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Agitprop Rap?: ‘Ill Manors’ and the Impotent Indifference of Social Protest

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the content and impact of Plan B’s protest song ‘Ill Manors’ which was composed in response to the 2011 English Riots. I argue that, notwithstanding the musical and lyrical brilliance of the song, its political agenda was limited because of the complex socioeconomic climate into which it emerged. By aligning Žižek’s notion of post-politics with Bauman’s concept of the underclass as collateral casualties of consumerism, I investigate how the vestiges of political protest could be seen to be assimilated by liberal capitalist ideology. This chapter shows how articulate musical rage followed a series of inarticulate violent acts formed in an age of political indifference.

Introduction

In *Music and Politics* (2012) John Street argued that the protest song is both a form of political communication and a mode of political representation, and he suggested that the former is only possible because of the latter: “It is not enough to be able to speak up; you must also be able to speak *for* a people or a cause” (2012: 42). This theorization nuances R. Serge Denisoff’s classic but problematic text, *Sing a Song of Social Significance* (1983), where protest songs were defined as either “Magnetic” or “Rhetorical”. “Magnetic” songs, according to Denisoff, attract people to movements and promote group solidarity and “Rhetorical” songs are intended to change public opinion.

In this chapter I will examine Plan B’s protest song ‘Ill Manors’ (2012) which was composed in response to the riots that took place in England in August 2011. The track explores both the causes and the consequences of the riots, focusing on societal attitudes towards an underprivileged youth population. *Guardian* columnist Dorian Lynskey described it as “the first great mainstream protest song in years” (2012). The song, together with an album and feature film of the same name, were part of a project initiated by Plan B that aimed to address what he perceived as an increasingly

alienating class divide. I will focus here only on the song and its accompanying music video (which incorporated actual footage from the riots), although much could be said about the integration of music, narrative, and the rhetoric of protest over the entire *Ill Manors* project.

The central claim I hope to advance is that, despite its musical and lyrical brilliance, the song was neither effective magnetically or rhetorically, or using Street's formulation, that 'Ill Manors' was a masterpiece of political communication that could never succeed in encouraging change because it did not sufficiently realize its potential as a mode of political representation. The reasons for this are complicated but relate to the incoherence surrounding the riots themselves which Winlow and Hall have defined as "both political and apolitical; destructive, but also strangely conformist" (2012: 149). Those who rioted were not driven by an ideological vision or progressive political agenda. There appeared to be no conscious desire to bring about social change or a more equitable world (Carter 2011; Prasad 2011a, 2011b). The riots were ultimately characterized by opportunistic looting with fifty percent of the recorded offences acquisitive in nature (Singh et al. 2012).

In fact, the riots seemed to encapsulate Slavoj Žižek's notion of post-politics where the political is not repressed but foreclosed. Žižek argued that in a post-political age we increasingly see irrational and excessive violence "grounded in no utilitarian or ideological reason" (Žižek 1999: 201; see also Žižek 2008). The anti-capitalist elaboration of this concept by Zygmunt Bauman (2007) and an amplification by Winlow and Hall (2012) provide useful scaffolding to investigate how the vestiges of political protest could be seen to be assimilated by nihilistic consumerism. The incomprehension in the debate surrounding the causes of the riots also muddied the waters. Mainstream politicians predictably denounced the anti-

social criminality as entirely savage and indicative of a society in the throes of moral decay. Prime Minister David Cameron's one-dimensional analysis of the riots was that that they demonstrated "criminality pure and simple" (2011a) and provided evidence of a threatening and amoral underclass. Subsequent analyses revealed a much more complex picture of the motivations, class, age, race, and social make-up of the rioters which was far from uniform or coherent (Rusbridger & Rees 2011).

Emerging from this sometimes contradictory and convoluted discussion, 'Ill Manors' skillfully expressed a subconscious desire for change, but it could not promote group solidarity because there was no group to speak for. The crowd had dispersed and only confused individuals remained who did not understand what, if anything, had unified them in the first place. In short, this was the right song in the wrong place at the wrong time. Plan B's articulate rage followed a series of inarticulate violent acts formed in an age of political indifference. This raises important questions about the impact of the social protest song in a contemporary society where violence carries an implicit admission of impotence. We will consider the mixture of impotence and indifference, how this framed the riots and, consequently, limited the capacity of the song to speak for its cause.

The term agitprop rap is, of course, loaded. I use it in its very broadest sense, referring to political agitation and propaganda through artistic means. It is a form of communication that aims to influence the attitude of the community by focusing on a particular (one-sided) aspect of an argument. Agitprop is a portmanteau of the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the Central Committee Secretariat of the Communist Party in the former Soviet Union which was mounted in the years after the 1917 revolution. It has typically conjured negative connotations. I encourage a broader, perhaps somewhat indulgent, reading here that emphasizes political activism

in an era where there is constant evidence of eroding public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, as well as other signs of public cynicism and lack of trust in politicians. Furthermore, 'Ill Manors' makes extensive and dazzling use of samples derived from Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, popularly known as the Leningrad Symphony (1942). Along with many other artists at the time Shostakovich faced constant censorship and scrutiny. His music was even denounced as 'formalist' by the Soviet authorities and was banned on several occasions (Fay 2000, 2004). Yet the Seventh Symphony with its narrative about the defence of Leningrad from the Nazis during WWII, enhanced his reputation as a Soviet patriot, at least temporarily. The connections between the sampled material and its adapted cultural context provide some insights into the strategies of rhythmic and textural 'agitation' and techniques of irony that are employed in 'Il Manors'.

Riots of Impotence and Indifference

In the summer of 2011, between August 6 and 10, an estimated 13,000–15,000 people were involved in riots in several London boroughs and in cities across England. The riots followed the police shooting of Mark Duggan on August 4. The Metropolitan Police stated that officers were attempting to arrest Duggan—a black male—on suspicion of planning an attack. They stated that he was in possession of a handgun which he had fired first before police acted in response. Subsequent evidence suggested that Duggan was not armed when he was shot. Ballistics tests revealed that a bullet that had lodged in a police officer's radio had in fact come from a police firearm. The incident was immediately referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). Overnight, differing media accounts appeared, some representing Duggan as a 'gangsta' others showing him as a family man.

Unsatisfied with a lack of transparency and clarity surrounding Duggan's death, a protest was arranged by the local Broadwater Farm residents on August 6. The Broadwater Farm estate already had a history of tension between the black community and police and was the scene of riots in 1985 (Gifford 1986). Local community supporters and members of the family, gathered outside Tottenham police station. Initially the protest was peaceful but, later in the evening, violence broke out. Some of this was motivated by racial tension surrounding restrictive law enforcement practices, but increasingly the trigger for the violence became a distant memory as opportunistic looting took hold. By Sunday August 7 the riots had spread to twelve areas within London and by Monday August 8 the riots had spread nationally. Social media was seen as catalysing the unrest with debates surrounding the role of technology resulting in the moniker the "Blackberry Riots" (Economist 2011; Baker 2012). Rioters made use of Blackberry smartphones, whose encrypted Messenger Service allowed private group messages to be sent simultaneously to users' contacts. There were different phases and different motivations for the riots in different places and ultimately the entire series of events was characterized by genuine disorientation (Angel 2012; Goringe & Rosie 2012; Briggs 2012a, 2012b).

The British Prime Minister interrupted his holiday and returned to the UK to oversee the Government response. Police leave was cancelled and Parliament was recalled on August 11 to debate the situation. According to the official report sixty-six areas experienced rioting, five people lost their lives, and widespread arson and looting caused severe damage to businesses and local communities (Singh et al. 2012).

By mid-October there had been 4,000 arrests, 2,000 people had been charged and over 600 cases had already reached a final court outcome, with more than half

resulting in an immediate custodial sentence (Rusbridger & Rees 2011). The legal system was required to work under extraordinary pressure, with all-night court sittings, and the use of severe prison sentences for many of those convicted of riot-related offences.

The outbreak of explanations and solutions was almost as incoherent as the riots themselves, as politicians, journalists, academics and other commentators attempted to make sense of what had happened. The Conservative-led Government were quick to condemn the riots and blame gang culture and moral decay. David Cameron had already referred to “broken Britain” throughout the campaign for the 2010 general election, and thereafter continued to refer to marriage and a stable two-parent family as central to mending a sick society (Mooney & Neal 2010: 145). In a speech outlining the Government’s response to the riots on August 15 Cameron argued that the riots were not about poverty but rather about behavior, perpetrated by “people showing indifference to right and wrong” and with a “twisted moral code”. Cameron was quite sure that many of the rioters had “no father at home”, where it was standard to grow up without a male role model “looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger” (2011b). Key to Cameron’s agenda was reform of the welfare system, because he argued that it encouraged the worst in people who could “be as irresponsible as they like because the State will always bail them out” (2011b). A further extraordinary response from the Justice Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, referred to the rioters as a “feral underclass”.

What I found most disturbing was the sense that the hardcore of rioters came from a feral underclass cut off from the mainstream in everything but its materialism. Equally worrying was the instinctive criminal behaviour of apparently random passers by. ...In my view, the riots can be seen in part as an outburst of outrageous behavior by the criminal classes – individuals and families familiar with the justice system who haven’t been changed by their past punishments (Clarke 2011).

The discourse surrounding poverty and social class in British society, therefore, was grossly simplified and distorted, but did align with some longstanding Conservative political values. By highlighting deviancy and instinctive criminality, a fundamental belief in the concept of pure meritocracy was maintained. The ‘underclass’ existed exclusively through choice and lack of ambition rather than any other root causes, thus emphasizing the role of the individual and absolving the State of any responsibility.

Efforts to present a united front over the riots became strained when the Conservative Party’s coalition partners, The Liberal Democrats, warned of the danger of kneejerk reactions. They had focussed their rhetoric on causes related to dependency and isolation, but also believed that the precise reasons for the various acts of disorder were complicated and needed to be carefully understood. It was only as a concession to the Liberal Democrats that the Prime Minister agreed to a public enquiry. In his contribution to the debate, The Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, said it was important to recognize that both “culture” and “opportunity” (i.e. values and poverty) were determining factors (Miliband 2011). He also emphasized inequality, explaining that the rioters were not the only people guilty of immoral greed, citing several exemplars including bankers taking huge bonuses even as the taxpayer bailed out financial institutions following the subprime mortgage crisis (2008), the MPs expenses scandal (2009), and the News International journalists involved in the phone hacking and bribery scandal (2011). Miliband argued that there was a societal gap “glorifying those who make millions while others struggle to keep up” (Miliband 2011). The discussion surrounding inequality was, of course, especially designed to make Conservative politicians feel uncomfortable, because it had obvious socialist connotations in clear opposition to free market ideology. With each of the

three main political parties taking somewhat predictable positions but also touching on relevant issues, the debate failed to provide any substantial insight into the riots or its underlying causes. The common factor beyond political point scoring was utter incomprehension.

The concept of impotent indifference is one way in which the riots can be understood as simultaneously political and apolitical. The writing of Zygmunt Bauman is particularly helpful in framing this discussion. The consistent use of the term ‘underclass’ in the discourse surrounding the riots would, for Bauman, reinforce his prescient theorization relating to the commodification of the individual and its inevitable impact on society. He argued that the consequence of the new social landscape, where a society of producers had been transformed into a society of consumers, was the creation of a sizeable ‘underclass’ with little or no ability to consume or be consumed.

The ‘underclass’ evokes an image of an aggregate of people who have been declared off-limits in relation to *all* classes and the class hierarchy *itself*, with little chance and no need of readmission: people without a role, making no useful contribution to the lives of the rest, and in principle beyond redemption. People who in a class-divided society form no class of their own, but feed on the life juices of all other classes, thereby eroding the class-based order of society (2007: 123).

Bauman dismantled the controversial concept of an ‘underclass’ as a politically convenient way of grouping an otherwise disparate range of individuals, reduced to a single entity as a parasitic threat to the rest of society. But he went further and argued that ubiquitous consumer values affected all aspects of social life, so that in order to succeed, people had to follow consumerist principles or suffer humiliating exclusion. In a world that evaluates everything by its commodity value the ‘underclass’ were failed consumers, the “walking symbols of the disasters that await fallen consumers” (2007: 124). If, as Bauman suggested, individuals are

connected to the social whole primarily through their capacity as consumers, then the rioters could be understood as “collateral casualties of consumerism” (2007: 117). These were not the riots of an ‘underclass’, these were the riots of “defective and disqualified consumers” (Bauman 2011a).

Others made similar observations about the victory of liberal capitalist ideology (Grover 2011; Moxon 2011; Varul 2011) and argued that the nihilism of the riots may have had the external appearance of protest, but in fact had simply provided evidence of compliance with the underlying values of the free market society. There were, to be sure, deeper symptoms of unresolved social problems, but not *genuine* protest. Somewhat countering and nuancing this viewpoint is one of the most sophisticated and provocative theoretical analyses of the riots to date, provided by criminologists Winlow and Hall who argued that post-modern subjectivity provided a framework for the “profound sense of lack” exhibited by young people (2012: 154). Their insistent dissatisfaction triggered by consistent social and economic marginality stimulated the rage that exploded when an occurrence in the shared social experience provided the catalyst. Frustration at limited opportunities and urban social conditions certainly played a role in framing the riots, but the nihilism of the looting suggested a broader malaise contextualised, but not entirely subsumed, by consumer society. There were underlying political motivations to the riots, but because of an absence of genuine political alternatives “the unconscious dissatisfaction the rioters felt about their place in the world could only be expressed by further engagement with the meaning system of late capitalism” (Winlow & Hall 2012: 162).

The concept of impotent indifference, then, allows us to consider ideas of engagement and disengagement, protest and opportunism, even the sense of ‘moral’ justification that some rioters maintained. Naturally indifference follows impotence,

but both are formed by pointlessness. With a feeling of impotence there is no point in trying because the subject knows they are powerless to effect any change. This leads to indifference where there is no point in trying because the subject is convinced of their own insignificance and no longer cares. In the English riots of 2011 impotent indifference, framed by an increasing sense of marginality, did not mean that the desire for change was absent, rather, the subconscious protest could not find its voice because there was no political opposition to contemporary liberal capitalism and, in any case, nobody really understood this as a problem. So the riots were certainly about inequality, and greed, and opportunism and many other factors, but they were also about the inability to be heard resulting in the inability to speak. As Winlow and Hall stated “the riot is a distraction from the humdrum reality of everyday life, momentarily absorbing, but in the absence of real politics, incapable of yielding the progressive change that the subject subconsciously desires” (2012: 155).

Articulate Musical Rage

Within this framework it is useful to consider Plan B’s assessment of the riots which focused on the urban youth for which he endeavoured to stand up as spokesman, “society needs to take some responsibility for the cause of these riots” (Plan B 2012). He made it clear that he did not condone the riots, but wanted society to understand why so many young people did not feel that they had a future or did not care about receiving a criminal record. He also argued that there was “very public prejudice towards the underclass” which made him and others feel alienated: “These kids have been beaten into apathy. They don’t care about society because society has made it very clear that it doesn’t care about them” (Plan B 2012).

An example of this is the word 'chav' that means council housed and violent, a derogatory phrase that is openly used by certain sectors of middle England to label and define people from poor backgrounds. It's a derogatory phrase no different in my opinion to the ones concerning race or sex. The difference is that the papers use it publicly. If they did the same with racial or sexist derogatory terms it would be deemed, and rightly so, as offensive and politically incorrect (Plan B 2012).

The term 'chav' here is presented as a bacronym, because it was originally derived from the Romany Gypsy word *chavi*, simply meaning child. In its pejorative and stereotypical extension it has become associated with an antisocial subculture of vulgar, poorly educated, lower-class youths who typically wear imitation designer clothes. Several commentators, along with Plan B, have identified the term as an example of highly offensive class abuse (Jones 2012; Toynbee 2011). It is from the perspective as the 'universal chav', playing on middle class nightmares, that Plan B takes an ironic stance to form his acerbic political musical commentary. The aggressive chorus, "Oi! I said oi! What you looking at, you little rich boy!" represents predatory underclass youth, but also puns on the sick society tropes perpetuated by politicians and the media with the recurrent phrase "My Manor's ill" (see Fig. 1. 5 for the song's complete lyrics). The music video contains heavily stylized, caustic images of, for example, Plan B dressed in a 'hoodie' preparing to attack an old lady (Fig. 1.1). The overall strategy is one of satirical distance, perpetuating the stereotype while simultaneously dismantling it. The constant duality is one of the reasons for the song's intensity and insight. By comparison, Bloc Party's song 'Kettling' (2012), for example, also presented the rioters' perspective but was so naively one-sided that it seemed only to glorify violence without providing any depth or critical distance. Plan B, however, repeats the cultural myths and tells us that they are all true, but his tongue is firmly in his cheek as he swaggers his way through a series of unresolved contradictions.

Keep on believing what you read in the papers
Council estate kids, scum of the earth
Think you know how life on 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 step foot out the 'burbs



Fig. 1.1. Plan B “Get you bloody tools out”



Fig. 1.2. Leader of the Pack

Allan Moore reminds us that “... a musical persona, from whom the protest comes, always exists within a musical environment” (2013: 397). This seems especially relevant to ‘Ill Manors’ where a musical as well as a lyrical analysis reveals how rigorously rhythm and texture are controlled to generate an underlying, simmering tension in the verses that leads inexorably to musical explosions in the

choruses.

The musical material in 'Ill Manors' features samples taken from Shostakovich's 7th Symphony. This was not an original idea, as Peter Fox's song 'Alles Neu' (2008) employed virtually identical accompaniment. A comparison of these two tracks is beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice to say that borrowing as homage is a common practice in Hip Hop. We can also observe that Peter Fox's track is much more aspirational and is much less concerned with rhythmic and timbral agitation than 'Ill Manors'.

One wonders if Plan B was aware of the context of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, which was dedicated to the citizens of Leningrad who had suffered relentless German bombardment during WWII. Shostakovich hoped that the Symphony would receive its first performance in Leningrad, but the première was held in Kuybishev and performed by the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra in March 1942 because both the Leningrad Philharmonic and Shostakovich had been evacuated. The propagandist potential of the Symphony was fully understood and it was quickly adopted as a symbol of heroic struggle with repeat performances in several Soviet cities. Anti-Fascist sympathizers in the West also saw the Symphony as an important icon of resistance. A microfilm of the score eventually found its way out of the Soviet Union and the piece was performed by Sir Henry Wood in June 1942 at the Proms in London and then in July by Arturo Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in New York. The Symphony was first performed in Leningrad in August 1942 while the city was still under siege. With the Radio Orchestra down to only fourteen players, the city mustered the performance by recalling musical reinforcements from the front. In an audacious example of psychological warfare, this performance was defiantly broadcast to the German forces (Fay 2000: 133).

The sampled material in 'Ill Manors' is derived from a rather isolated section in the fourth movement between measures 337–367. There are obvious surface links that could be made to a city under siege, or a call to arms in the face of relentless assault. More interesting, however, is the way that the agitation and claustrophobia contained within the sampled material itself is amplified to generate a sense of relentless tension.

Figure 1.3 shows how the sampled Shostakovich material is applied. Verse 1 and Verse 2 are alternating two measure phrases that form the musical accompaniment throughout the verses. The immediate challenge is to find a way to fit Shostakovich's 'irregular' 7/4 patterns into a 4/4 song structure, a process that inherently generates a sense of internal rhythmic dissonance. Different cells of sampled material derived from measures 337 and 343 are combined and their organization emphasizes waves of rhythmic tension and release. There is clear demarcation of the beat at the beginning and ends of the two bar phrases and disruptive rhythmic syncopation in the middle. In Figure 1.3 this is represented by crosses showing strong beat reinforcement and dotted lines indicating rhythmic dissonance against the beat. The basic musical pattern used throughout the song is, therefore, inherently unstable and generates a sense of insistent unease. A half-time drum pattern frames the nervous energy created through the sampled sources. Furthermore, Plan B's 'flow', or the rhythmic style of rapping, seamlessly shifts between "speech effusive" and "percussion effusive" styles (Krimms 2000: 48–54) with moments of rhythmic stability contrasted with rapid acceleration. Overall this creates three multi-faceted, constantly shifting, rhythmic layers between the voice, drums and instrumental accompaniment.

The concept of rhythmic dissonance is further developed in the immediate

build to the chorus where it is as if Shostakovich's 7/4 figures can no longer be contained within the 4/4 rhythmic structure. At the bottom of Figure 1.3 the sample construction of the four measures before each chorus are shown. Derived from repetitions of Shostakovich's measure 337, the dotted boxes show appearances of the seven-beat motif that vies for rhythmic dominance against the 4/4 pulse. The song's symmetrical drum pattern and the asymmetrical samples trip over each other resulting in a powerful sense of escalation on the journey towards the chorus.

III Manors: Verse 1

III Manors: Verse 2

Shostakovich: measure 343

Shostakovich: measure 337

III Manors: Build to Chorus

The figure displays a musical score for the 'III Manors' section of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, Fourth Movement. The score is presented in three parts, each with annotations indicating structural elements and relationships. The first part, 'III Manors: Verse 1', shows a sequence of notes with a solid box around the first two measures and a dashed box around the last two. The second part, 'III Manors: Verse 2', shows a similar sequence with a solid box around the first two measures and a dashed box around the last two. The third part, 'III Manors: Build to Chorus', shows a sequence of notes with a solid box around the first two measures and a dashed box around the last two. A central section shows 'Shostakovich: measure 343' and 'Shostakovich: measure 337' with similar annotations. Arrows indicate the flow and relationships between these sections.

Figure 1. 3: 'III Manors' Sample Construction Derived from Shostakovich Symphony No. 7, Fourth Movement.

If these are minor skirmishes, then the build up to the final chorus results in an almighty explosion. To demonstrate this we can use a sonogram analysis. This is a visual representation of the spectrum of frequencies in a sound as they vary over time. The vertical axis represents frequency (from low to high, 0 to 22000 Hz), the horizontal axis represents time (mins/secs), and a third aspect indicating the amplitude of frequencies at particular times is represented by the intensity or color of each point in the image. Fig. 1.4 shows the build up to and the beginning of the final chorus between 02:47–03:12. Only the instrumental accompaniment is shown in the sonogram itself, the text of the vocal parts appears above. Initially the mangled sound groans at the lower end of the spectrum, the first and only time in the track where the instrumental frequency range is intensely concentrated well below 4000 Hz. Four heightened snare drum strikes then cut through the texture, leading to an intense accumulation of sound covering the entire frequency spectrum (20000 Hz is generally considered the upper range of human hearing). This accumulative spectral tension is further emphasized by the interplay between Plan B and the crowd. Throughout the song, both visually and aurally, Plan B has been presented as the leader of the crowd (see Fig. 1.2). Typically, his solo rapping in the verses is contrasted with the entry of the group who join him in the choruses. In the last section, this interplay is further developed with increasingly rapid call and response between the crowd and the rapper that eventually merges into one collective body before the entire crowd bellows the final chorus.

There is much to commend in the articulate musical rage of this bold, politically incisive, protest song. Its bellicose lyrics play with ironic distance and its agitated, unsettled rhythmic and textural development acts as a visceral representation of underlying tension that relentlessly and unavoidably leads to rupture.

Conclusions

'Ill Manors' is a musical and lyrical masterpiece of political communication, but I have also argued that the song could not act as a mode of political representation in the climate of impotence and indifference into which it emerged. On April 7 2012 the song entered the UK singles chart at number six but dropped to number twenty-three the following week and then rapidly descended out of the top forty. At the time of writing it's official music video had the lowest You Tube hit rate of the UK's top twenty songs from April 2012; this included two 'local' artists Olly Murs and Rizzle Kicks. By aligning itself with the rioters, the song presented a specific perspective that was intended to galvanize a marginalized youth and open the eyes of middle England towards the impact of some of its own prejudices. The song sought to challenge the notion of the 'underclass' which still underpins discourses of disadvantage and poverty in the UK. Yet, perceptions of Britain's disenfranchised youth have not changed, there does not appear to be an alternative perspective.

However unreasonable and mistaken the actions of the rioters were, the mediatization and politicization of the riots further entrenched beliefs in a maladjusted, defective and broken society that have not been shaken. Perhaps it is unfair to expect music to bear the responsibility for changing these kinds of attitudes. Protest songs probably do not have such an overarching degree of influence, but they are more likely to make an impact when there is an underlying consensus, or when a song identifies something that has been persistently troubling society. The successful protest song emerges at the perfect moment and seems to express the core values that a community had been unable to articulate before it appeared. The identification with a specific socio-economic group in 'Ill Manors' was both necessary and problematic, necessary because the majority of the rioters did come from impoverished

communities, but equally problematic because the riots were infinitely more complicated than a rich-boy-politicians-versus-poor-kids narrative. Even though these ideas were skillfully placed within an ironic musical context, irony is a very dangerous weapon when riots seem like a parody of political activism, or when political responses to the riots seem like a parody of public engagement.

The issues at the heart of 'Ill Manors', however, are profound and worthy of further debate. The sense of social unease that Bauman and others have identified was both the provocative initial spur and the reason for the ultimate weakness of 'Ill Manors'. Bauman argued that the "underclass is not merely an absence of community; it is the sheer *impossibility of community*" (2011b: 152). Following the English riots of 2011, there was no self-conscious community to stand up for. The rioters were not actively pursuing a progressive political agenda, many were unable to reconcile their actions. In this sense, both the riots and the musical response expressed "a spirit of revolt without revolution" (Žižek 2011), an explosion of anger that could only be disappointingly self-defeating.

Postscript

On January 8 2014 the inquest into the death of Mark Duggan reported its findings. By a majority of eight to two the jury found that Duggan was "lawfully killed by police", yet eight members of the jury also stated they were sure that Duggan "did not have a gun in his hand" when he was shot (<http://dugganinquest.independent.gov.uk>). At the time of writing, Mark Duggan's family are appealing the decision against police practices following the fatal shooting.

Fig. 1. 5. 'Ill Manors' Lyrics

Verse

Let's all go on an urban safari
We might see some illegal migrants
Oi look there's a chav
That means council housed and violent
He's got a hoodie on give him a hug
On second thoughts don't you don't wanna get mugged
Oh sh*t too late that was kinda dumb
Whose idea was that... stupid ***t
He's got some front, ain't we all
Be the joker, play the fool
What's politics, ain't it all
Smoke and mirrors, April fools?
All year round, all in all
Just another brick in the wall
Get away with murder in the schools
Use four letter swear words cause we're cool
We're all drinkers, drug takers
Every single one of us burns the herb
Keep on believing what you read in the papers
Council estate kids, scum of the earth
Think you know how life on 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 step foot out the burbs
Truth is here, we're all disturbed
We cheat and lie its so absurd
Feed the fear that's what we've learned
Fuel the fire, let it burn

Chorus

Oi! I said oi!
What you looking at, you little rich boy!
We're poor round here, run home and lock your door
Don't come round here no more, you could get robbed for
Real (yeah) because my manor's ill
My manor's ill
For real
(Yeah) you know my manor's ill, my manor's ill!

Verse

You could get lost in this concrete jungle
New builds keep springing up outta nowhere
Take the wrong turn down a one way junction
Find yourself in the hood nobody goes there
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
Give us free money and we don't pay any tax
NHS healthcare, yes please, many thanks

People get stabbed round here, there's many shanks
Nice knowing someone's got our backs when we get attacked
Don't bloody give me that
I'll lose my temper
Who closed down the community centre?
I kill time there used to be a member
What will I do now until September?
School's out, rules out, get your bloody tools out
London's burning, I predict a riot
Fall in fall out
Who knows what it's all about
What did that chief say? Something 'bout the kaisers
Kids on the street no they never miss a beat, never miss a cheap
Thrill when it comes their way
Let's go looting
No not Luton
The high street's closer, cover your face
And if we see any rich kids on the way
We'll make 'em wish they stayed inside
Here's a charge for congestion, everybody's gotta pay
Do what Boris does, rob them blind

Chorus

Transition

We've had it with these politicians
You bloody rich kids never listen
There's no such thing as broken Britain
We're just bloody broke in Britain
What needs fixing is the system
Not shop windows down in Brixton
Riots on the television
You can't put us all in prison!

Chorus

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