

The Vigilant(e) Parent and the Paedophile: The News of the World Campaign 2000 and the Contemporary Governmentality of Child Sexual Abuse

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Between 1821 and 1824 Theodore Gericault (1791-1824) attempted to capture on canvas the faces of various 'monomanias', including a portrait of a 'man with the "monomania" of child kidnapping'(1822-3) which was recently exhibited in London as part of the *Spectacular Bodies* exhibition (Hayward Gallery, 2000). The exhibition traced, inter alia, the development of the aestheticisation of insanity through technologies of knowledge production. To the modern eye there is nothing especially significant or noteworthy about this monomaniac's appearance beyond looking rather miserable and forlorn, but the series of portraits, instigated by Dr Etienne-Jean Georget of the asylum at Ivry, were explicitly attempting to present certain typical features. In this instance, 'the haunted, sideways glance, asymmetrical sag of the mouth and hollow cheeks' were indicative of his type, the child abductor (Kemp and Wallace, 2000:126). As the exhibition illustrated, photography soon took the place of painting, and the nineteenth century saw the development of this practice of depicting madness, with Jean-Martin Charcot famously building his career on the production of such representations, establishing his photographic unit at the hospital of the Salpatriere in Paris, and writing and lecturing on the 'visual iconography of the insane'. In Britain Francis Galton studied photographic portraits of criminals from the Home Office and, arguing that 'natural classes' of individuals appeared, produced his composite photographs that purported to illustrate the typical face of each grouping – one of which were sexual offenders. In Italy, Cesare Lombroso combined a reading of evolutionary theory with his studies of the human skull and his use of photographic portraits to present his notorious argument that criminals were atavistic, throwbacks from an earlier period, whose status as such was betrayed by their physiognomy. Presented here in London 2000 for their historical curiosity, his photographic tables showing the faces of Italian and German criminals were initially presented in 1889 under the title 'the Anthropology of the Criminal' with the criminal's name printed underneath each of the sixty eight portraits.

Readers of Michel Foucault's work are alert to the tensions between individualisation and the creation of 'types' within disciplinary settings (see especially, 1975, 1988). Foucault has pointed to the rise of disciplinary techniques that produce detailed information about individuals as both specific individuals or cases and as instances of a categorical type about whom knowledge can be collected and circulated as information, and which can be used in turn in the identification and governance of others of the same type. In the few well known examples discussed above, one can trace the development of certain aesthetic techniques (portraiture, photography, composites, mounting) that required the disciplining of the individual bodies of their subjects (to sit still for the artist or the camera, to face front, and so on) and that were enlisted into the service of an institutionally-based knowledge production based on the certainties of being able to depict types of deviance (as discussed by *inter alia*, Rose, 1998). Furthermore, these examples clarify the sense in which this period saw a move from the depiction of the individual visage or body as 'merely' exemplary to the development of a theoretical plane that placed and rendered an individual instance comprehensible within intersecting theories and disciplines that were thereby initiated, developed or confirmed. Thus Lombroso placed his table of images under a title referring to anthropology and purported to add weight to theories of evolution; he is also remembered for his furtherance of a form of eugenics while nevertheless he is regarded as an important figure within a discipline we now know as criminology.

Analysing changes in the complex by which child sexual abuse and abusers have been governed requires attention to the changing ways in which certain subjects are problematised, to use Foucault's 'barbaric' word. It requires attention to the techniques and knowledges by which the topic is constituted as such, to the power complexes that surround it and to the subjects that emerge from these relations and their attendant techniques. Those who have adopted such an approach have paid attention to the techniques by which child abuse becomes known within disciplines (such as medicine, psychology, or social work) to the techniques by which the population at risk is constituted and governed (through the rationalities of law, social work and police practice) and to the variety of subjects or figures that emerge from such discursive practices (such as the child abuser, the child at risk, the seductive child, the colluding mother, the hesitant social worker) (Bell, 1993; Hacking, 1992; Radcliffe, 2001; Smart, 1999). Adopting a 'Foucauldian' approach, however, does not lead one's research on such a topic in a unilinear direction, since the questions asked and the lines traced will depend not only on the interests and proclivities of the researcher but also crucially on the framing of the issue. How one decides to frame the contemporary production and government of child abuse will be of utmost import insofar as the disciplinary sites and human activities (and therefore the subjects, knowledges and techniques) at and around which the topic has been problematised are multiple. That is, within schools, hospitals, on the streets, at home, at work, indeed in all domains of public and private life, and especially at the boundary between the two, contact with children is governed by law and by various context specific guidelines. 'Popular' forms of governance, through media attention, advice offered to parents and literary forms, will also be part of the contemporary problematisation of child sexual abuse, as will, over the past few decades, feminist challenges, practices and knowledge production. Where one begins and ends one's exploration, therefore, will be crucially important.

In order to make some commentary on the contemporary British government of child sexual abuse, I want to begin my exploration with a contemporary instance of the public display of the faces of criminal(ised) men (and some women). As my preamble suggests, the use of photographic techniques and their arrangement in tables has long been part and parcel of the development of knowledge about criminality, but while the *Spectacular Bodies* exhibition displayed such tables as intriguing historical displays, the table with which I begin was printed in a national newspaper in 2000. Looking remarkably like Lombroso's table of criminals, these photographs were printed in a national Sunday newspaper, the News of the World, with the ostensible aim of informing the public of the appearance, age, crime, punishment and whereabouts of those who had been convicted of a variety of offences grouped by the newspaper and the ensuing furore under the term 'paedophilia'. This campaign, which came to be known as the 'name and shame' campaign, presented these tables not as scientific evidence nor within the development of a theory of insanity, but as a form of public information, presenting information that had been deemed by official bodies involved in governing child sexual abuse(rs) too dangerous to be made publicly available. The newspaper's intervention caused a storm of controversy in Britain, which focussed principally on the contested rationalities of present modes of government of child sexual abuse and abusers, with politicians, journalists, police chiefs, lawyers, pressure groups and parents engaged in protracted and vociferous debates.¹

The campaign was launched in the aftermath of the abduction and murder of an eight year old girl in West Sussex, England, who went missing on the short walk across a field to her grandparents' home after playing with her siblings. Every day the national media reported on developments in the search to try to find her, and her parents and siblings made appeals to her and to the public to help in her safe return. The discovery of Sarah Payne's body on July 18 was met with widespread sorrow, and an estimated 30 000 people visited the site where she was found, many to lay flowers in her memory. In this period of heightened emotion, the News of the World published the photographs to which I refer to above with the front page headline reading: 'If you're a parent you must read this: Named, Shamed' and the text continuing 'There are 110, 000 child sex offenders in Britain, one for every square mile. The murder of Sarah Payne has proved police monitoring of these perverts is not enough. So we are revealing WHO they are and WHERE they are ... starting today'(23/7/2000, p1).

This was the beginning of the campaign which saw the weekly paper publish the photographs, names and locations of convicted child sexual offenders and which it vowed to continue: 'week in week out we will add to our record so that every parent in the land can have the RIGHT to know where these people are living.'(23/7/2000, p2). As well as publishing these 'tables', as it turned out on only one further occasion

¹ The arguments that follow from a commentary based on reading selected newspapers from the period – the News of the World, for its key role, The Mirror as an example of a tabloid paper and The Guardian as an example of a 'quality' broadsheet newspaper. I have also consulted BBC news on-line archives. In the first two sections, I am not arguing that the newspapers point to this analysis, but rather that these theoretical thoughts render a certain reading of the coverage. In the third section I am presenting a reading of constructions of the mothers based on these papers reportage.

(30/7/2000), the News of the World made certain demands for legal changes, specifically public access to the sexual offenders register, a form of the States' 'Megan's law', which the paper called 'Sarah's law'. Furthermore, despite the newspaper's request for readers not to engage in vigilante actions, one group of mothers on the Paulsgrove housing estate in Hampshire received much media attention as they organised local parents in nightly marches, holding 'vigils' outside the homes of those known 'paedophiles' on their estate and protesting at the housing of those convicted of child sexual offences in their locale. One mother explained that in the wake of Sarah Payne's murder 'The mums decided we had to do something. Someone said that one lived there and we started marching.' (The Mirror, 11/8/2000, p9). Each night over the course of the next week, they marched through their housing estate. Over the next few weeks, stories of the actions of mothers 'turned vigilantes' were widely reported, mostly focussing on Paulsgrove estate but also elsewhere, as well as stories of convicted sexual offenders fleeing their homes, being confronted by angry mobs, having property or relatives attacked and, a fortnight or so after the News of the World campaign began, taking their own lives. Official response, and that of the 'quality' newspapers, was to express sympathy with the mothers' sentiments but to decline support of the campaign's demands or the actions of the mothers and their prompting of 'vigilante' attacks. Pressure mounted on the News of the World to halt the campaign, which they did, claiming victories at least in terms of the level of public support received and the discussions they had instigated between 'powerful agencies' such as the Association of Chief Police Officers, the NSPCC, NACRO, the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (NOW, 6/8/2000, p6). The parents at Paulsgrove also suspended their protests, but gathered at least once more, holding a candlelit vigil, as well as discussing strategy and taking part in meetings with their local council.

It is important how we remember these events, and to recognise that there is never just one account. Thus although it would not be untrue to argue, as does Haug (2001), that this was an occasion on which the public were whipped up by the newspaper in question into a storm of anger in the midst of which the figure of 'the paedophile' became a monster for our times who was depicted as simultaneously everywhere and as existing on the other side of rational, healthy and normal life, such an account does not give attention to various other aspects of the context which I believe are important to its analysis. Of course it is important to look at the way the figure of 'the paedophile' emerged in these debates. In particular I would argue that it is important to note that no one ventured an interpretation of the images in terms of *types* and indeed, the images themselves received no comment, suggesting that in the public imagination at least the 'paedophile' has lost any ability to be rendered into credible knowledge; no one seemed to be interested within this debate in pursuing a theoretical explanation of child sexual abuse, psychological, feminist, cultural or otherwise, that might be able to make pronouncements on the characteristics of the child sexual abuser as a type beyond the fact that he was understood throughout as likely to commit repeated offences.² He has become, once again, an individual instance rather than an example of a type or an illustration of a theory. This was true both

² Indeed, it was the perception of the high risk of re-offending sexual offenders, rather than child sexual abuse in general, that the parents protests were about, addressed to the authorities who

within both a 'populist' discourse and an opposing 'liberal' one. In the first 'the paedophile' was referred to by many as unintelligible, monstrous, evil, diseased, and perverted – eg. amidst the many examples, in The Mirror 'these people ... are inflicted with an incurable disease, the most terrifying disease there is' (18/7/2000, p4); in the News of the World 'for these evil perverts there must be no hiding place' (16/7/2000, p6) and 'Does a monster live near you?' (23/7/2000, p2) - in ways that drew a line between him and normal individuals casting him a constant and irredeemable danger, existing within the realm of the inhuman and the unknowable. In the opposing 'liberal' discourse he was understood as an offender who like any other, the sexual nature of the crime notwithstanding, has human rights such that he should be given the benefit of attempts at rehabilitation and resettlement with anonymity.³ Furthermore, it is important that home and family, cornerstones of ideologies that feminists have repeatedly critiqued, emerged intact, with 'the paedophile' understood as a figure existing outside the home, where the main danger to children was understood to lie by the dominating discourses.⁴

However, it is also important to consider the context in which this figure appears, and in particular I wish to suggest that a focus on the figure of the mother/parent and these parents' actions, is as significant in the analysis of these events as a focus on the constitution of 'the paedophile'. Moreover, as feminists, it is incumbent upon us to consider the actions of the women protesters beyond an understanding of them as the reactionary dupes of a profit-seeking media. And this especially so given the fact that feminism has wanted to get child sexual abuse understood as widespread and as a serious matter, and the fact that feminist politics often implicitly endorses forms of direct action by women 'doing something' by taking up public space and the attention of the public sphere. In this article, therefore, I will follow a few of the many avenues of exploration that one might pursue in relation to the contemporary problematisation of child sexual abuse through these events, with a focus on the parents/mothers. In the first section I argue that one can understand the episode in terms of a legitimisation crisis in the contemporary governmentality of child sexual abuse which resulted from the questioning of the specific role that parents are required to adopt within its rationalities. The depiction of the parents' protests as vigilante action is therefore overdetermined by the contemporary position in which parents are required to act as risk-assessing - and therefore as ever vigilant - parents. I argue that how the line between the vigilant and the vigilante is constituted and governed in

would not share the knowledge they had about who had offended in the past and therefore who was understood to be likely to offend in the future.

³ Although rehabilitation programmes may contain theoretical constructions of child sexual abusers, the liberal discourse does not embrace any theory in particular, but merely insists that each offender is an individual human being so that society has some duty to respond to and contain him. Re-offending becomes a crucial issue in each of these discourses, in the first for its indication of a disease that has not been, and often the implication is that it cannot be, cured, and in the second because it indicates a failure of the institutions of society to successfully police and contain these individuals.

⁴ This despite the fact that those child sexual offenders in the photographs and those whose homes were surrounded, were frequently reported as themselves having wives and children, and despite the numbers of incidents of men killing their partners and children whose reportage surrounded these stories on the pages of the tabloid newspapers.

'normal' circumstances depends upon the level of trust that is generated in parents, understood in turn as their faith in both a basic general level of security of the society in which they parent and the information that is available to them by which to make risk-assessments with regard to their children's safety. In the second section, I argue that this 'crisis' was averted by the reestablishment of lines of government between parents, the public sphere, public agencies/institutions and government so that the danger posed to contemporary rationalities passed over. As well as drawing upon the depictions of the parents as irrational, this re-establishment involved interesting discursive manoeuvres with respect to notions of 'the public'. In the third section, I pose the question suggested above: given the image of strong women challenging the state, what happens if we attempt to view the mothers' actions through a feminist lens?

I. Legitimation Crisis in a 'Risk' Society

Within sociology, much has been written about 'risk society' and its operations. According to the thesis proposed by Ulrich Beck in *Risk Society* (1992), the language and procedures of our government and self-government in the developed world can be characterised as forms of risk assessment. Decisions made at the level of government, community or individual tend to be approached as and couched within the terms of risk, so that, inter alia, the effect is such that in order to make and to articulate a decision in life, individuals receive and respond to abstracted forms of knowledge, calculate risk and respond according to that calculation. Decisions ranging from whether to immunise our children to whether to take an umbrella on our walk involve balancing risks and making judgements based on probabilities. To put a Foucauldian gloss on this argument, one might say that individuals are encouraged to constitute themselves as risk-assessing subjects who receive knowledge, whether bidden or unbidden, and who proceed according to their response to that knowledge. Nikolas Rose has drawn attention to the 'relentless imperative of risk management' (1999:160) as it has spread to encompass not only matters of personal insurance (pensions, health insurance and the like), where it has belonged historically, but also matters of lifestyle management.

Reading these trends toward 'risk assessment' culture through the prism of Jacques Donzelot's (1979) *The Policing of Families*, furthermore, one begins to develop a perspective on them as they relate to the government of families and the constitution of the modern parent. Donzelot argued that the position of the parent within governmental strategies has developed historically as the functions of parenting have transferred to the State, while the latter relies on the family as a principal site through which to deliver its good government of the citizenry and future citizens (children); the state therefore governs through the family and promises a certain autonomy to the family in return for its co-operation. Within the recent and contemporary government of the family, one could argue, the parental role has remained key for the implementation of policy decisions and political imaginations generally, while parents are invited to consider themselves independent of the state at least in familial matters.

Within contemporary Britain, one could argue, parents and especially mothers, are invited and expected to engage in an escalating number of risk assessments in relation to their children's health,

education, psychological development and safety, and to practise rational parenting. Enabled in their task by information by a variety of official and unofficial experts and their range of knowledges (doctors and health visitors, OFSTED tables, developmental psychologists, pamphlets suggesting healthy eating and home safety tips, advice columns and web-sites for parents, self-help books and groups and so on), parents are entrusted with the care of the future generation while the government, relieved of the close management of this task, has only to provide a context of basic security, the institutional settings required (eg. for health and education) along with general standardised forms of guidance from a distance. No one is unaware that the whole system operates with a certain level of threat. The consequences of approaching the parenting role inadequately would mean the balance of power becomes sharply asymmetrical. But for the most part this mode of government works not by surveillance and dictate but by providing a basic general level of security, information required for good parenting (and risk-assessments), and a sense of familial autonomy.

The events of summer 2000 can be understood as what one might term a legitimisation crisis, in the Habermasian sense, around this risk assessment culture within which parents perform their 'independent' parenting roles. The News of the World campaign envisioned a mode of government whose rationality was dramatically at odds with the ways in which the British public have been officially invited to respond to child sexual abuse since it became an issue spoken about in the public sphere at all. As opposed to relying upon the rational assessment of risk – which parents are advised is small – and in addition to the adoption of safeguarding techniques – ranging from teaching children not to accept gifts from strangers to techniques by which to teach children learn the difference between different sorts of touches and how to create an atmosphere in which they are able to speak about unpleasant feelings or experiences – the newspaper campaign implied that the risk was great and the perpetrators so numerous that parents need *specific* information about individuals in their local area so that they can teach their children to avoid *specific* individuals, not (just) specific types or categories (such as strange old men with sweets, or those who have unsupervised access to their children). According to this reading, the parents involved in the Paulsgrove protests and their supporters were staging a protest that contested the positioning of parents within the rationalities by which child sexual abuse and abusers are governed. The challenge was levied, first, on the basis that generalised information and statistics do not give *enough specific* information to assess the localised risks that faced their children. Secondly, it was levied on the basis that the parents no longer had faith in the government's own assessment of risk from those individualised already criminalised for sexual offences. Consequently they no longer had faith in the provision of a basic level of security within which parents are supposed to make their assessments.

As such, the campaign and the members of the public who protested according to its logic, were not only attacking the sources of the danger as they understood it embodied in the 'paedophiles' but were also explicitly attacking the governmentality by which child sexual abuse and abusers are presently governed. In order to be good parents and to safeguard our children, they argued, we need the hard facts – the who and where – of individual threats, not the interpretation of aggregated national statistics and expert guidelines

for creating good parenting techniques and safe neighbourhoods. The Mirror's editorial, which wavered in its reaction to the News of the World's campaign, nevertheless stated the point clearly: 'Ordinary families want one thing and one thing only – the right to know if their children are in danger from convicted perverts. The only way to deliver that assurance is to open the sex offenders register to public scrutiny.'(4/8/2000, p6).

To fuel its demand for specific information through access to the public register, the News of the World reported stories from various States in America where access is more publicly available and in which children had been 'saved' from paedophiles in their area, including one of a woman who had recognised a neighbour on a police internet site. He was subsequently arrested for violating his probation and admitted fantasising about children in the area (23/7/2000, p4). In contrast to these stories, reports reminded readers of cases in Britain where children have been killed by known abusers. For example, The Mirror carried the story of a ten year old girl who was killed in West Yorkshire by a known paedophile who had moved onto her estate, and contrasted Megan's law with a Britain where 'we tip toe around criminals with grandiose plans of rehabilitation'(26/7/2000, p9).⁵

Despite the resemblance between the News of the World's pages of photographs and the tables of Lombroso, therefore, the photographs that appeared in 2000 did so within a very different power-knowledge complex. They appeared without any resultant argument about 'types' theories or causes. Indeed, theories such as Lombroso's are rejected in the presentation of the criminal as *unknowable* through general information such as that which founds 'expert' knowledge. Besides, the argument ran, in terms of giving the public information, generalised theories of atavistic leanings, or of abusers' childhoods or Oedipal difficulties for that matter, are unimportant; all the public needs, they declared, is the simple information as to which particular neighbours to avoid.⁶

Given that the contemporary rationalities by which child sexual abuse and abusers are governed are profoundly at odds with the way the News of the World campaign and its supporters were figuring the need for information and the possibilities of risk assessment, one would expect the official response to be dismissive. In the debates that followed, the task facing the 'official' line, and the one taken by the Home

⁵ Journalist Sue Carroll used the opportunity for an unnecessary comparison with protests against section 28 when she suggested that perhaps it is time that those who had 'devoted so much time to the repeal of Section 28 [that forbids the promotion of homosexuality within local government] a crime [stet] that concerns a minority but does not strike at the heart of the average voter, might like to invest their energy into the question of how we deal with paedophiles.'(26/7/2000, p9).

⁶ This is not to say that no such 'theoretical' accounts were expressed. In the News of the World an 'expert on cases of child abduction' was quoted as saying that 'once a paedophile starts to offend they have urges that don't go away. Such behaviour will have its seeds in childhood where the person will most probably have been sexually abused himself. This will start a cycle of fantasy...' (23/7/2000, p5). But these accounts were rather muted across the reportage, and here for example is used to argue for his incurability and dangerousness, rather than in order to understand his behaviour.

Secretary Jack Straw and home office minister Paul Boatman, was to reaffirm the need to limit public knowledge to anonymised and generalised knowledge, with access to detailed knowledge reserved for governmental and legal bodies. In countering the fundamental challenge that the newspaper and the protesting parents represented, their response was to present the campaign and the protests as themselves representing the danger, both to individuals and to democratic justice. The parents, mostly mothers, who were arguing that their desire to be vigilant parents was being undermined by policies which refused them information, were quickly cast as vigilantes. Acting as they were from their personal situations of partial and emotional connection with their own children, they were easily cast as having a volatile interest that was properly distinct from the overall and sober view that government must take.

Other newspapers tended to report the protests along these lines, depicting them as excessive eruptions of ungovernable irrational sentiment. The day after the News of the World began its campaign, for example, The Guardian reported several incidents, under the headline 'Innocents suffer when law of the lynch mob takes hold'(24/7/2000, p3), where child sexual offenders had been attacked or had killed themselves, where men had been wrongly identified as 'paedophiles', and where mobs had acted 'irrationally', in order to argue that the campaign would lead to 'vigilante actions'. A week later The Guardian reported that a group of sixty people waving banners, throwing paint and shouting abuse at a house in Plymouth that was wrongly identified as home to a paedophile (31/7/2000). The Guardian leader on 11/8/2000 made reference to the lessons to be found in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar – 'a mob, once roused, will not easily be stood down' – and reflected on the Paulsgrove 'anti-paedophilia protests' arguing that while there was justification for their anger and fear, their actions were both dangerous and *uncivilised*:

'Either way we just want them out of here' said one of the protesters' leaders on Wednesday. What might be the evidence against someone convicted of no crime? 'Word of mouth', she said. *What might count elsewhere as the basic principles of civilised society are a foreign language in Paulsgrove.*

This, then, is the real meaning of social exclusion. Thousands of estates have been allowed to become dustbins for the rest of society, out of sight and, until a moment like this one, out of mind. Now they are getting together, bonding as a community – if not quite the way the prime minister and all his communitarian rhetoric envisaged. *There are dangers here*, and not just from those who abuse children.'(emphasis added)

On 9/8/2000 a headline in The Mirror read 'Vigilante Britain: paedophile kills himself after mob attacks his home' reporting on the suicide of a 50 year old man the day before he was due to appear in court accused of assaulting a girl of four. Although he was not named in the News of the World campaign, he had been subject to threats and an angry crowd had gathered outside his home in North Manchester after he had appeared in court admitting three indecent assaults on young girls. His lawyer said he was 'terrified out of his wits by a newspaper name and shame campaign in the wake of Sarah Payne's murder.'(p17). On the same page a photograph depicts three of the mothers and a man at the Paulsgrove estate, arms crossed in defiance, displaying a union jack flag on which is scrawled 'Paedophiles – a child never forgets why should you'. Two days later the paper writes 'Police have pleaded for an end to this vigilante action but the women here are a force to be reckoned with.'(The Mirror, 11/8/2000, p9)

The parents' group protests were understood by no one as serious political engagements, but as either reactive protests or vigilante actions, depending on one's point of view, performed by those who felt threatened and decided instead to be threatening. One woman, 'Angela Pettinger, 46, a tough-talking mother of four' who became 'a figurehead in the nightly demonstrations' reportedly said that if the mothers laid their hands on a suspect, he 'would be lynched'; 'if they touched one of mine', she continues, 'I'd do time for it' (The Mirror, 11/8/2000, p9). Another woman, speaking after a crowd had attacked the home and car of a man who had 'abused 140 youngsters', said 'we'd have ripped him to pieces.' (The Mirror, 5/8/2000, p8). The language and provocative tactics of the mothers, that were potentially and actually violent in direct and indirect ways, meant their actions were presented as irrational, uncontrollable and indeed, as pre-modern, as outside the realm of 'the political' altogether. It was the mothers, in short, and no longer 'the child sexual abuser' who were depicted as atavistic.

Not only were they denied status as *political* comment, the News of the World's campaign and the protesting parents, were themselves depicted as abusive, especially in the sense of abusing childhood innocence, and the latter especially in relation to the involvement of children in the protests and in the chanting of violent slogans and taunts. For example, The Guardian reported a case in Greater Manchester where a '300 strong mob' surrounded the house of a man shouting 'paedophile, rapist, beast, pervert'. The man alleged that a group of kids had 'backed a six year old child halfway down the path to my door shouting 'do you want this one?'' (25/7/2000, p7). Similarly, The Mirror reporter Barbara Davies reported children joining in the Paulsgrove protests alongside their mothers who 'laugh at the youngsters who have just finished stuffing a life-size doll and hung it from a noose on a lamppost' and who say 'we'll lynch the pervs' (11/8/2000 p9). The tone of these reports is clearly condemnatory, with an explicit point about the 'irony' of such actions in terms of caring for children.

My contention here, therefore, is that these events can be seen politically insofar as they can be seen as a legitimisation crisis in which the challenge of the campaign and protests was to the contemporary political rationalities by which child sexual abuse is governed. What the protests demonstrated was the position in which parents, especially mothers, and especially those who are less well off and therefore less mobile, are placed. That is, it highlighted the way that parents are expected to trust that a certain level of security is provided, to make risk assessments based on generalised information and expertise, and to communicate to their children safety techniques based on this general information. Neo-liberal government runs smoothly only if parents can trust that the State is indeed providing both a basic level of general security and trustworthy information by which to make their risk-assessments. Both of these fundamental beliefs were being questioned, and the protesters' disquiet was focussed on the resulting precariousness of their position. The State's ability to guard against real dangers was under question, because it seemed to them that convicted sexual offenders were not being rehabilitated or adequately monitored when released. Further, although relevant information was being collected it was not being made available to those who were most in

need of it, that is, parents. Their ability to fulfil their roles as rational risk assessing parents was thereby rendered impossible.

The ‘State’, for its part, was left in the position of having to argue *against* the transparency of information, despite the general governmental trend to require parents to assess risks according to more and more detailed information and to act rationally in relation to that information. Aided by media representation of the protesters as themselves anti-democratic, emotional, violent, pre-modern, as acting out of proportion (to the real risk) and as out of place, the State reaffirmed its role as the provider of a general context of public security and of sober, non-emotive, rational, modern, democratic government.

II. Representing ‘The Public’ and Re-establishing the Lines of Government

[O]ur critics are a tiny minority. An unknown MP, a judge ... and two newspaper editors, Simon Kelner of *The Independent* and Charles Moore of the *Daily Telegraph*. This arrogant lot have ventured from their cosseted, cloistered and comfortable worlds just long enough to show their contempt for your opinions. They know nothing of the real world and show no concern for real people.’ (Rebekah Wade, editor, *News of the World*, 13/8/2000, p2)

Running through the debate was, interestingly, a battle around the representation of ‘the public’ – who they were, who was ‘in touch’ with them, how their interests were best known and provided for – that was crucial to the momentum of the newspaper’s campaign. As the *News of the World* moved away from its originally stated intention to present information direct to the reading public as parents, it began to figure its campaign less provocatively as an intermediary role between public opinion and official bodies. As such it became more and more concerned with public opinion and gathering evidence of their support for the demands of the campaign. This was crucial to its rhetoric. As well as asking readers to call a hotline to pledge support, and to sign a petition to the Home Secretary asking him to introduce ‘Sarah’s law’, they commissioned random telephone surveys by an independent polling group (MORI) reporting in one, for example, that 76% of the 1004 people interviewed agreed that people should know if a convicted paedophile was living in their area (20/8/2000).

The *News of the World* maintained throughout that public opinion was on their side. Even a man who had been wrongly attacked as a direct result of being misidentified as the man in a photograph published in their table of faces was triumphantly reported as agreeing with the campaign’s ends: ‘Iain Armstrong was a victim of vigilante attack because he bears a striking resemblance to pervert Peter Smith, but he BACKS our campaign’. The paper quotes him as saying: ‘I suffer from spondilitis and wear a neck brace like him. But I’m no pervert. As a father myself I would want to know if there are any perverts nearby so I can keep an eye on what they’re up to.’(30/7/2000, p3).

The official response was one which had to perform the potentially difficult (discursive) task of arguing that even if the concerns and demands made through the *News of the World* may have represented

public *opinion* but they were not in the democratic public *interest*. The means were denounced as provoking vigilante attacks, as we've seen, and the specific end (public access to the Sexual Offenders Register) was denounced for its potentially deleterious effect, most often understood as 'driving paedophiles underground where they cannot be monitored.' (The Guardian, 31/7/2000, and 11/8/2000). When Paul Boetang refused to support 'Sarah's law' arguing that it was not in the public interest for these reasons, Sarah Payne's parents were reported as reacting angrily, suggesting that he should 'take a look at public opinion.' (The Mirror, 8/8/2000, p8). While the 'quality' newspapers were on the whole extremely critical of the News of the World campaign, seeing it as irresponsible, wrong-headed and as a cynical ploy to increase falling sales (The Guardian, 24/7/2000, p17), the paper retorted that their critics were cloistered and cosseted in comfortable worlds, as out of touch with the 'real world' and therefore the public's concerns.

The eventual reframing of the campaign, however, and the editor's turn to the relevant national organisations and agencies as the focus of seeking changes that would ameliorate public anger and anxiety about child sexual abuse, meant that the newspaper's radical challenge dispersed as it returned to the terms and the logic of the present modes of government of child sexual abuse. In the paper's editorial printed on 13/8/2000, in the issue the 'naming and shaming' campaign was suspended, the public's protests became depicted as inchoate 'direct action' – this despite the fact that the same issue reports the Paulsgrove parents holding meetings, discussing strategy, and entering negotiations with local authorities - with the News of the World then presented as stepping in to give voice to the public sentiment. This move from action to speech is figured as one from potentially violent emotion to calm rationality.

'pushed to the extreme otherwise reasonable citizens are forced into vigilante action. Concerned parents who believe they have no voice see the only way forward as direct action ... Now they have a voice. The News of the World. And already they can see the results [in the meeting between principle agencies]' (13/8/2000, p2)

By the end of the campaign, therefore, with the move from action on the streets to the 'high level summit' between the experts and officials presented as a victory - and thereafter the petition to government (which Sara and Michael Payne later presented to Jack Straw) the main focus of the campaign - the lines of governmentality were re-established. Communication, expertise and information flows between parents and government were no longer to be circumvented by the newspaper's offer of full specific information direct to parents. Instead the newspaper positioned itself rather differently, arguing that the public had been *represented* by the News of the World, who had achieved the aim, in the final analysis, not of being the alternative and direct source of public information, as they had originally presented it, but by being the conduit of information and facilitator of proper democratic process between the public and government. According to the paper's representation of events, levels of trust were re-established so that the public interest would be attended by policy makers and their initiatives, and parents need no longer be in direct protest with government. Parents' demands on government could be mediated, first, by the agencies whose role it is to provide basic levels of security and of care, and secondly, via the newspaper's route of petitioning the Home Secretary whose role in turn would be to consider their concerns. What had begun as a challenge

to these intermediary levels and routes of government, therefore, and an explicit challenge to contemporary governmentality of child sexual abuse, came to claim victory in the reinstating of those rationalities.

III. Reading for a Feminist Politics?

‘When Sarah Payne was killed we all thought that could have been one of our kids. When we went to the council to get one paedophile removed they fitted his home with a fire door. It was as if their main concern was to protect the paedophile, not our kids. That’s why we took to the streets’ (News of the World, 13/8/2000, p4).

It was remarkable, given the image of strong women taking to the streets making demands around an issue of sexual abuse, that during these events there was so little comment that was explicitly feminist. The image of these mothers challenging the State is one that might elsewhere cause feminists to wax lyrical and it is certainly an image of solidarity, politics and agency implicitly promoted in many a theoretical discussion of ‘politics’. It is true that there was at the time some small measure of explicit support for the mothers from feminists. Andrea Dworkin, visiting the Edinburgh festival, was reported as ‘enter[ing] the Sarah Payne debate by declaring that the victims of child sex abuse have the right to kill paedophiles.’ Speaking of a woman who shot and killed the man who had abused her son in an American courtroom, she is quoted as saying, ‘I loved that woman. It is our duty to find ways of supporting her and others like her. I have no problem with killing paedophiles.’ The quotation continues, ‘I’m not completely up to date about what is happening in Portsmouth but I understand people’s anger. I feel sorry for the women and children in the families who have been driven out of the estate but often in these cases the men have been involved in incest on their children.’ (The Guardian, 16/8/2000). But on the whole there was only cautious support for the Paulsgrove mothers such as that from feminist journalist Ros Coward who tried to counter their representation through an understanding of their frustrations as mothers. (‘New feminist’ Natasha Walters in her end of year reflections, chose instead to remember the whole episode as a paradoxical one in which children were (ab)used in the name of resisting child abuse and murder).

Of course the relative lack of feminist comment in media coverage may have been for a variety of reasons (quite possibly mundane reasons such as chronic discrimination within the media, a lack of feminist journalists); but rereading the newspaper coverage, one suspects that the difficulties of articulating a feminist reading of the parents/mothers actions may be due, at least in part, to two related significant points. First, that the mothers themselves did not seem to be drawing upon previous feminist discourses or analyses of child sexual abuse, and in fact the campaign entailed some newly conservative images and articulations around child sexual abuse. Secondly, because although the ‘women were a force to be reckoned with’(ibid), to view the episode through the lens of the female figure of Antigone questioning the Good and morality embodied in the masculine State⁷, or even simply as mothers against male sexual abusers, reduces a more

⁷ Although see Butler, 2000, for a complication of this oft-used image of Antigone. There is the possibility, one that I do not have time to explore here, that one could adopt Butler’s re-reading of

complex picture to only one of its significant dimensions. It is the complexities of the picture which make it difficult to prioritise the gender politics of the episode without giving attention, in particular, to how issues of 'social class' and the government of communities contextualise and cut through those politics. Moreover, certain nationalist and racialised imaginings surround the News of the World campaign and the parents' protests that underscore the problems of claiming it as in any way unproblematically radical, let alone feminist.

As we've seen, the mothers articulated their actions as an extension of the protection they wished, and are expected, to provide for their children, and as such, as premised upon maternal sentiment, the most defensible and most feminine of sentiments. Their words and actions however, meant that they were repeatedly depicted as "unfeminine", as aggressive, determined, uncompromising, tough talking and so on. The combination of symbolising both maternal attachment and the transgression of gendered norms of public behaviour, as well as their action moving them from private into public space, makes their figuration as a contemporary equivalent of Antigone's challenge to the State's attempted control of kinship relations a potentially attractive manoeuvre. Indeed, in what I have argued above, one could make political capital by regarding the mothers' actions as radically illuminating the government's reliance upon kinship and the compliance of mothers. Mothers are not supposed to ask for more or better government but to continue in their role of mothering and be assured that the government's attention is on the dangers that might disrupt that idyll. By protesting that they no longer had faith in the State's handling of this danger, the mothers could be understood to represent a challenge which asserts that women cannot operate according to the logics of the State's calm diminution of the danger at stake, with the force of their particularised sentiment opposing itself to the statistical, cold-hearted, rationality of generalised knowledge. Such a rendering of events would embrace the vigilante image of the mothers, and argue against the negative imagery that depicted these women as archaic, pre-political, violent and as abusing their children by encouraging their participation in the protests.

But while a feminist reading of these events and critique of the politics of representation might pursue such a line, with some justification perhaps, it would be to ignore or cut across some other aspects of the events and their reportage. First, as I've suggested, the protesters were not articulating their fears or demands in a way that made them obviously resonant with feminist analyses. Most importantly, the mothers and protestors tended to confirm an image of the child sexual abuser that feminist analyses have sort to complicate if not displace. In the repeated use of the term 'paedophile' the mothers concurred with the wide media usage of the term that cast the men concerned within a category of the sexual aberrant. At other times termed 'monsters', 'perverts' or 'diseased' the men (and a few women) were cast as such into the realm of the abnormal, making them the dangerous individuals about whom all, excepting the liberal establishment intent on their resettlement and rehabilitation, were united in distaste and horror. In this, the parents' protests

Antigone in relation to these mothers insofar as they are explicit protesting about an issue of kinship insofar as child sexual abuse threatens the family - often from within as well as from

were consistently as conservative as the newspaper that believed it spoke to and for them. Indeed, in their calls for the death of those convicted of child sexual offences, they were more so. The relevance that the feminist critique of the family as an institution, or of masculinist sexualities, as pertinent to child sexual abuse had no place here as the image of the danger was clearly understood to be located outside the home in specific individuals with sexually deviant dangerous desires. The old stereotypes recirculated as if feminist critique had had no impact. One woman on the Paulsgrove estate reportedly said ‘her seven year old son asked her “are tramps paedophiles mum?” “ I had to explain the difference between dirty old men and dirty old men.”’(The Mirror, 11/8/2000, p9).

But one mustn’t allow a curious sense of feminist disappointment to cloud one’s reading. After all, the mothers were reacting to a particular instance of child murder that *was*, by all available intelligence, committed by a stranger in a public space, and that had only been turned into an issue of child sexual abuse or ‘paedophilia’ somewhat rashly, perhaps, by the News of the World and other media reports. One could reasonably argue that some aspects of the feminist analysis of child sexual abuse – those that focus on the fact that perpetrators are known, that sexual abuse occurs in ‘private’ as opposed to ‘public spaces’ - would not be appropriate here, and when they did emerge – in letters to ‘quality’ newspapers for example - seem somewhat irrelevant, dismissive and even smug. Moreover, through their actions, if not their words, the mothers pointed to the high numbers of convicted and known sexual offenders available for attention and the rhetoric of the newspaper campaigns – ‘one for every square mile’ – confirmed the feminist mantra on the issue of sexual abuse – any man, every man, any where. Moreover, the paradox of the printing of the photographs in the News of the World was, of course, that if the intention was to quell fears by locating specific individuals as dangerous, the images simultaneously demonstrated the ubiquity of child sexual abuse and the ‘normality’ of the abuser, insofar as they had previously lived among unsuspecting communities. Indeed, the paper was explicit on this point at least, printing a ‘cut out and keep guide’ based on one developed by the NSPCC’s ‘Full Stop’ campaign: ‘Who are the paedophiles? They can be found in all professions, all levels of society, be from any race or religion and can be a friend, relative or acquaintance. It is more rare for a paedophile to be a complete stranger.’(6/8/2000, p4). Nevertheless, it would be true to say that overall the protests were not ‘feminist’ in their articulations. Other aspects of NSPCC work and of feminist analysis that could have been made directly relevant, such as the feminist attention to the construction of ‘normal’ masculine sexuality as equating dominance with pleasure, went unarticulated on the part of the protestors, so that while the occasion of the transgression of gender norms and a challenge from mothers to the State might have seemed an opportunity for feminist glory, they were not.

Furthermore, the politics of gender that surrounded these events were very strongly entwined with a politics of socio-economic disadvantage. The mother’s protests, and much of the discourse in the News of the World as well as that in other newspapers, presented the issue in relation to one which has not figured especially in feminist analyses - the interaction between housing policies and child sexual abuse - making the

without - and in that sense they represent an issue concerning the *limits* of kinship.

politics of its unfolding subtend a politics of social class, rarely articulated as such but consistently made relevant by references to the impact that housing policies had. Rather than a protest against patriarchy, the women were repeatedly reported as protecting their children within the contexts of housing policies that they were powerless to alter. Housing provision was relevant both in relation to the protestors' immobility and dependency upon council provision, and in relation to the resettlement of offenders, about which they felt under-consulted and ill-informed. The rhetoric of government *through with and for* community was challenged here as the protestors indicated that their housing was neglected and the estate governed through asymmetries of power where decisions about housing sexual abusers were not a consultative issue. Thus for example, The Mirror reported that mothers were angry because one man who had fled to avoid a group of protestors had been 'placed by housing authorities in a flat yards from schools and a playground' (The Mirror, 5/8/2000, p8). The News of the World editorial adopted the language of invasion in its reference to poor housing stock - 'Families in rundown estates react angrily against the flood of perverts rehoused into their communities' (13/8/2000, p2) - and the Member of Parliament for the Paulsgrove estate area commented 'you don't understand what their lives are like on this estate. I do, I live among them and understand their frustration' (News of the World, 13/8/2000, p4). Letters to the News of the World from the public supported this sense of powerlessness in relation to housing policies. One woman whose child was abused wrote that 'as if to add insult to injury the local council are going to keep his house available for his release - a house that is opposite our bedroom window' (p44); another that her family was having to live next door to the man who had tried to rape her daughter (p16).

The importance of housing provision and policies was also referred to within those arguments which characterised the protestors as a dangerous mob, peripheral to civilised society. Here, the housing estates that were presented as divided from the more 'sheltered' and 'calmer' parts of Britain, with for example a Guardian leader suggesting that 'liberal arguments familiar in newspapers, TV studios, parliamentary tea rooms and bishops' studies cut no ice among the boarded up stores and sub-standard housing of Paulsgrove. For them the distinction between a convicted and suspected paedophile is academic.' (11/8/2000). The mothers and their housing conditions were regarded as central to these events, therefore, as central as issues of housing and overcrowding were to explaining social dangers, including child sexual abuse, a century earlier.

Rather than radical feminist, therefore, it would be easier to argue that these events were forms of radical *class* protest in which mothers were attempting to draw attention to the difficulties of their expected role as parent-protector when the context of risk is so heavily determined by housing provision and resettlement policies.

Any attempt to read these events as radical, however, would need to pay critical attention to the sense in which the parents' protests and some of the reportage that surrounded them appealed to a certain nationalistic imaginings. To give some examples: the Union Jack flag was used to present the protestors' message (ibid), the News of the World countered arguments about offenders' rights with a patriotic images of

England's 'fields of wheat in high summer' becoming unsafe for a young girl to exercise her right to walk through them (23/7/2000, p6), the newspaper made repeated references to its campaign as a 'crusade', and reported proudly that a Dutch reader had written to say 'I would be proud to be British, at last some one is fighting back'(30/7/2000, p41) as well as drawing upon the idea of communities being 'flooded' by waves of 'perverts'(13/8/2000, p2). All these instances illustrate the sense in which the issue of child sexual abuse became figured as a nation under siege, with the parents' protests described by several commentators as representing something of the '*national psyche*' or nationwide, common sentiment (eg. in The Guardian leader, 11/8/2000). The solution to having the 'most vile criminal in our midst'(Chairman of the Police Federation, News of the World, 20/8/2000, p6) was repeatedly figured as his removal, that is as death or capital punishment or else territorially as 'driving him out'(The Mirror, 9/8/2000, p17). Moreover, the rehearsal of these images of defending the nation was not without an attendant racialisation which arguably haunts the continual references to the protesters as 'lynch mobs', the protesters' own references to 'lynching'(ibid) and their practice of surrounding houses, chanting references to hanging as well as performing symbolic hangings (ibid). The history of forms taken by violent white racism cannot be innocently remembered through these terms; in this sense the 'whiteness' of the protest was integral to its symbolic self-understanding.

IV. Conclusion

Remembering the events of summer 2000 is likely to be important in the framing of future events that touch upon the issues central to it (Kitzinger, 2000), and it is with this in mind that I have presented the above comments. In particular I have been concerned to argue that the role in which the parent and especially the mother is positioned within contemporary political rationalities is an important context within which to understand the events, so that alongside any consideration of how child sexual abuse and child sexual abusers were constituted therein, there might be attention to how the mother as a risk assessing child-protecting figure was illuminated in all its fragility and in (some of) its political utility. The episode was not one that can be understood simply as women against the State or against men, but can be read as the mothers arguing that their role within the rationalities of contemporary government of child sexual abuse had become untenable, and it was these rationalities that were put into a temporary legitimisation crisis in which the women erupted onto the political stage only to be quickly overwhelmed with the negative media response. The ways in which the rationalities of the contemporary government of child sexual abuse were reestablished, drew upon these negative portrayls of the women to the extent that it was they who became the contemporary prime candidates for caricature as atavistic and anti-democratic. The reestablishment of lines of government operated moreover, by isolating the women not only from the political but from 'the public' through the discursive space that was, interestingly, opened up between public opinion and public interests by official responses. Finally, I have argued that a feminist analysis cannot take these women as icons for feminist politics, so embroiled were their actions and discourse in reactionary, nationalist and potentially

'racist' argumentation; but I would suggest that neither can feminist theorists ignore the fact that these were women who to a certain extent mobilised *as* women.

Consideration of their action is instructive for feminist politics and analysis, I believe, on a number of counts. First, because despite the gendered dimensions to their action, one might pause on the simple observation that these events did not become the site for anything one might have recognised as a feminist discourse beyond the negative point that the figure of the child abuser as a peculiarly 'psychologically disturbed' man seemed untenable; indeed, newly conservative constructions of the paedophile and child sexual abuse seemed to circulate as if there had never been a feminist body of work challenging those depictions and understandings. Secondly, the events underscore the importance of how we understand the contextualising factors in analysing the construction of 'child sexual abuse' and the figures that circulate in relation to it. Thus we have seen how child sexual abuse does not stand alone as a topic but draws in other aspects of political governmentality to which these women were simultaneously responding, especially parenting within a culture of 'risk assessment', modes of (access to) information and the powerless position of tenants in relation to national and local government's housing policies. Feminist analyses of child sexual abuse, therefore, need to include consideration of issues as far reaching as these (rather than confine the analysis of child sexual abuse to any single dimension). Moreover, and thirdly, the portrayal of these mothers that emerges from the media responses - as without civilisation and as outside the political - is one that has to be understood as a credible fiction produced by the political contexts. These contexts, I have suggested, include a contemporary governmentality that promotes and requires a mode of parenting quite different from the one these mothers adopted, a 'rational' risk-assessing form of parenting that builds its possibility in turn upon the continued construction of women (and working class motherhood in particular) as quietly passionate in such a way that, as Donzelot's argument would suggest, produces subservience to political government and its production of the familial.

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