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**Erasing Diversity: Mediating Class, Place, Gender and Race in The Moorside**

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Advertised by the BBC as a two-part factual drama 'based on the kidnapping of Shannon Matthews'[i], The Moorside (BBC One, 2017), written by Neil McKay and directed by Paul Whittington, aired in Britain on 7th and 14th February 2017 respectively. Notably, the drama's first hour long episode was screened ten days prior to the nine-year anniversary of Shannon's 'real-life' disappearance, an event, cum scandal, that had garnered extensive and erroneous attention in the national press. The temporal proximity between the case and its mediated re-presentation is, we contend, important to think through in order to recognise The Moorside's regional, cultural and corrective place amidst a larger, more pervasive political narrative – that of 'broken Britain'. In assessing The Moorside's representations of class, gender, place and race, we aim to examine the ways in which the estate and its residents were constructed on screen, asking what such representations might mean and what is at stake in this story, making a case for why and how the images matter.

In textual terms we suggest that the drama sets up a simplistic dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' citizens, and in so doing, refuses to acknowledge issues of structural inequality. In addition, we argue that The Moorside whitewashes the community story that it claims to present, erasing racial and ethnic diversity from the narrative. Contextually, we assess the ways in which the classed media landscape and industrial facets and features of the BBC may have influenced the shape and aesthetic structure

of the drama. A final tenet of our analysis focuses on performance, and we close the article by thinking through its key performer, Sheridan Smith, who played the central character, Julie Bushby. In doing so we consider the ways in which Smith's stardom is utilised as a vehicle to enable and direct ideas regarding social and regional identity.

**Narrating Broken Britain**

More than any other episode of recent British history, the kidnapping of Shannon Matthews in February 2008 and the subsequent arrest of her mother, Karen, on charges of child neglect and perverting the course of justice, placed social class at the centre of the national conversation. Even before Karen's complicity in Shannon's disappearance was revealed, the media discourse honed in on the apparently pejorative characteristics of her underclass status: the fact that she was a benefit claimant, that she had children to multiple fathers, and that she lived on a council estate in the North of England (the Moorside in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire). Following Karen's arrest, these class markers were unsurprisingly amplified as causal factors in the case, naturalising a connection between immorality and council estate life. As Owen Jones puts it: 'The episode was like a flare, momentarily lighting up a world of class and prejudice in modern Britain' (Owen Jones 2011: 20).

Jones's book Chavs: The Demonization of the Working-class takes as its starting point the Matthews case, arguing that the events were totemic in bringing into focus a new form of class hatred in contemporary Britain: 'it was as though everyone from a similar background was crammed into the dock alongside her' (2011: 20). Jones argues that the case revealed a fundamental empathy deficit in the UK media,

exposing the lack of class diversity amongst those who constructed and disseminated the wider 'broken Britain' narrative of the Matthews saga. Indeed, David Cameron, then leader of the Opposition weaponised the case in the service of his damning verdict on Britain under the Labour government of the period. Writing in The Daily Mail, Cameron placed Shannon's kidnapping alongside the tragic deaths of Baby P, Shaun Dykes, and Rhys Jones as indicative of a 'verdict on our broken society' (David Cameron 2008). Cameron brazenly sought to connect the cases to the public finances, to further the argument that the prospect of fiscal conservatism under the Tories would in some way provide a cure for the nation's apparent ills: 'the broken economy and the broken society go hand in hand. You cannot treat one problem without addressing the other. Let's not forget that one of the reasons our public finances are in such a mess is the sky-high costs of social failure' (Cameron 2008). There is naturally an absence of analytical detail or of policy solutions here, with Cameron preferring to vaguely refer to a 'Conservative [plan] that starts with supporting families' (Cameron 2008). The Moorside is described as '[a]n estate where decency fights a losing battle against degradation and despair. A community whose pillars are crime, unemployment and addiction' (Cameron 2008). For Cameron, the causes of these problems were moral, rather than structural, and they could only be overcome through changes in behaviour, and certainly not through increased investment in the welfare state. Effectively, the story the future Prime Minister told about Karen, and the estate on which she lived, had the effect of reducing complex, deeply embedded social issues to questions of right and wrong, of good and evil, establishing the frame through which the case is still viewed today.

Despite appearances, this invective was not purely opportunistic, and was informed by a wider intellectual project on the British right, manifested by Cameron's commissioning of the Centre for Social Justice's 'Breakdown Britain' report, published in 2006. Led by Iain Duncan Smith, the think tank was charged with producing 'policy recommendations to the Conservative Party on issues of social justice' (Social Justice Policy Group 2006). As Lisa McKenzie explains, the report was key in popularising the 'successful concept of 'the broken' to explain inequality as a product of family breakdown' (Lisa McKenzie 2015: 11). This controlling fiction gained wider traction in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, as a conveniently holistic policy consensus was formed around austerity in response to both global-economic and domestic policy crises. As McKenzie goes on:

> The Breakdown Britain report, which has been the source and justification for many of the welfare changes implemented by Iain Duncan-Smith, Conservative Party Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, identifies 'five poverty drivers': family breakdown; welfare dependency; educational failure; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and serious personal debt. All of this squarely puts the problems of society on the individual. According to the 'broken' Britain thesis, it is personal failure and 'bad behaviour' that has broken Britain (2015: 11).

Thus Cameron narrates the Matthews case as a wider re-animation of a Thatcherite analysis of poverty, one which points the finger of blame at the mother, who is 'broken' beyond social repair. The return to the Matthews case as material for TV drama therefore brings this emblematic class narrative back in to the national

consciousness, presenting again fundamental questions about the way in which marginalised communities are represented, constructed and condemned through the media.

The instrumentalising of the Matthews case for short-term political benefit reflects a wider discursive pattern of class representation as an objectifying process, reliant on limiting, monolithic treatments of what are highly complex and intersecting questions of inequality, space, and gender. McKenzie, in the introduction to her autoethnography of council estate life, Getting By, identifies the importance of understanding the sociological signification of the estate in relation to concepts of 'inside'/'insider' and 'outside'/'outsider', with 'what those on the 'outside' think about those on the 'inside'', particularly crucial in determining the continued reductive construction of the estate within popular cultural forms (2015: 4). This dynamic should be at the heart of questions of representational ethics, particularly in relation to narrative depictions of estate life. As Imogen Tyler has noted, the pervasive and unchallenged role of the outside author of the symbolic construction of class identity in contemporary Britain has produced a spatialised mythology around the council estate, with 'the poverty associated with these places […] imagined as a self-induced pathological condition' (Imogen Tyler 2013: 162). As Tyler explains, '[t]he moral panic about council estates unleashed pervasive forms of territorial stigmatization, a revolting class discourse that was inscribed upon the bodies of those who lived in these abjectified zones' (2013: 162). Building on Owen Jones' argument, we can understand one such abject body to be that of the chav, and of course more specifically the chav mum, with Karen Matthews the most prominent manifestation of this monstrous discourse. To return to David Cameron's positioning of Karen

Matthews as the villain of 'broken Britain', we might more broadly consider the ways in which the chav figure is a necessary product of this discourse; an antagonist produced to make coherent and knowable the simplistic terms of class hatred, as Imogen Tyler describes:

> we need to theorize the figure of the chav as 'a figure of consent' constituted by 'a disgust consensus' […] a figure through which ideological beliefs (the underclass), economic interests (the erosion of the welfare state), converge to mystify neoliberal governmentality by naturalizing poverty in ways that legitimize the social abjection of the most socially and economically disadvantaged citizens within the state (2013: 170-171).

Thus, the chav mother, a gendered figure occupying the space of stigmatised and broken council estate, and the architect of the broken family, is critical to how we conceptualise class-making as a symbolic practice undertaken through the production of rigid ideological frameworks which require abject forms to maintain them. In approaching The Moorside we must therefore place the representation of the Matthews family at the centre of our enquiry.

And yet, those behind the drama would have us believe that such questions miss the point. As the writer Neil McKay argues: 'We don't tell the story of Shannon Matthews, we tell the story of the women on the estate who came together to find her' (Anonymous 2017). McKay is talking about Julie Bushby (Sheridan Smith), chair of The Moorside Tenants and Residents Association at the time of Shannon's disappearance, and Natalie Murray (Sian Brooke), a neighbour and friend of Karen's.

Both Julie and Natalie were present when Karen revealed her complicity in the abduction and were key to extracting the confession, a moment recreated in the second episode. Tellingly, in interviews conducted around the release of the drama, both Bushby and Murray illustrate McKenzie's 'inside, outside' dynamic when expressing their frustration at the representation of The Moorside in the wake of the case. Bushby: 'People said we were like Shameless...We're not Shameless. If anything, we're fucking Emmerdale!...We're the Dingles!' Murray: 'We were all portrayed as chavs, in tracksuits with big loopy earrings and hair on top of my head' (Tim Lewis 2017). It is telling that both women recognise and rail against reductive media constructions of class and seek to position themselves, and by extension their communities, as distinct from these narratives. Indeed, in the wake of his 'broken Britain' article, Cameron travelled to the Moorside to make amends, and it was Bushby who took him to task on behalf of her community, challenging him on his scripted apology, and the disrespectfully casual attire he wore to deliver it. Bushby and Murray, then, are positioned in The Moorside and in broader discourses around the case, as representative of what Owen Jones observed as 'a tightly knit working-class community, with limited resources, united behind a common cause' (Jones, 2011: 21). For Jones, 'this never became part of the Shannon Matthews story. It just didn't fit in with the Shameless image that the media was cultivating' (2011: 21). What emerges in The Moorside then is a similarly discursive construction of 'the community' in essential terms, in contradistinction to the abjectified underclass of the Matthews family. As Charlotte Moore, the BBC's Director of Content puts it: 'As a nation, we only ever saw it from one perspective, and I hope this drama will capture what it was like to be at the centre of that community. How they responded and lived

through it' (Alex Nelson 2017). Again then, Karen and her family are pejoratively positioned against a generalised and virtuous symbolic community.

In a heated exchange on BBC Radio 4's Front Row, T*he Moorside's* producer Jeff Pope, repeatedly denied that the drama was 'about' Shannon Matthews, attempting to sidestep questions relating to the ethics of such a focus by claiming 'It's called The Moorside, it's not called 'The Shannon Matthews Story'. I say again, it's about this thing that happens off-screen, which is this girl is abducted, and then it's all about the impact of that on this group of people' (BBC R4, tx 7 February 2017). Again then, there is a clear attempt to form an exclusionary narrative structure around the Matthews family, which, through their absence works to further deepen and naturalise their position as the collective underclass villain. In effect, this narrative framing accepts the terms of the 'broken Britain' analysis, juxtaposing the morally 'good' community, emblematised through Natalie and Julie, against the abject and silenced Matthews family.

In a favourable review in The Guardian, Mark Lawson describes how while Julie is 'duped by Karen…her faith in human nature [while] understandably bruised…is compellingly, never lost', and that 'when she is required to make a speech in court, her words (taken verbatim from trial transcripts) have an eloquence and intelligence that Ibsen would happily have given one of his heroines' (Mark Lawson 2017). Julie is here again positioned against Karen: an essential notion of 'human nature' modelled against monstrous immorality. Lawson suggests that the name of the series, evoking a general sense of community rather than the specifics of the case, functions as a 'statement of intent' enabling McKay and Pope to approach 'gruesome headlines

from an unexpected angle' (Lawson 2017). Indeed, McKay and Pope are currently producing a BBC dramatization of The Barking Murders, having collaborated previously on See No Evil: The Moors Murders (ITV, tx 14 May 2006), Appropriate Adult (ITV, tx 4 September 2011), with Pope also writing and exec-producing Little Boy Blue (ITV, tx 24 April 2017), and their formula for re-visiting criminal episodes from the recent past has tended towards a focus on what Lawson calls 'filter' characters, such as Bushby or Janet Leach (Emily Watson), Fred West's chaperone in Appropriate Adult (Lawson 2011). Thus, inbuilt within the fabric of these dramas are mechanisms which enable a diversion away from the particularities of the crime narrative, and in the case of The Moorside, its complex socioeconomic dimensions. In place of these, universal notions of 'community' and 'humanity' prevail, which are in The Moorside enacted through characters such as Natalie and Julie, and through the symbolic and physical location of the estate.

**Mediating the Moorside Estate**

The representation of the estate itself is critical to understanding the ways in which The Moorside both reflects and constructs class identities across its two episodes. The series was filmed not on the Moorside itself, but on a topographically and architecturally similar estate in Halifax, with the moorlands of the Calder Valley still visible in the landscape. According to Neil McKay the decision to avoid Dewsbury was taken 'because the community had already been through a trauma' (Ben Travis 2017). Despite the locational shift, the estate space remains a critical aesthetic feature of the drama. While director Paul Whittington opts for an intimate handheld style for the bulk of scenes involving characters interacting on the estate and in their homes, this contrasts with a highly contemplative treatment of the estate from a distance. For

example, the opening of the first episode comprises ten environmental shots of the estate, and while some of the shots are taken from within gardens and back yards, and at eye level amongst the streets, four of them assume a position above the estate looking down upon it, framing not only the houses but the wider West Yorkshire landscape. Indeed, there are in total nine shots in episode one and a further six in episode two that can be described in this way, and these images sit alongside repeated night-time aerial shots to assert an appearance of distance from the physical space of the estate. In his work on the cultural geographies of the English North, Rob Shields adapts Andrew Higson's (1984) critique of 'poetic' landscape shots in the British New Wave as a feature of the Northern 'space myth', and these observations can be further developed in relation to the contemporary North imagined in and through The Moorside (Rob Shields 1991: 185). Indeed, if the series and the wider Matthews case is reliant on a spatial myth of the estate, itself intersected with the mythical, inhuman figure of the chav, there is also at work a regional narrative which is subtly but persistently asserted through the familiar iconography of the 'That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill' (John Krish quoted in Shields 216). Shields describes how the effect of such images is to imbue upon the audience a sense of 'spatial power and authority', which is particularly significant given what we have already discussed about the specific class politics of the estate as connected to the Matthews family (216). For Shields, 'class imagery collapses into spatial imagery' (216) with these kinds of shots betraying an 'ordering authority… behind the camera' one which naturalises 'a political authority and economic power which is turn legitimised in the film' (218). This sense of 'visual mastery' is thus inherently regional, underpinning 'a monological, South-centred narrative which asserts the symbolic and empirical identity of the north in terms of the space-myth' (220). The particular landscape that

is returned to repeatedly in The Moorside aligns with the symbolic codes of the generic, imagined 'North' described by Peter Davidson: 'in terms of dearth, authenticity and pastness', with 'the trope of the urban pastoral' particularly prominent – indeed, the estate is repeatedly shown to be sitting within the vast moorlands (Peter Davidson 2005: 136). The elegiac quality of the Northern 'space myth' as described here is deepened in the postindustrial age, and we might consider the heightened symbolic importance of these iconographies as landscapes of inequality in austerity Britain. Certainly, the absence of human characters within these compositions (with the exception of one shot containing group of searching police officers) further serves to mark both a sense of spatial mastery and isolation.

At this point it is worth briefly considering Happy Valley (BBC One, tx April 14 2014), Sally Wainwright's crime drama, filmed in the same Calder Valley landscape as The Moorside and which across both its series repeatedly engages in similarly spectacular town and country imagery. The differences between the two dramas, however, are also revealing in the class dynamics of such aesthetic strategies. In her discussion of the series, Helen Piper compares *Happy Valley's* antagonist Tommy to 'the real life, working-class perpetrators of crime such as Mick Philpott or Karen Matthews who have been demonised by the tabloid press' (Helen Piper 194: 2016a). For Piper, Royce is not constructed as ''typical' of his class or district because his agency is located within a balanced representation of a community, as part of a discourse of wider social responsibility' (183: 2016a). Indeed, unlike in The Moorside 'the viewer is invited to consider how a childhood blighted by poverty, drugs and neglect may have contributed to his depravity, implying that these blights of working-class life are a social […] cursed ante rem, spilling over from generation to

generation' (194: 2016a). The Moorside of course purposefully sidesteps these questions through the focus on Natalie and Julie and the wider community effort to find Shannon. Thus the ways in which that community is organized spatially on screen are highly significant in terms of the underlying politics of class representation. In another article on Happy Valley, Piper discusses the final moments of the first series, which show Catherine, the central protagonist, 'standing at the summit of a rugged hill looking down at the town' (2016b: 178). It is here where, through flashback, she recalls the traumatic moments that have comprised the series and we see an 'affective working through of the trauma' (178). Here, Catherine is able to take ownership from the position of 'visual mastery' (Shields 220) to occupy a 'native rather than a tourist view' of the landscape (Piper 178). No such spatial empowerment is available to the inhabitants of the Moorside -- the final shot, like the first, is taken from the edge of the moor looking down upon the estate with no human subject to threaten the sense of authorial omniscience.

In narratives of class and regional politics such as The Moorside, then, we need to consider the ways in which particular modes of visual iconography might be seen to insidiously naturalise and assert existing power relationships. As Bev Skeggs argues, in the process of class-making 'essentialising and spatializing work together' and here we are presented with notions of essential 'humanity' and 'community' predicated on the perspectival shift away from the Matthews family and towards the more generalised Moorside (Bev Skeggs 2004: 19). This is a process which is aided by the symbolic construction of the estate – and by extension the imagined region - as something to be literally looked down upon and judged. In this sense the shots can be seen to, in Skeggs's terms, entrench a sense of 'spatial fixity', 'of not being mobile'

which in turn naturalises the power relationships imbued within such spatialised representations of class identity (Skeggs 112).

**Intertexts, Responsibility and Race**

On the evening that the verdict was announced in the trial of Karen Mathews, the BBC broadcast a Panorama special entitled The Mother of All Lies (BBC One, tx Dec 2008). Presented by Jeremy Vine, the programme contains interviews with Karen's neighbours, including Natalie, and police involved in the case, most notably the then Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, Norman Bettison. Just as in The Moorside, the scenes involving human characters, in this case the interviews, are punctuated by shots from the hill, looking over the (actual) Moorside estate. Indeed, there are sixteen of these shots in total, and they are often presented alongside judgements on the Matthews family and the class that they represent. For example, the first interview with Bettison ends with his response to Vine's question: 'Where does the responsibility for a family like this lie?' Bettison's answer seems to explicitly evoke the 'Broken Britain' analysis: 'With the individual, and I don't think there are enough people who make this point'. Soon after this statement the Moorside is introduced with five long shots of the estate, framing it against the moors in the familiar style, sound tracked by the 999 call that Karen made to police when she reported Shannon missing. The documentary effectively gives Bettison the final word: 'This is a woman who has lived her life without any personal responsibility, without the sense of having to answer for the consequences of her actions. She feels that she should be pitied….actually, we shouldn't pity, we should judge more'. Moments earlier, following another shot of the Moorside from the hill, Bettison asks: 'Where is personal responsibility? [...] Personal responsibility or the lack of it is at the heart of

this'. Thus again the symbolic positioning of the estate within a Northern and class bound space myth is explicitly aligned with a narrative positioning of Karen Matthews, and all that she represents, as evil – the social determinants of crime are flagrantly ignored, and she and her class are inscribed within a discourse of abjection.

This is another instance of class being written from the outside. Indeed, The Moorside, produced some nine years after The Mother of All Lies, occupies the same discursive space as its forebear, mirroring its aesthetic strategies, and drawing on the police and the wider community to pejoratively contextualise and to other the Matthews family. These intertexts for The Moorside therefore offer ways into understanding the drama's place within the wider narrative of the case, illuminating the complexities of its class politics in the process. For example, in contrast to The Panorama documentary, Channel 4's *Shannon Matthews: The Family's Story* (Channel 4, tx March 20 2008) was made before Karen's complicity in the disappearance was revealed. It is a largely sympathetic account of life in the Matthews household two weeks after Shannon's disappearance. The documentary makes explicit connections between the media coverage of the Madeline McCann case and the then diminishing attention afforded to the Matthews family. In situating itself within the home and closely following Karen and her then partner Craig Meehan, the narrative provides the kind of nuanced engagement with their class identity absent in other portrayals of the case. Indeed, in a particularly moving moment Karen attempts to read a story in a tabloid newspaper about Craig, but she is forced to pass it to a friend, remarking to the camera 'I'm not reyt good at reading'.

Like The Moorside, the documentary is also anchored around the wider community campaign, and while Julie features briefly, the main focus is on two residents of the estate, Saleem, a man of South Asian heritage, and Farah, a white woman. They are shown protecting Karen from the paparazzi, and organising a sponsored walk to raise awareness of the case. When it is revealed that Shannon has been found, Julie relays the news, just as she does in The Moorside, yet here we focus on Saleem, who is overcome with emotion and bursts in to tears. Yet, neither Farah or Saleem are represented in The Moorside, and indeed no person of colour has a speaking role in the drama, this despite the fact that in the 2011 census, Dewsbury was shown to have a 16.5% south east Asian population. Indeed, Mumtaz Hussan, now a Labour councillor, who was photographed at the height of case at the front of a large crowd of residents carrying a banner during a vigil, commented on this representational imbalance: 'The Asian community played a big part and a lot of Asian people were working in this group…But when they showed the drama there were hardly any Asian people in it' (George Bowden and Eve Hartley 2017). We might suggest, then, that the iconographies and narratives of class and region on which The Moorside draws are purposefully exclusive and excluding. In order to enable the monologic construction of Natalie and Julie as the embodiments of (good) community, the community itself must be rendered homogenous, uncomplicated by narratives which might divert from the central focus.

In addition to the above, this whitewashing of The Moorside can also, perhaps, be understood to play into and make visible other problematic contemporary narratives regarding the state of the nation. In a post-EU referendum landscape, the BBC's decision to air a factual drama that showcases poor, white, Northern English

communities, ostensibly pulling together because of their 'good' moral values (in opposition to the Matthews family and excluding all non-whites from any significant screen time and voice), can be understood as a narrative re-treading of 'little England' terrain. Moreover, as bell hooks argues:

> Academics writing about class often make light of the racial privilege of the white poor. They make it seem as though it is merely symbolic prestige […] Race privilege has consistently offered poor whites the chance of living a better life in the midst of poverty than their black counterparts (2000: 114-15).

This attempt by The Moorside to re-present and therefore to redefine Northern working-class identity and landscape is not so much a hopeful vision of the present and future, but rather, can be understood as an imaginary and nostalgic reworking past, in which the (white) working class helped their own communities, but ostensibly knew their place. Again, in The Moorside, the representation of ethnic and racial diversity is not required as the British, and more specifically English narrative regarding the supposed 'problem' of non-whites and of immigration, has already been dealt with under and through the Brexit vote. Immigration as the scapegoat for society's ills does not fit into The Moorside narrative because the drama has erased non-whites and immigrants already.

**Industrial Context**

In addition to thinking through the local and national political contexts amidst which The Moorside was broadcast, it is also useful to consider the industrial context of the BBC in relation to issues of class, place, gender and race. Established under a Royal

charter and principally funded by a television licence fee, the BBCs mission 'to inform, educate and entertain' is well publicised. To facilitate its mission statement, the BBC also proclaims six Inside the BBC key values[ii], the fifth of which is: 'We respect each other and celebrate our diversity so that everyone can give their best.' Yet, within the BBC there are significant issues that have been identified in relation to a lack of diversity and equality, particularly in the areas of gender and race. In 2016 the BBC launched a 'Diversity and Inclusion Strategy', undertaking a census of their current provision. The published findings[iii] are below:

**Our People**

| Workforce | 31 March 2017 | 2017 Target | 2020 Target |
|---|---|---|---|
| Women (all staff) | 48.2% | N/A | 50% |
| Women (leadership) | 42.1% | N/A | 50% |
| Disability (all staff) | 10.2% | 5.3% | 8% |
| Disability (leadership) | 9.6% | 5% | 8% |
| BAME (all staff) | 14.5% | 14.2% | 15% |
| BAME (leadership) | 10.3% | 10% | 15% |
| LGBT (all staff) | 10.5% | N/A | 8% |
| LGBT (leadership) | 11.5% | N/A | 8% |

The results in relation to gender and race both display clear deficits. While female employees make up 48% of the workforce, only 42% of women hold leadership roles. In terms of BAME employees, the figures are significantly worse, with only 10% of BAME employees in leadership roles. While the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is arguably a positive step in recognising and working to level the landscape for women, BAME, LGTB and/or disabled employees at the BBC, it is important to note the absence of social class as a marker for issues connected to diversity and inclusion in these targets.[iv] Such an omission in terms of understanding structural inequalities of

opportunity points to a distinct blind-spot. As Rhian E. Jones notes: ‘attempts to improve diversity […] rarely include attention to how socio-economic background can influence success. This is clearly problematic when it comes to representing the British public, as class is a fundamental dimension of disadvantage that intersects with many others’ (2015). Further exploring the socio-economic picture of BBC employees, Jones states:

> A small but useful part of the [BBC] picture was provided in a 2014 report by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, which found that a third of BBC executives had attended Oxford or Cambridge, compared to one per cent of the public as a whole. Similarly damning is the fact that 88 per cent of the public went to a comprehensive, but just 37 per cent of BBC executives did, while 26 per cent attended independent schools and a quarter went to grammar schools.

This snapshot of class inequality in the BBC, particularly at executive levels, is telling in terms of the place, both literally and metaphorically, that middle and upper class ‘insider’ employees occupy. Of course, it is at executive levels where power is most frequently held in relation to both who is employed and what is (and what is not) shown, as well as how narratives, people and places are represented.

**Performance, Identity and Stardom**

Another significant tenet of representation in relation to place is performance. As we have argued previously, television performance remains a rather ‘unchartered (and

underexplored) territory' allowing 'actors bring to their various performances, narratives and iconographies of Northern English space' (Forrest and Johnson, 2016: 195). In particular, the regional stardom of Sheridan Smith is useful to consider here. Smith as Julie Bushby is a significant choice of performer in multiple ways. Considering the aforementioned emphasis on naming as a site of contestation (both in relation to the title of The Moorside drama itself, as well as the cultural figure of the 'chav'), her own – Smith – is one of the most common in Britain, and is one solidly connected to the white, working class. As a star actor, Smith, herself a working-class, Northern[v], professionally 'untrained' performer, is best known for her roles on television, particularly in Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps (BBC Two; BBC Choice; BBC Three, 2001-11), Benidorm (ITV; STV; UTV, 2007-18) and Gavin and Stacey (BBC Three; BBC One, 2007-10). In these shows, Smith played what can be understood as a 'stock type', an immature, generally uncultured and distinctly working-class young woman, who was frequently sexually promiscuous and socially strident. Indeed, it was in these long-running serial television dramas that Smith grew up on on-screen, formed her televisual identity and became a household name.

Interestingly, place as a classed facet of identity was significant to and in each of these shows. Two Pints of Larger and a Packet of Crisps was set and filmed on location in Runcorn, Halton, a socio-economically deprived town in the North West of England, formerly known for its chemical and tanning industries. Though in governmental terms Runcorn is classified as part of Cheshire, its social and economic identity within the North West region is most strongly aligned with Merseyside and in 2015, Halton was ranked 27th most deprived Local Authority nationally (out of 326) in the Indices of Deprivation. Benidorm, a city in the province of Alicante, Eastern

Spain, is dominantly known (in the UK) as a low-cost holiday resort on the Costa Blanca. In the television serial Benidorm, the character Mick Garvey (Steve Pemberton) describes the place as 'Blackpool with sun' (1.1), and this description is effective in indicating its classed reputation. Benidorm, a resort dominated by British tourists, is, as José I. Prieto-Arranz and Mark E. Casey note, 'often positioned as a 'joke' amongst the British press who sneer at the working class at play' (2014: 69). Finally, Essex, the home of Smith's Gavin and Stacey character, Rudi Smith, works as a place to effectively position Rudi as a stereotypical 'Essex girl', a pejorative term so pervasive that it has its own entry in the Oxford English Dictionary: 'derogatory a contemptuous term applied to a type of young woman, supposedly to be found in and around Essex, and variously characterized as unintelligent, promiscuous, and materialistic.'

As an actor, Smith's multiple performances of regional and classed types, particularly in serial comedy television texts, had professional consequences. In an interview with Megan Conner, she noted that she had mainly played 'slappers and chavs in comedies, and although it was great, you can get typecast' (2012). Smith's active decision to break out of this typecasting and into 'serious' drama and West End theatre followed. Focusing initially on biopics, Smith starred in Mrs Biggs (ITV; STV; UTV, 2012), in which she played the central role of Charmian Biggs, wife of the great train robber, Ronnie Biggs. Her performance earned her a BAFTA for 'Best Leading Actress'. Smith's next leading role was in Cilla (ITV, 2014) – a three-part biopic of the life of the singer and entertainer, Cilla Black, for which she won a National Television Award for 'Outstanding Drama Performance'. On the stage, Smith also illustrated her talents. Following on from her leading performance in the

2009 West End musical production of Legally Blond (for which she won the Laurence Olivier Award for ‘Best Actress in a Musical’), Smith went on in 2012 to play Hedda Gabler at the Old Vic, London. Reviewing the production, Michael Billington noted that: ‘Ibsen’s Hedda was once described as a hoop through which every aspiring female actor must jump; and Sheridan Smith performs the feat with commendable ease and agility’ (2012). Three years later, Smith performed the lead role in Funny Girl: The Musical at the Menier Chocolate Factory, again receiving exceptionally good reviews.

Arguably, for Smith, while the above roles allowed her to reveal the breadth and depth of her performative skills, they also further inculcated ideas around stardom, class and region, tying Smith’s star persona to notions of both ‘authenticity’ and ‘exceptionality’ in relation to her own working-class roots. Beyond television comedy then, it was through and for these more ‘serious’ roles that Smith’s current stardom, pivoting around her exceptionality, was nominated and conferred by leading cultural critics, allowing her to occupy a place inside the British academy. In 2014, Tim Auld, writing for the Telegraph, named Smith as ‘the actress of the moment’, noting:

> Be it [in] television comedy, stage musicals or serious literary drama, [Smith], at every turn, has confounded her critics. […] But our love affair with Smith is about more than her talent: […]: it’s about that quality so beloved of the British, awarded highest status by her fellow countrymen and women of the North: graft. At a time when so many newspaper and broadcast headlines about the state of the profession like to concentrate on the success of a handful of public school-educated actors (Benedict Cumberbatch, Harrow; Eddie

> Redmayne, Tom Hiddleston, Etonians), it's refreshing to hear another narrative, reminding us of an equally important strand of our theatrical story […] Smith is an actress in the mould of great British female performers such as Julie Walters, Maxine Peake and Jane Horrocks – northerners all, who were not plucked from obscurity and raised to stardom overnight because of their model, clotheshorse looks (Auld, 2014).

Auld's clear articulation of the importance of Smith's work ethic, something he ties directly to her Northernness and arguably, by extension, to her working-class roots and 'look', provokes broader questions about star bodies. Indeed, it is useful to think through the ways in which star bodies (both physical bodies and bodies of work) articulate preoccupations with gender, place and class. As Stephen Gundle argues, we should read stars as 'cultural symbols and conduits for ideas about gender, values and national identity' (2008: 263). As well as national identity, stars such as Smith can also be understood as a cultural symbol and conduit for ideas about gender, values and regional identity. Indeed, in The Moorside's Northern story, it is Smith's stardom that was pushed front and centre and used to promote and market the factual drama.

Following The Moorside, Smith was situated as the star vehicle star for two more television dramas, namely Care (BBC One, 2018), in which she played single mum Jenny, and then in Cleaning Up (ITV, 2019), playing the role of Sam, a newly-single mum with a gambling addiction, working as a cleaner on a zero hours contract in stockbroking offices at Canary Wharf. In the latter, Sam, this time a working-class Londoner, unintentionally bears witness to insider trading, and decides that the upper-classes should not be the only ones that should benefit. Echoing the rise of Smith's

own performative stock, Sam dupes the 'insiders', pulling off (at least initially) a performance as 'one of them'. Speaking to Dan Whitehead in The Big Issue North (2019) about her role, she noted 'I was drawn to this because of the class divide thing – why can they get away with it and we can't?'

Smith's exceptionality – her ability as a working class (white) woman to speak and perform beyond expectations of her class and gender – is perhaps the skill that aligns her most strongly to Julie Bushby in The Moorside. As noted earlier, speaking of Bushby and of Smith's re-enactment of her court speech at Karen Matthews' trial, Mark Lawson noted that 'her words (taken verbatim from trial transcripts) have an eloquence and intelligence that Ibsen would happily have given one of his heroines' (2017). Smith's former role as Ibsen's Hedda can therefore be understood as both an intertext to The Moorside, and, aligned with Bushby, as an example of a breaking narrative, of going beyond expectations imposed by 'insiders' on 'outsiders'. While this, like Bushby's portrayal in The Moorside can be understood as a socially favourable feature, critical analysis and indeed critical distance makes visible a broader picture; it is low expectations and representations that dominate in relation to Northern, working class women, and that are demanded to be overcome. The eloquence of Bushby's language at Karen's trial in The Moorside is arguably understood as exceptional because of the earlier coarseness that she displays, particularly in the opening scene of episode one which sees her swearing and threatening to 'batter' her son (albeit in an act played out for a Council run 'Parenting' class leader, who advises Julie to employ an alternative, 'non-violent strategy'). Indeed, a similar view could also be applied to Smith, and her performative career. Perhaps, what is made visible in the gaps between Bushby and Smith's own

performances of selfhood, of their journey from plain speaking to verbal eloquence, is a mobility from expected working-class to middle-class behaviour. Through evidencing their ability to transition and indeed move up the social scale, they are publicly rewarded, their efforts lauded by the insiders who still have the ability and power to pronounce if and when someone has made the grade.

**Conclusion**

As exceptional cases, Bushby and Smith are positioned through The Moorside and its various intertexts as individuals, not as representative of their place, class and gender. As John Scott reminds us, 'the individual is the basis for allocation to class situations, but the family, as a demographic unit, is central to social class formation' (1994: 938). In terms of The Moorside, it is, albeit via their exclusion, the Matthews family that are positioned at the centre, and therefore as representative of their class. This is important in that, as Stuart Hall argues 'all identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects' (1996: 15). The Moorside's strategies of exclusion work however on two levels. The Matthews family, as argued above, are 'visibly excluded' from the main community story, as a narrative device used to render the estate and its residents homogenous for ease of story-telling. This strategy allows for the Matthews family to represent the 'poor behaviour' attributed to their social class, in opposition to Bushby and Murray's exceptionality. Equally, if not a matter of greater concern, is the 'invisible exclusion' of non-white members of the community, who are erased completely, stripped of voice, extricated from their community, eliminated. This erasure of diversity matters – and is, alongside the

good/bad behaviour dichotomy gifted to white residents, one of the key things that can be understood as being the matter with The Moorside's representation.

As Richard Dyer argues: 'How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation' (1993: 1). Thus the process of class representation is also a process of class formation. Establishing class is always a narrative process, and we hope to have shown here how textual analysis can operate symbiotically alongside the contextual, that is the industrial and political factors at play in the production of class stories on screen. In the process, we have revealed how The Moorside reflects, naturalises, and further embeds narrowly ideological representations of class, and intersecting spheres of gender, race, and placed-based politics.

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[iii] BBC Equality Information Report 2016/17: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/equality-information-report-2017.pdf
[iv] The 'BBC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, 2016-2020' does, pleasingly, note the importance of social class as a measure of diversity and the strategy document notes: 'Diversity also includes our non-visible differences such as sexual orientation, social class, heritage, religion, unseen disabilities, different perspectives and thought processes, education, family status and age.' http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2016.pdf
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