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Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London/New York: Zed Books, 2013). pp. 253. ISBN: 9781848138537, £14.99, paperback.

I have been eagerly anticipating the publication of sociologist Imogen Tyler's first monograph, *Revolting Subjects*, for some time. When I heard that the book would combine Tyler's interests on asylum and migration, motherhood, race and ethnicity, disability, social class and poverty, and much more, to explore abjection, revolt and resistance in neoliberal Britain, I was intrigued, excited and fascinated by how the book would unfold. I was not disappointed. Through the exploration of figurative case studies, bound as "national abjects," Tyler deftly weaves a vast array of theoretical literature, stretching across feminism, sociology, media studies and psychosocial studies, to name but a few, and empirical examples to map "the borders of the state from the inside out, suggesting we look anew at *the state we are in*" (Tyler 2013: 3, original emphases). Each page does just this as Tyler takes us on a vivid journey to explore those cast out of contemporary British sovereignty, how the revolts of these subjects can offer resistance and highlight a re-conceptualisation of citizenship in neoliberal times. This review is split into two parts. The first half briefly considers *Revolting Subjects*' contribution to academia. The second half contemplates what this book adds to maternal studies by exploring Chapter 1: 'Social abjection', Chapter 4: 'Naked protest' and aspects of Chapter 2: 'The abject politics of British Citizenship' and Chapter 6: 'Britain and its poor'.

Drawing on a theoretical lens of social abjection, *Revolting Subjects* disentangles citizenship, social class and migration through the consideration of recent, mainly, British revolts. Exploring case studies of asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, rioters, 'chavs' and disability activists, Tyler is concerned with what the "mediation of resistance" across a range of sites tells us about neoliberal Britain, how this affects those most disenfranchised and how these revolts can offer a "reframing of events and the capacity of aesthetic practices of counter-mediation to fracture the neoliberal consensus" (Tyler 2013: 13). What ensures that this book is significant and timely is Tyler's brilliant re-working of social abjection to do this, to which I will return in due course, and

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how this anchors the array of revolts that she explores to persuade the reader of the urgency and political relevance of her argument in the current moment. The way in which Tyler synthesises, critiques and establishes this in *Revolting Subjects*, unravelling complex theories and considering revolting subjects with analytical force, is vivid, cogent and convincing, ensuring that this book is nothing short of exceptional.

In perhaps one of the thickest yet captivating chapters of *Revolting Subjects*, Tyler offers her theorisation on social abjection, paving the way for the book's theoretical framework. Tyler's "(re)turning" (Tyler 2013: 46) of abjection claws the concept away from a stringent Kristevian account to aid her in the exploration of those considered abject in neoliberal Britain. Departing from Georges Bataille's notion of abjection and Tyler's phenomenal critique of Julia Kristeva's theorisation of abjection in an earlier essay, *Against Abjection* (2009), Chapter 1 considers how social abjection can be drawn upon to think with (and against) subjectivity and sovereignty. Most poignant to maternal studies is Tyler's critique and re-working of Kristevian notions of abjection, whereby the subject rejects all that is considered abject for individuation. Whilst Tyler does argue that certain aspects of Kristevian notions of abjection must be retained, such as enabling an account of the body politic through the "multiple perspectives" that "working *with* abjection enables" (Tyler 2013: 35, original emphasis) and drawing upon the concept to consider bordering, she pushes past the theoretical impasse that Kristeva's legacy leaves, by "turn[ing] Kristeva's account of abjection against itself" (Tyler 2013: 35). She does so through a stunning analysis of how abjection is present in Kristeva's theorisation through a "memory hole". Tyler explores the socio-cultural, historical and political formations that enabled this theory to come to light, the norms that allow abjection to hold meaning and significance, and considers abjection as a force of governance. Tyler argues that Kristevian notions of abjection mask the xenophobic, colonial and abjecting qualities inherent to the theory. Most significant, in my opinion, is when she states that to avoid the cyclical appropriation of abjection, empirical accounts must be explored - or, as Tyler terms it, we must focus on "being abject" (Tyler 2013: 4) - as the silencing of empirical accounts is inherent to abjection itself.

Kristeva's account of abjection has often been drawn upon or critiqued by those exploring the maternal (see for example, Betterton 2006; Soderback 2010; Zerilli, 1992, to name but a few) as the maternal is considered to be the ultimate abject. And yet, as Tyler and others (e.g. Baraitser 2009; Tyler 2009; Walker 1998; Zerilli 1992) note, the theory is compelling yet also problematic for maternal studies owing to many of the reasons that Tyler outlines. One of the

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strengths of this book (and there are many) is that this meticulously researched and fascinating chapter enables Tyler to bring the political relevance of abjection (and the maternal) into focus, re-imagining the concept to ensure that it is drawn upon for contemporary critique without claiming this as prehistoric and universal. What Tyler's account of social abjection offers is a theory and framework that enriches maternal studies by retaining the compelling aspects of Kristeva's theorisation, whilst troubling the theoretical deadlock that Kristeva offers, which relegates the ultimate abject, the maternal, to a site of passive disgust.

In line with furthering empirically based accounts of "being abject", Chapter 2 discusses Sonia and her child, Mary, an irregular migrant who was imprisoned as she attempted to leave Britain when pregnant with Mary. Tyler highlights how migrant mothers are now easily targeted to maintain national borders. Chapter 4 extends this focus, disentangling and complicating this terrain, to investigate how migrant mothers are also a site of resistance and maternal agency. Exploring how pregnant women, mothers and children have become "corporeal border zones" (Tyler 2013: 108), she argues that through the mobilisation of naked protests in Yarl's Wood and the Niger Delta, resistance and political tools for disenfranchised communities are highlighted. Whilst not attempting to give a comparative analysis, Tyler traces the Yarl's Wood and Niger Delta protests to explore how these naked maternal subjects disrupt transnational politics through a feminist, postcolonial lens. Arguing that these maternal protests challenge Kristevian notions of maternal abjection and Agamen accounts of 'bare life', Tyler states that these protests trouble dominant conceptions of Eurocentric and masculinist traditions of sovereignty, offering a "maternal commons" (Tyler 2013: 107). As Tyler notes, through "the baring of their naked maternal bodies the mothers of Yarl's Wood and in the Niger Delta insist that maternal origin is acknowledged and in doing so refuse their constitution as wasted humans" (Tyler 2013: 123). Tyler successfully and simultaneously emphasises the huge injustices that these maternal subjects face due to transnational politics under neoliberalism, whilst concentrating substantial attention to resistant acts and agency. This difficult line to tread means that Tyler avoids relegating these maternal subjects into a silent mass of disenfranchised communities whose main function is to define, ideologically, the 'good' citizen. These chapters vividly bring to life what Tyler means when she writes that her aim is to turn "abjection against itself" (Tyler 2013: 35).

Lastly, Chapter 6 explores 'Britain and its poor' to add a psychosocial reading of neoliberal Britain as a "class project" (Tyler 2013: 177). In this chapter, in part, Tyler explores how figures have been drawn upon in the body politic to establish class as a revolting subject.

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She explores “Chavs” and “chav mums”, discussing Vicky Pollard, a fictional character from *Little Britain*, who personifies all that is abject about the ‘underclass’ at the point that inequalities are deepening in Britain. Not only does Tyler contribute stimulating theoretical insights when she draws on psychosocial concepts of social abjection to explore class, but she also situates the maternal and class in the wider context of revolting subjects. Thus, Tyler simultaneously enables the maternal to have a much-needed focus, whilst maintaining this alongside the broader concentration of class critique in neoliberal Britain.

Revolting Subjects is a very special book. Whilst I have offered a reading of some elements that I feel most obviously contribute to maternal studies, it has many aspects that can be drawn upon by those interested in the maternal. The meticulous and vivid intermingling of such a vast amount of theoretical and empirical material is an impressive feat in itself. And yet, Tyler not only does this with such passion, anger and skill, but also offers a rare contribution to academic enquiry by proposing a hopeful account of political resistance. Elsewhere Tyler’s work has also been described as hopeful and passionate; the significance of this cannot be overstated and it is a much-needed, refreshing, yet thought provoking thesis in the current socio-historical moment. This impressive book would be valuable to those in the fields of sociology, geography, philosophy, cultural studies, activism, politics, and well beyond.

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