

'I probably would never move, but ideally like I'd love to move this week': class and residential experience, beyond elective belonging

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'I probably would never move, but ideally like I'd love to move this week': Class and Residential Experience, Beyond Elective Belonging

Abstract

This article critically engages with Savage et al.'s conceptualisation of 'elective belonging'. Drawing on research in a case-study site in central Salford, it argues that historical processes of deindustrialisation, slum clearance and social housing residualisation have been compounded by the subsequent strategies of gentrification and impact upon the forms of 'belonging' that can be constructed by marginal working-class populations. Correcting for the predominance of research on belonging from the perspective of middle-class incomers, findings are organised around the themes 'the local/incomer distinction', 'perceptions of and orientations to the neighbourhood', 'the power of economic capital', 'social others and social distance', and 'tectonic communities'. It is argued that the privileging of attracting inward investment into such locales necessarily entails that the elective belonging of the privileged is secured at the expense of the prescribed belonging of the marginal.

Keywords: Belonging, Gentrification, Social Class, Social Distance, Tectonic Communities

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This article takes the form of an engagement with Savage et al.'s (2005) influential notion of 'elective belonging'. The original concept is inspired by a Bourdieusian model of class analysis and is intended to describe the reflexive ways in which middle-class individuals develop and express an attachment to the places they inhabit. The first part of the article will introduce the concept of 'elective belonging', explore the extent to which it is underpinned by a form of belonging unavailable to the working class, and review a number of authors who have sought to bridge this gap. It is argued that a problem with much of this work is that it frequently fails to draw out the relationality between the elective belonging of more advantaged class actors and what I tentatively term the 'prescribed belonging' of the marginal working class. The second section introduces a research project conducted in central Salford, which was focused upon patterns of spatial mobility, use of

urban space and expressions of belonging. This research suggests that processes of exclusion and constraint greatly impact upon the forms of belonging that can be constructed by a marginal inner-city working class and particularly that the phenomenon of state-led gentrification by capital, premised on the refashioning and reimagining of city spaces in order to appeal to the lifestyle wants of various sections of the middle classes, significantly deepens this exclusion. By way of a conclusion, I argue that the concept of 'prescribed belonging' can be seen as a corrective to certain strands of cultural class analysis that posit an overly descriptive and insufficiently relational model of class.

Elective Belonging

Elective belonging (hereafter EB) is described by Savage et al. as encapsulating spatial attachment, social networks and forms of connectivity, and links to class position (2005). The title of the book in which EB is introduced, *Globalisation and Belonging*, is significant. It speaks to the ways in which social networks and social fields have become 'unbounded' by various social processes, including rapid and significant increases in personal mobility, the dispersion of social networks far outside of one's own locality and the influence of mediated cultures.

For Savage et al., elective belonging is related to a class-based habitus; subject to differential forms of socialisation, possessing different quantities and compositions of capital and occupying differing trajectories through social space. This habitus in turn produces dispositions for different kinds of spaces:

People are comfortable when there is a correspondence between *habitus* and field, but otherwise people feel ill at ease and seek to move - socially and spatially - so that their discomfort is relieved. For Bourdieu this is crucial to the 'dialectic of positions and dispositions'. Mobility is driven as people, with their relatively fixed habitus, both move between fields (places of work, leisure, residence, etc), and move to places within fields where they feel more comfortable. (2005: 9)

In unpacking these dispositions, *Globalisation and Belonging* explores the facets of spatial attachment across a sample of mostly middle-class residents in four different types of middle-class neighbourhoods in the Greater Manchester conurbation. The authors present a plethora of spatial

attachments related to life-course, the social and demographic mix of different neighbourhoods, access to facilities and cultural consumption, geographic variations in gender relations (2005: 54), the relative dispersion of social networks, patterns of neighbouring (2005: 81) and (classed) fears of other city-spaces (2005: 113), amongst others. These findings, along with other works adopting a Bourdieusian approach to residential belonging (Butler with Robson, 2003), clearly contribute both to a broad understanding of spatial attachment, but also to the ways in which different class fractions (within the middle class) exhibit dissimilarities in their tastes for urban spaces, related to their differential possession of the Bourdieusian capitals.

Ultimately, Savage's concept is underpinned by the degree of choice the middle classes exercise over their residential location (the 'possibility of leaving and moving somewhere else', Savage et al., 2015: 264), and as Crow (2010: 228) notes, a rather different terminology is needed to describe the position of working-class tenants. This is indicative of the broader preoccupation with the lifestyle modalities of the middle class in contemporary sociology, which has led to the obscuration of the relationship that more marginal actors have to housing, neighbourhood and belonging (Allen, 2008a; Slater, 2006; Wacquant, 2008). Even Butler, whose work arguably suffers from the same imbalance in perspective, has suggested that most of the research on gentrification 'sets out to study the location from the viewpoint of those who have been remaking the area' (Butler, 2008: 141).

More recently, authors have attempted to counterbalance this bias by focusing specifically on working class experiences of belonging, gentrification and neighbourhood change (Allen, 2008b; Patton, 2014; McKenzie, 2015). Allen for instance has elaborated the concept of 'dwelling'; advanced in an attempt to understand the working class relation towards housing in its own terms (rather than from the perspective of middle-class developers, planners and academics). Allen convincingly argues that working class 'involvement' in the world (in a phenomenological sense) is defined by a *struggle for survival* rather than a *struggle for position* (2008b: 61) and, that, rather than understanding the

home as a commodity and a 'positional good', they are more inclined to view it as simply a locus for familial and collective life. Yet as Allen's own research powerfully reveals, the inner-city working class very often do not have the opportunity of simply dwelling, as their neighbourhoods are remade around them and they are displaced by one mechanism or another.

Paton (2014: 51) on the other hand variously critiques the work of Savage and Allen for what she understands as the denial of working-class agency implied by either a residual relationship to neighbourhood and belonging (Savage's concept of working-class nostalgia for a bygone age) or a purely instrumental one (Allen's 'bricks and mortar'). As her work clearly attests (as does the work of McKenzie), neighbourhood belonging is an immensely rich source of identity formation for working-class individuals, rooted in shared history, family networks and class culture. For this reason she argues that the working-class residents she studied in the gentrifying neighbourhood of Partick in Glasgow, experience strong elective belonging but weak 'elective fixity', i.e. the ability to choose to remain in place against the forces of neoliberal urban restructuring.

Nonetheless, a weakness with the approaches to social class and belonging of Paton and Savage is that they frequently fail to adequately draw out the distinctions separating (in the case of the former) or the direct relationality between (in the case of the latter) those classes remaking a neighbourhood and those whose neighbourhoods are being remade. In the case of Savage this relates to the weakness of a cultural class analysis that tends to the descriptive rather than the relational, a point I return to in the conclusion. It is not simply a case of 'contrasting' the presence or absence of elective belonging/elective fixity of the middle or working classes, but on understanding how one is dependent upon the other. This allows us to explore the politics of spatial belonging, in terms of the privileging or exclusion of different kinds of classed subjectivities, and how this maps on to those forces (re)shaping neighbourhoods. While Allen's work may over-instrumentalise working-class belonging, a real virtue of his study is to show how the increasing propensity of the middle

classes to treat housing as a commodity directly impinges upon the working classes' ability to stay where they are.

A further problem with counterposing elective fixity to elective belonging is that it might suggest that the only problem is the inability of the working classes to remain in place (obscuring the clear deficiencies of many working-class neighbourhoods in terms of environment, infrastructure and service provision), or obscure the fact that working-class spatial attachment is impacted upon by middle-class residential mobility *even when they remain in place* (though this is clearly suggested in Paton's work). In this understanding it might be better to deploy the concept of 'negotiated settlement', which Popay et al. developed in the course of their research on health, poverty and place:

[...] each individual can be argued to arrive at a 'negotiated settlement' between the normative aspects of place, where they 'ought' to live, and their lived experience of place – with the term 'settlement' denoting the best that can be achieved at a particular time rather than a necessarily desirable state. (Popay et al., 2003a: 67)

In this article I will elaborate upon these arguments utilising data collected through a case study of a gentrifying neighbourhood in inner-city Salford, Greater Manchester. I will ultimately suggest that the term 'prescribed belonging' may be a useful way of foregrounding the class relations at play in neighbourhood restructuring, as well as being a corrective to the predominance of cultural conceptualisations of class that can obscure questions of exploitation/domination.

Methods and Case Study Site

The findings presented in this article are predominantly drawn from a doctoral research project conducted between 2007 and 2011 that investigated inequalities in spatial mobility in a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood in central Salford (the eastern portion of the city, adjacent to Manchester city-centre). The research encompassed a significant degree of observation in the neighbourhood, an extensive review of documentary evidence and thirty-five in-depth interviews with residents (lasting between one and two hours). The sample incorporated a diversity of social positions ranging from the 'born and bred' working class, to representatives of incoming groups such

as students, young professionals and asylum seekers. The sample contained a slight over representation of women and a bimodal age structure, but in terms of education, employment and occupational status, it is broadly representative of the wider neighbourhood. Findings from this study have also been supplemented by a number of other projects I have conducted in adjacent neighbourhoods (primarily on issues of crime and policing, and employment and welfare).

Historically, Salford is no stranger to class-based inequalities, with the extreme living conditions of the Victorian and Edwardian slums being most famously attested to by Engels (1973) and Roberts (1990). This history of poverty and inequality is critical in terms of understanding the later spatial development of the city, and particularly in understanding the habitus of the contemporary working class, linked to a widespread oppositional culture; this is most evident today in the distrust of many residents towards various forms of authority (including local government and the police).

In terms of the city's subsequent development, it was precisely such widespread poverty and poor housing quality that provided the rationale for slum clearance and urban renewal, beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s. It is hard to overstate the impact this had on local communities; social networks were destroyed as individuals were relocated to peripheral 'overspill' housing estates many miles from their former homes. While the scale of those initial rounds of 'renewal' have not been rivaled since, they did mark only the most resounding crescendo of endless cycles of demolition and reconstruction in central Salford. These continue up to the present through mechanisms such as the Enterprise Zones (early 1980s), New Deal for Communities (1999-2011), Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders (2003-2011) and Urban Regeneration Companies (2005-2011).

Although the experience of slum clearance and relocation left an indelible scar on the working-class communities subject to it, it has been the impact of deindustrialisation and the collapse of employment in the inner-city that has generated the engrained poverty, exclusion and associated social problems now often taken as synonymous with Salford. In one neighbourhood,

unemployment stood at 22.9 per cent (32.4 per cent amongst young people) at the time of the 1991 census (Evans et al., 1996: 363). At the same time, the acceleration of suburban flight tended to drive social housing 'residualisation' as neighbourhoods were leached of those inhabitants with higher qualifications and stronger employment records (Gough et al., 2006). The 'urban crises' represented by these shifts were marked by the degradation of the physical environment, an increasing paucity of services, increasing crime rates and occasional outbreaks of disorder.

At the same time as these inner-city neighbourhoods were experiencing decline and significant social dislocation, emerging strategies of state-led gentrification by capital were being formulated (Warde, 1991; Smith, 2002), and were rationalised on the basis of attracting inward investment to the increasingly entrepreneurial conurbation. In Salford, these policies led to the establishment and development of 'Salford Quays' as a regeneration site on the former Manchester/Salford docks.

The story of the development of Salford Quays has been comprehensively researched by Henderson and colleagues (Henderson et al., 2007); what their work reveals is that the promised 'trickle-down' effects on which it was sold were never seriously believed by those driving the development. Although such a posture from local political elites can be seen as continuation of past 'top-down' housing policies, cynicism has been exacerbated by the obvious intent of 'refashioning the class geography of Salford' (Henderson et al., 2007: 1451), as well as the striking lack of a wider community benefit to the 'exclusive' apartment developments¹. Such cynicism is clearly attested to in the community history produced by Brotherston and Hughes (1994).

Indeed, the evidence suggests not only cynicism, but also tensions and direct antagonism between the incoming middle classes and the residualised working classes; one example being the demands by business owners in the early 1990s for a wall to be built separating the Quays from the adjacent Ordsall estate (Salford Advertiser, 1992). Fear of crime was clearly justified, as is evident in an interview Evans et al. (1996: 372) conducted with a 'spokesperson' of a local crime gang who

suggested that aspiring thieves should focus their activity on the Quays. Rising acquisitive crime was blamed by some for the commercial stagnation of the development during this period and led to a focus on securitisation in the late 1990s and 2000s.

I would characterise this later period of the gentrification of central Salford as one of 'explosive gentrification'. For instance, the neighbourhood containing Salford Quays saw an increase in its resident population from 6,464 at the 2001 census to 14,194 at the 2011 census. Given that the neighbourhood, as with elsewhere in central Salford, is squarely divided between new apartment developments (owner occupation and private rental) and poorer quality social housing from the 1970s and 80s, there has been very little scope for working-class residents to 'cash-in' housing assets. This may explain why, in contrast to Paton's study in Partick, there is comparatively little evidence of 'buy in' by the working class to the continuing gentrification of their neighbourhoods.

A contextual history can help us understand local attitudes to urban change that have a bearing upon the forms of belonging constructed and negotiated in the present, a point overlooked in many housing studies. I now proceed to an overview of five key themes in relation to belonging that emerged from the analysis of my interviews and observational data: 'the local/outsider distinction', 'perceptions of and orientations to the neighbourhood', 'the power of economic capital', 'social others and social distance', and 'tectonic communities'.

The Local/Incomer Distinction

A core premise of Savage et al's EB is that belonging is no longer to a fixed community, or to space as a 'container', making the distinction between local and incomer facile. The authors point instead to the significance of a localism/transience axis. The point is well taken; quite apart from the relatively high general levels of mobility exhibited by all social strata over the last century, central Salford has been *endlessly* demolished and rebuilt over the last 50 years and this is likely to have increased the level of turnover markedly. The participants in my own study have come from many places within the conurbation as well as further afield.

Nevertheless, while taking on board some of the arguments of Savage et al., many working-class incomers I interviewed are accepted into local working-class networks in a way in which middle-class incomers would not be, and indeed communicate their feelings of belonging by associating the area with the culture of their class. For *Chantelle* (resident for 5 years) this means not being judged for dropping the kids off at school in her pyjamas (in a way that she would be in more 'stuck-up' areas), while for *Maureen* (resident for 10 years) it is the similarity of the neighbourhood to the working-class area where she grew up, in another part of the conurbation:

B: It sounds like you feel there's quite a good community here?

Maureen: It's, I think it's much the same [as when I was a kid] actually, but you know then these are like the same kind of houses [terraces] that we lived in and it was the same thing, families didn't move far away from each other, so it is the same kind of, community [...] (*Cleaner, late 50s, no formal education, income = £5-10k p.a.*)

And these positive identifications with place (on the basis of class culture rather than length of residency) can be contrasted to the experience of middle-class individuals. In the first instance by *Amanda*, who was born and raised in the area:

B: [D]o you feel involved in the local community?

Amanda: Erm, not particularly no, I don't know, I just, I never felt part of [the area], I didn't, I just felt different from the other children round our street, they always treated my parents as outsiders cos' they've [got good jobs], but still live [on the estate], and I was, I'm going to sound geeky now, [...] I was a geek anyway, [...] so I never fit in. (*Undergraduate student, early 20s, income = £5-10k p.a.*)

In the second instance, with the account of *Sara*, a middle-class incomer who explains her foray into one of the local pubs: 'Hmm, haven't been back again since, it was okay but, I didn't really feel like I particularly fitted in there, I feel like I sort of stood out a little bit, so I wouldn't really be going back there again'. Furthermore, given the strength of a local 'Salford' identity articulated by many residents and the status that accrued to 'born and bred locals' in localised hierarchies of distinction, it seems clear that the 'local/outsider' distinction continues to have some purchase. What the preceding suggests, however, is that this distinction is also mediated (and to some extent 'shortcut') by class background (which was also clearly evident in Paton's research). Some of the reasons for

this can be understood through the themes that were identified from the interview data pertaining to place, belonging and mobility.

Differing Perceptions of and Orientations to the Neighbourhood

As noted in the overview of the case study site, central Salford has undergone significant state-led gentrification over the last thirty years, changing the demographic composition of some neighbourhoods markedly. In this section, I want to consider the different orientations to the neighbourhood exhibited by working-class people on the one hand, and middle-class on the other.

In the first instance, working-class understandings of the neighbourhood were marked by either a sense of decline (amongst older residents) or a taken-for-granted acceptance of the area's problems and lack of desirability (typically amongst younger residents). With regard to the former group, it may be argued, following Savage (2008), that they deploy 'nostalgia' as a counterpart to elective belonging; yet it is vital to recognise that this is no mere romanticisation of the past. Alongside the processes of slum clearance and urban renewal described above, there has been a marked restructuring of the city around the automobile, including the construction of Greater Manchester's only intra-urban motorway (as well as other dual carriage-ways), carving up communities and reducing once bustling high-streets to exhaust-scarred and abandoned (by pedestrians) urban environments. *Claire*, who had to move from an adjacent neighbourhood as a child due to slum clearance contrasted the lack of facilities in the area compared to her youth:

Claire: That was massive, it was a huge shopping area, [...] you had "the run", the pub run as well, which was pub, shop, pub, shop, [...] you could get anything you wanted down on *Main Road* and *Circle Lane*.

B: When did that start to disappear then?

Claire: Early seventies, they started doing redevelopment and they did a load of compulsory purchases, that's how we came to live here.

(Administrator, early 40s, income = £15-20k p.a.)

Even some 'incomers' such as *Kim* (*Health outreach worker, mid-30s, income = £25-30k*) and *George* (*Student, early 20s, income = £0-5k p.a.*) who have no historical frame of reference, cite the danger

represented by roads, the pollution and the degradation of the urban environment as factors impinging on the 'liveability' of these neighbourhoods.

Given the endless rounds of urban 'renewal' Salford has been subject to and the fact that, unlike *Kim* and *George*, many younger working-class residents had a limited understanding of what other neighbourhoods might be like, there was a tendency to express a (negative) taken-for-granted relationship to place:

B: What looks bad around *Oldsville*?

Amelia: Most places I think, every where's shit! [laughs] Honestly! It is, everywhere looks dull. (*Mid-20s, part-time cleaner, income = £5-10k p.a.*)

This is not to suggest that working-class residents only had negative attachments to place - as with McKenzie's (2015) work, many had a fierce pride in 'being Salford' – but it is to state that the majority of residents were keenly aware of their neighbourhoods' material deficiencies, coupled with a sense of encroachment that will be explored below. This often created a sense of dissonance or ambiguity between negative evaluations of environment and what was deemed positive, particularly the presence of local social networks providing various forms of support. *Amelia's* interview, for example, was notable for the number of occasions she oscillated between a desire to escape central Salford (primarily due to the impact of crime) and her recognition of her reliance on familial support (see MacDonald et al., 2005 for similar findings):

Amelia: Never thought about it, I don't, I've always said I'd always live [here] but, I don't know, now that [my son]'s at that age, and there's so much stuff going on about 'ere, and like since I had the break in, I don't know, mi options have opened [...] ideally I'd love to move abroad now [...] I reckon if I ever wanted to move, I'd move aboard, or, I dunno, Wales or something [...] mi granddad lives in Wales, [...].

And an acknowledgement of the unlikelihood of ever fulfilling this dream:

B: So how soon do you think you'd like to move out of the area?

Amelia: I probably would never move, but ideally like I'd love to move this week, I would I'd love to, if mi mam and that was there, and they had like a house for us, a separate one!

[...]

B: So you don't think you'll ever move out of the area?

Amelia: I would, but, I wouldn't know what to do, in like finding somewhere, mi mam's always helped me with everything, I wouldn't know where to start like.

Given her lack of formal education, the lack of geographical awareness she exhibits² and her dependence upon local social networks as a coping mechanism I argue that *Amelia* is torn between the negative impacts of place (in the last 12 months she has been burgled, been to prison herself, worried at the problems her son has had at school and suffered a nervous breakdown), and the realisation that she lacks the resources to be able to leave. Her spatial belonging is *prescribed* by dint of her class position.

The orientations of middle-class incomers to the neighbourhood were very different, with the larger group being characterised by a form of EB I term, following Allen (2007), 'city-centre tourism'. Allen describes this phenomenon as being linked to the saturation of development in city-centres, driving young professionals into the more moderately priced inner-cities. Furthermore, Allen argues that such developments are marketed on the basis of an association with 'city-centre living', even while they are spatially disconnected from city-centres. Such an orientation is clear in the interviews I conducted with professional incomers. *Suzanna* is a social worker from Europe who moved to Salford due to the fact that her boyfriend was studying at that university; her friendship networks are either linked to her boyfriend's studies or her own sports activities, and her choice of residence was very much linked to convenience, accessibility and an orientation to the city centre.

B: I'm interested in what led you to choosing *Apartments A*, how much of a role did location play, for instance?

Suzanna: Quite a big one, I would never have moved further away from Manchester city-centre, so we were looking for something where we could have a walking distance, [...] it's convenient [...]

(Social care professional, late 20s, income = £20-25k p.a.)

Sara meanwhile had moved from a more affluent town in the northwest for her own studies, and stayed on after obtaining a professional job in the city-centre. While she did participate in a local community organisation and expressed a commitment to her local 'community', she had no friends

in her direct neighbourhood, and experienced unease when interacting with working-class residents (as noted above). Similarly to *Suzanna*, location and affordability were the primary factors in her move to Salford.

Sara: So my estate agent recommended *Apartments B* just because in the city centre, obviously the apartments are really expensive, and really small, so if we just moved slightly out of the city centre, we managed to get a really good deal, two bedroom apartment, lot more room than we would have got if we'd lived like closer to town.

(Human resources professional, early 20s, income = £25-30k p.a.)

Both *Suzanna* and *Sara's* narratives support Allen's contention that 'dormitory' apartment developments end up being 'conceptually disconnected' from the neighbourhoods in which they are based. These middle-class incomers were much more likely to express a 'city-regional' sense of place, utilising facilities from across the conurbation, which were simply inaccessible to working-class residents lacking in cultural and economic capital.

The Power of Economic Capital

In this section I describe the ways in which the power of economic capital, as embodied by the actually-existing development processes, can be seen to impinge upon the spatial attachments of working-class local residents. Crucially, as recognised by the Salford Council officers interviewed by Henderson et al. (2007), social objectives have always been secondary to the aim of attracting commercial investment to the city. While the provision of social-housing has often been mandated as part of new development activity, targets rarely have been met and, in any case, have been entirely abandoned following the onset of recession in 2007 (Kingston, 2012). At the same time there has been a promotional focus on 'affordable housing', a floating signifier rightly critiqued by Lees (2013). The failure of 'regeneration' to incorporate such social dimensions is well understood by local working-class residents:

Dave: The houses have been rebuilt, but the fucking young minds haven't! They've made the area look a bit prettier, but that's all.

(Unemployed, early 40s, born in central Salford)

The local 'neighbourhood forum' I attended over the course of my initial fieldwork (2007-2011) provided many examples of the limited influence working-class residents were able to exercise over the development process. The timing and structure of the forum itself – held during the working day so that only a handful of retirees could attend, where council 'officers' usually outnumbered residents by four to one, and where the briefing from the private developer who had been given authority over the neighbourhood masterplan (traditionally undertaken by the local authority itself) dominated proceedings – seemed to preclude meaningful engagement. Particular tensions flared over the five years it took one local community group to obtain land from the local authority for a community allotment (in spite of a surfeit of brownfield sites across the area), leading one resident to exclaim that *'when developers want land, they get land!'* (Field work diary, 01/09/2009). In another instance, residents resented a local councillor interceding on behalf of Tesco, in order to dismiss objections to a large superstore being built in an adjacent neighbourhood. At the same time, disinvestment from services that were important to local residents (particularly youth services) tended to be glossed over in this forum.

A further issue relates to the rebranding of neighbourhoods in central Salford, with the proliferation of new neighbourhood 'identities'. These are rapidly becoming too numerous to mention, but include 'New Broughton Village', 'Ordsall, the Village in the Heart of the City', 'Chimney Pot Park', 'Hulton Square', 'Unity Quarter' and 'MediaCityUK', amongst others. These 're-imaginings' are explicitly targeted towards a middle-class disposition that views housing as a commodity and a tool for distinction within the 'space of positions' (Allen, 2008b). It is clear that such rebranding contributes to the dislocation of working-class spatial attachments, with one resident joking that 'nobody knows where they are'.

Responses to the imposition of a largely undemocratic and unaccountable development process could often be visceral, as revealed in the following observation:

One of Maureen's neighbours, Hugh, stopped to say hello while Maureen and I were smoking

outside the community centre. Maureen starts telling him that a local developer is going to build on the small green space in front of where we were standing, where he usually walks his dog. He responds angrily: 'The wankers! Why can't they just leave us alone?' Maureen replies sarcastically: 'It's progress Hugh!' (Field work diary, 26/04/2008)

Perceptions of Social Others and Social Distance

A further dimension of the way neighbourhood change impinges upon spatial belonging relates to the changing demographic mix of central Salford and the social distance between working-class/locals and middle-class/incomers. From a local perspective there is the sense that middle-class incomers do not integrate with the wider community:

B: With the new people moving into the flats, do you think they participate in the community?

Chris: No! They don't. They don't mix or anything, erm, [the council said] "it's not [going to be] absentee landlords", but it's turning out that it is, I mean if you look at [the new apartments], the weekend parties that are going on there, and the noise! [...] A lot are young, students, things like that, absentee landlords. [...] They don't give a monkey's, [...] they don't really care, they don't want to become part of the community [...]

(Retired former soldier and community worker, late 60s, born in central Salford)

This should not be surprising, given the critique of supposed 'mixed-community' strategies made by Lees (2008); the fact being that middle-class incomers are not orientated towards the neighbourhood (helpfully encapsulated by Atkinson and Flint's notion of 'differential time space trajectories', 2004) and inhabit privatised developments.

On these latter points, the majority of new apartment developments in central Salford can be seen as 'gated communities', fenced or walled off from surrounding areas, featuring videophone entry and off-street parking. Given that most of these developments consist of one-bed and two-bed apartments that are clearly targeted at middle-class individuals at a particular stage of the life-course (students and 'twenty-somethings'), they tend to promote a certain kind of (hedonistic) mono-cultural community. This is alluded to in a comment by a locally-raised individual who briefly resided in such a 'new-build' apartment development, before returning to her former estate:

Kerry: I never met one person, I seen people outside doing the drugs and stuff, but even then the next door neighbour, I think we said hello once and that was it. But that's a

bit; I don't like that, because it's nice to know the neighbours and stuff.

(Mother of one, late 20s, income = £10-15k p.a.)

Turning to how incoming residents view working-class/locals, my observational work (particularly at the 'Police and Community Together' meetings, which were only attended by middle-class incomers) produced numerous examples of individuals espousing commonly held stereotypes of Salford locals as parochial, racist and lacking in aspiration (see Butt, 2005; Nicholson, 2004). This was also noted by *George* in relation to student incomers:

George: Some students think of locals like 'scally bastards' and it's like actually they are not that bad. If you give them a nod, they are alright. Some of them don't like the uni but that's more because of the students and the fact that the students treat them like crap when it's their area.

(Student, early 20s, income = £0-5k p.a.)

Of all the students I interviewed (both in relation to this and other projects), few had any social contacts with non-student residents, many held negative stereotypes regarding local people and all demonstrated a preoccupation with the potential for criminal victimisation. The existence of such discourses is singularly unsurprising given ever-widening inequalities at the societal scale, but is also one which is resisted by working-class locals such as *Vicky (a para-legal administrator)*, when she claims that middle-class incomers do not give 'the neighbourhood a chance'.

Tectonic Communities

The mutual social distance described above is rooted in class dynamics, the differential possession of capitals and differential social trajectories, and is productive of what Butler has elsewhere termed 'tectonic social interactions', referring to 'the ways in which different social groups move past each other in separate worlds and have almost no interaction on any systematic basis' (Butler and Watt, 2007: 98). Nevertheless, this metaphor needs to be pushed further in order to understand that such interactions do not constitute a 'tension management device' (Butler, 2002), but can rather actively generate friction. This is evident in his later work with Jackson (Butler and Jackson, 2015), but only really explored in relation to the social distance and distancing of the middle classes ('their' fear of certain areas, 'their' disgust at certain practices). What I want to suggest

below is that the working classes are not oblivious to these valuations and avoidances, and frequently respond through various forms of resistance.

This was made most explicit in another research project I was associated with, on car crime in central Salford (Coulton et al, 2010), where *Luke* (an occasional car thief) linked the targets of his criminal predation to those he perceived to be disrespecting him:

Luke: [...] them students are going to be the one in ten years with big houses and nice cars! I mean I get on with a few students, but some are almost looking down on you, and then they're the people that you want to rob. (*Unemployed male, late teens*)

Of course there is an element of a vicious cycle here, whereby middle-class incomers are liable to be intimidated by working class youths on the street, and cross to the opposite side to avoid walking past them. This in turn is regarded by those youths as signifying aloofness or contempt. Such 'resistances' (the victimisation of incomers) then serve to further the demands for the increasing 'securitisation' of these neighbourhoods, strengthening a sense amongst the middle-class incomers that the marginal working-class community constitutes a dangerous and threatening 'other'.

Mike: [...] when I lived on *Albert Street*, it was very tough, we were perceived as being, one person termed it as 'Yuppies', because this is council, that's privately owned, it automatically meant a different social status [...] and they would pick on, they would break the windows, and, [...] they will threaten you, [...] particularly if you threaten to go to the police [...] (*Medically retired resident, late 50s*)

Yet it is far from only those locals involved in criminal activity who evidence an antagonism towards middle-class incomers, as in the following extract:

B: That actually brings something else up, just wanting to ask you your thoughts on the new people, [the] kind of incomers into the estate?

Margaret: Don't really know many on, erm, on *Mill Lane*, and *Apartments C* [...] my only complaint about the [those] people is, that they've got a mega carpark at the back there [...] and they park on the grassed areas, and y'know, and they've ruined [it] and I don't think they should be allowed, and [...] and I'm not surprised they get their windows smashed in, because I think people are fed up with it now, they're sick to death of them parking, and ruining areas that we're all bloody grafting for, to get looking nice and they're spoiling them. (*Retired catering officer, mid-60s, income = £5-10k p.a*)

Indeed antagonism and conflict are evident in a range of spheres, primarily relating to access to urban spaces (particularly Salford Quays) and facilities, and the direction of local policing strategies. Analogous to the suburban social movements around crime prevention in South Manchester analysed by Taylor (1996) and their elective affinities to the goals of local growth coalitions, where incoming residents have organised, it has been in the response to the 'crime problem', be this through Neighbourhood Watch, Neighbourhood Forums or 'Police and Community Together' meetings. The often disproportionate police response that arises from the well organised articulation of middle-class interests is a further cause of friction between the 'tectonic communities' inhabiting central Salford (cf. Minton, 2009; Hancock, 2007), and is, as I have argued elsewhere, fundamental to understanding the dynamics that led to rioting in Salford in August 2011 (Jeffery and Tufail, 2015).

Conclusion: Beyond 'Elective Belonging'

On the basis of this data collected in central Salford, I want to argue that processes of neoliberal regeneration, imposed over the heads of a marginal working class, serve to exacerbate already existing class conflict and to impact upon the forms of belonging that can be constructed by this group. The middle classes who have resettled the inner-city in recent decades have the possibility of defining an 'elective belonging' that weaves individual narratives to locational desirability and a commercially-constructed notion of the post-industrial 'good-life' ('place-making' in the words of Benson and Jackson, 2012), centred on the consumption spaces of an English city-centre. However, the existing working-class residents exercise by comparison little choice as regards their residential location, while also suffering psychological dislocation (and very real physical exclusion) as their environments are remade around them. Thus, it may be more useful to speak of 'un-elective' or 'prescribed belonging'.

In making these arguments, it is worth re-stating that this research found very little evidence of the kind of 'buy in' to gentrification processes that Paton (2014) noted in her case study of Patrick.

This is related to the much higher levels of poverty found in central Salford as compared to the neighbourhood she examined in Glasgow, meaning that the new private rental accommodation is clearly beyond the reach of most working-class residents. Furthermore, as noted above, this is also dependent upon the fact that a very small minority of working-class residents owned their properties, foreclosing the possibility of this group profiting from the increasing property prices. While Paton argues at various points in her study that gentrification 'is not a zero sum game' (2014: 152), this is precisely the impression s generated in this study, with scant evidence of the 'hidden rewards' of class.

I want to finish by making some broader comments regarding contemporary class analysis in the UK. The rise of cultural class analysis has undoubtedly provided important insights into the ways in which class is reproduced through culture, especially in terms of the symbolic violence to which the working classes are subject (Skeggs, 1997; Savage, 2000; Tyler, 2013) and, of particular interest here, in exploring the spatialisation of class (Savage et al., 2005). Nonetheless, I am concerned that certain tendencies within this school conceptualise class in an overly descriptive mode, allowing concerns with the properties of individuals or classes to subsume the relationships between them. Against this, I want to reassert the notion of class as both relational (Bradley, 2014) and political (Toscano and Woodcock, 2015), implicit in both Marxist formulations of 'exploitation' and Bourdieu's dichotomisation of the dominant/dominated classes. This is to say, the advantages of the middle class are irreducibly related to the exclusions of the working class. Returning to my argument further above, it is not merely a case of describing the 'elective belonging' of the middle classes, and then contrasting this to the lack of choice of the working class; but of understanding the ways in which the forms of belonging articulated by the middle class, and the modes of urbanism (gentrification) designed to satisfy those desires, actively circumscribe the 'agency' available to the working classes. Most starkly, one person's coffee house, wine bar or 'designer apartment' is another's eviction notice or compulsory purchase order.

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Notes:

¹ It is abundantly clear that the restructuring of central Salford over recent decades has been premised on attracting middle-class incomers and appealing to the lifestyle wants of this group (see Henderson et al., 2007; Christophers, 2008; Wallace, 2015). Not only has this entailed the creation of bar and restaurant developments that are unaffordable to working-class residents, amidst ongoing disinvestment from statutory services, it has also involved the very public renunciation of Salford's working-class heritage (Beard, 2011).

² Pointing to levels of geographical awareness as a class differentiated asset is not a denial of working-class agency, but a recurrent finding from empirical studies of the last four decades (Gould and White, 1974; Green and White, 2007), and is related to the fact that spatial mobility is a class differentiated asset.

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