University of Nottingham as a cleaner in the evenings, she had two children, 17 year old Ayesha who was studying A levels at a local Sixth Form College and hoped to get a place at the University of Nottingham, and Jerome, aged 14, who had been arrested for violent disorder during the disturbances in Nottingham on the 9th August when the 2011 riots took place. Jerome had been put on a tag (electronic tagging device), and his movements had been restricted by a curfew while the case against him was filed with the authorities. Yvonne was struggling with the judicial process her family were now involved in because of her son's involvement in the English riots. I had interviewed Jerome about his arrest and then sat and had a coffee with Yvonne; she was not sleeping well, and on anti-depressants;

Yvonne: They keep asking me all the time where were you, why didn't you keep him [Jerome] in you knew not to let him out, it had been on the telly all day 'don't let your kids out' well to be honest Lisa I was at work cleaning what was I supposed to do – not go? I was sat on the bus coming back it was stuck in traffic I remember thinking what's going off now, I didn't know it was him [Jerome] getting arrested.

Yvonne then went on to tell me the problems she was having since Jerome had been electronically tagged:

Yvonne: Now I've got to go on parenting classes well I'll tell you I'm not going, I'm working and how do they expect me to keep him [Jerome] in the house from 6 at night until 8 in the morning he's a 14 year old lad its killing all of us, he's been on this order for 4 months now and unless he pleads guilty it's on until April when the trials scheduled I can't have another 4 months of this.

**4.7** I asked Jerome about his involvement the night he was arrested. He had gone to a local park with a group of older men who had status and respect on the estate through their ability to make money and their involvement in a local gang. The aim was to assemble a large group and go into the City but the police had intercepted them before they left the park and Jerome was arrested. I asked him about what had happened since. He told me he hated the curfew and the tag: he wanted to go out on the street with his mates, thus he wanted to plead guilty to the charge in order to have the tag removed, but his mum didn't want him to. I asked him what the riots had been about and he said: 'its about money nothing else matters, if you have got money no one cares who you are', He looked up to his Dad who was 'on road' (drug dealing). This fourteen year old in St Ann's knew and recognised the respect and status that came with this local position, he wanted to be respected, he wanted to feel valued, and knew that his social position on the outside of the estate, unless he had money was of no value. I asked Jerome what he

wanted to do when he left school, his answer was simple 'entrepreneur' he wanted to be 'rich like Alan Sugar'. Macdonald et al. (2005) have used the term 'displaced masculinities' to describe the disengagement and difficulties young working class men encounter in the transition from youth to adulthood with the absence of 'masculine employment' offering status, and respect. In this neighbourhood status and respect are important resources, and to look for employment that may diminish local respect and status carries far too much risk, and too much loss.

**4.8** During the mid 2000s it became clear that most families did not consider that things might get better, 'just managing' was okay as long as the neighbourhood provided friends, family, and local sources of value. However, since the end of 2010, apathy has been replaced by fear that things are getting worse, and that no one cares, and suspicion that it is deliberate state policy to purposefully foster the decline within council estates, and their residents through death, prison or both.

**4.9** The women attempt to work together for safety and support, however the men are disconnected and mistrustful, they believe that they are 'on their ones' (on their own), and making as much money as possible and by any means is their only route away from their situation. I purposely say away and not out, because there is no appetite to 'get out' of the neighbourhood: the goal is to stay within the neighbourhood and be successful according to the rules of the local value system, the logic being that being somebody on the estate is always preferable to being nobody on the outside.

**4.10** In this vacuum created by the lack of political connections and the absence of communication between a marginalised and excluded group of people and a society from which they feel cast out, it is no wonder that relations with the police and other officials representing the state have become both important and confrontational. The council, the social, and social workers, have always been mistrusted; however when these state representatives are moving out of working in poorer neighbourhoods either through centralisation of bureaucracy, or through redundancy, and as services increasingly close down through current austerity measures and 'cuts', it is the repressive force of the police that becomes the sole representative of the state.

**4.11** I am not arguing that there is no reason for the police to have such a high presence in this neighbourhood: there are crack houses on the estate which are impossible to live close to for other residents, there is prostitution and drug dealing and there have been incidents of stabbings and shootings linked to gang violence. Ann Curtis (1985) introduced the concept of slow rioting in the 1980s to explain the rise in violent crime within urban areas of the USA and especially when violent crime is committed by the local community on the local community, in the USA this was particularly discussed relating to black on black crime. Slow rioting is what happens in a neighbourhood when there is internal and internalised social decay leading to mass school rejection compensated by street knowledge, and unemployment leading to street work, when a community or group are rejected by the wider population, and become a de-valued people, their source of pride and success becomes local and relies upon the local value system. Crime, drug dealing, and teenage pregnancy, become accepted and provable ways in becoming successful.

**4.12** There has been a return to the imagery of the 'underclass' (Tyler 2013), with council estates representing a modern version of Hogarth's Gin Lane, with the two main characters the dangerous and violent gang member and the welfare absorbing single mother. The discourse of the underclass and their assumed lack of common societal values and morality, and their wilful self destruction, and self destructive behaviour begins to represent a real threat to British values and national life, curbed only through punitive measures. Consequently it can be argued that street crime is in many ways a form of slow rioting: by committing crime on your own streets you are less vulnerable to the police than a group of looters, and it is possible that some crime became the safer and private expression of protest against an individual's social position, powerlessness and location (Curtis 1985: 8).

### **August 2011; when the slow became the quick**

**5.1** August 2011 was significant in this neighbourhood but also for the research, I had been involved with the group of men on the estate for almost a year, and was winding up the ethnographic study at the time of the riots. I was focusing upon how disconnected this group of men were from what we might consider everyday society. Employment and paid work featured little in these men's lives, however making money, and having money was all encompassing in their practices, and discussions with each other. Premiership footballers and what they owned, was a constant source for discussion especially those who had come from Nottingham and had similar backgrounds to the men. The rules of boxing and cage fighting, and always football filled up the men's days. In addition, they held substantial and heated discussions with me regarding conspiracy theories usually relating to the relationship between the Freemasons, racism and rap music that they had learned of through videos on YouTube and believed explained their situation of 'being kept down' and not allowed to prosper. The discussion content was usually around the right to carry weapons and protect their territory, grow 'weed' in their 'yards' and not pay taxes to a 'corrupt and racist' elite. There was also a strong and anti-Semitic thread to these discussions, whereby the men believed that it was predominantly the Jews who were to blame for their powerlessness as black men; some of this belief had come through their time spent in jail, but most from the Internet. The investment in conspiracy theories, and the belief that it is deliberate state policy to 'keep them down' and decline their communities has left hopelessness which was sometimes overwhelming for the residents, leaving them as one man told me 'with no fucking room'. This is when I began to understand just how disconnected these men were, and their inability to situate themselves in society in both real and conceptual terms, they were frustrated, and angry, and the concept of slow rioting became useful in my analysis of these men.

**5.2** For two days 8th and 9th of August 2011 there was disorder and rioting within the inner city of

Nottingham. Unlike other cities that were experiencing similar disorder the focus of the anger in Nottingham was the police, several inner city police stations were fire bombed, and police cars were attacked as they drove through the estates. Some of the men I had been involved with I found out the next day in the gym had been caught up in the disturbances and arrested, they have been remanded in jail for the last 8 months awaiting trial. The court has not yet convicted them, although they have been judged by most of the English media, and by almost all of our mainstream politicians and the general public as 'morally bankrupt' and 'feral'. Right wing journalist Max in the Daily Mail (2011) wrote of these and other men involved in the riots: 'Their behaviour on the streets resembled that of the polar bear which attacked a Norwegian tourist camp last week. They were doing what came naturally and, unlike the bear, no one even shot them for it'.

**5.3** The Prime Minister David Cameron (2011) argued in his speech following the riots a week later that 'The riots were not about race, government cuts or poverty. They were about behaviour' and although England had seen some 'sickening acts', the big society was working through the 'Best of British' with the cleanup operation *#riotcleanup* in Tottenham and other areas of the UK, where the local community came out and cleared the streets with their own brooms (see also Jensen 2013; Casey 2013). These comments from media and political discourse are neither surprising nor shocking; neither was the level of crime, anger and violence on the streets during that first week in August 2011. There has been a gradual exclusion, de-valuing and stigmatisation of sections of the British working class for several generations, I have noted over eight years through the narratives of those who live in St Ann's the feelings of powerlessness and the rage which comes out of this level of despair, consequently the community turns in on itself. The residents of poor communities are looking inwards for sanctuary; they find it locally, with the unintended consequences of causing damage to themselves, and their communities.

## Conclusion

**6.1** This paper has attempted to highlight the lives of working class people living through a period of adversity in one council estate, due to the consequences of thirty years of neo-liberal policy on family and working life. Unemployment, stigmatisation, and anger, feelings of utter powerlessness, and a strong sense of identity and community are some of the outcomes of this stigmatisation of the poor. Over several generations there have been some well-intentioned politicians, and some not so well-intentioned, who have treated the disadvantages, and inequalities found within council estates as a matter of morality, blaming the practices of the poor for their poverty, and inflicting terrible levels of symbolic violence on poor neighbourhoods, and people who are already suffering from economic disadvantages.

**6.2** For several generations in the UK there have been boundaries drawn around certain territories: places where the poor live, places one should avoid going if at all possible not because of the poverty in that particular place but because of the behaviour of those who live there. The boundaries drawn around council estates have led to limited space for those who live there. Space can be actual, and also social, linked to value: who has the space to be valued, and become a person of value? And who is limited through class prejudice and class inequality? Consequently, for this section of the working class those who are the least skilled, least educated, and to some extent unlucky, their lives are very much centred upon where they live, and their family and local networks become important, they become recognised and recognisable, and have been re-branded from working class to underclass. They are living through a period in history, which is extremely unstable, they are vulnerable to the market, and rely upon welfare benefits and the state to keep 'their heads just above water'.

**6.3** Although they have been de-valued as useful members of society they find value for themselves locally, and from their adversity they find an identity that is meaningful to them. This structural instability has had massive consequences on family life, men and women find it difficult to be a 'proper family' because it made no economic sense to the family to have a man 'officially' living at the address who was unemployed, or employed in very low paid work. The underground criminal economy thrives in this neighbourhood, as it does in all neighbourhoods, where there is a lack of employment linked to financial autonomy and self respect. Long term joblessness and the proliferation of low pay and part time employment, the widening gap between rich and poor, and dissatisfaction and disillusionment with mainstream politics has meant a build up of internal and internalised social decay.

**6.4** Wacquant (1994, Wacquant 2008) and Curtis (1985) have argued that the concept of slow rioting in the USA seems an appropriate explanation for the anger and apathy, violence and passivity of a group who has been rejected by the wider population, and being somebody within is always valued above being no one, or less than no one on the outside.

**6.5** The slow steps of slow riot in August 2011 gained pace into the quick flashes of energy that is needed to bring people out onto the streets and risk arrest: an opportunity had arisen for this marginalised group in the UK to display their frustration, and anger with the state represented by the police. For almost a week in England people from these marginalised communities attacked, looted, and fire bombed places that symbolised their powerlessness. There was also destruction of property, and looting from people within their own neighbourhoods, which seemed unfathomable to the media, and to wider society. It would have also been to me if I had not spent 2 years with a group of men whom I learned was so disconnected to society, and their existences were so fragmented and fragile that employment and stable family life was beyond their expectations and became aspirations for the future. For these 'riotous subjects', and their value, self respect and dignity came from inside, from a local value system born out of stigmatisation, joblessness, and the lack of space and mobility. Their fear and hopelessness of being abandoned by the rest of society to unfulfilling and difficult existences manifested into an energy which allowed them to have room even if in Nottingham it was for only one night. The question now and for the future is, two years on from the 2011 riots, have those communities which are struggling and suffering slowed the riot and turned it inwards again? And like all good Foxtrots, when and



under what circumstances will the pace quicken?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Notting Hill is a residential area in West London which housed many West Indian Families during the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>2</sup>A Jamaican term used locally on the estate meaning a child's father, not necessarily a current partner.

<sup>3</sup>NG3 is the St Ann's postal code and is often used to talk about the neighbourhood

<sup>4</sup>NG is the postal code for Nottingham

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