Article

Revisiting 'social tectonics': The middle classes and social mix in gentrifying neighbourhoods

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Abstract

Studies of gentrification in London have shown that some groups of middle-class people have been attracted to poor and multi-ethnic areas of inner London in part because of their social and ethnic mix. However, the attraction has often not translated into everyday interaction. In an earlier account of gentrification in Brixton this de facto social segregation was typified as a process of 'social tectonics'. In this paper we compare two ethnically and socially mixed neighbourhoods, Peckham and Brixton, that at different times have represented the 'front line' of gentrification in London. We examine the extent to which the gentrification of Brixton in the late 1990s is being mirrored by the gentrification that is occurring today in Peckham – a similarly mixed and counter-cultural area of South London. Whilst we identify continuities between the gentrification process in these two areas separated by a decade of boom and recession, we suggest that the Peckham example demonstrates the need for a more developed approach to the issue of social mixing than that implied by the social tectonics metaphor. Specifically, we argue that there is a need to explain how the presence of classed and ethnic 'others' can be central to the formation of identities within some middle-class fractions in such enclaves in the inner city, and how attitudes and neighbourhood practices can change over time.

Introduction

In the summer of 2011, our research team was coming to the end of the empirical stage of a project interviewing middle-class residents across London.[1] The central question posed in the research was the relationship between middle-class people, the areas in which they lived and their attitudes towards

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those around them. We were particularly interested in attitudes towards social mix and how neighbourhoods had adapted to the changing nature of the social mix – or how they had kept it at bay. Respondents were asked to describe their neighbourhood and their uses of it, rather than their attitudes towards 'social mix'.

This was the summer of the riots that began in Tottenham, after the killing of Mark Duggan by the police, and spread to areas across London (and beyond). Peckham, an area where we had been carrying out research, was one of the areas affected. The riots in Peckham happened on the shopping streets that were repeatedly identified by respondents as the boundaries – and source of anxiety – of a middle-class enclave within the area. These events brought new significance to descriptions of these streets as boundaries separating the middle classes from other people in the area and as locations of encountering 'otherness'.

While the relationship between economic injustice, social relations in mixed neighbourhoods and these more spectacular eruptions of urban unrest is an important question for future research, here our focus is on the banal and everyday ways in which these members of the middle classes construct their senses of self-identity.

The paper focuses on the question of social mix in two gentrifying inner city neighbourhoods.[2] It compares present-day Peckham to Brixton (also an area that has a recent history of urban unrest with some of the most serious urban rioting of the post war period in 1981 (Scarman, 1982)) at a point 10 years earlier in time. It should be noted that the analysis presented here is focused on how middle-class people interpret the social dynamics of their neighbourhood rather than providing an overview of social relations in these places (for an analysis of a range of other perspectives on these

neighbourhoods and processes of gentrification see Glucksberg, 2013; Haworth, 2002).

In the research conducted in Brixton in the 1990s by one of the current authors (Butler and Robson, 2001, 2003), it was argued that, whilst the white middle classes spoke of the attraction of living in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood, they had little to do with working class and black residents and indeed held them responsible for some of the problems their own children were having in the area's schooling system. The research identified a situation, which the authors described as one of 'social tectonics', where these groups moved past each other like tectonic plates below the Earth's crust, with little contact. In the more recent research carried out in Peckham in 2010 and 2011, we found a greater degree of engagement with at least the idea if not the reality of the lives of 'others' who constituted the boundaries of their gentrified enclave. In the light of these findings, we concluded that the 'social tectonic' metaphor only partially described and did not in itself explain social relations between the middle classes and other social groups within the area.

In this paper we critically re-examine the 'social tectonics' metaphor in an attempt to unravel the reasons for the somewhat different self accounts by our two sets of middle-class respondents in these two areas of South London which have both, for their time, been representative of the 'front line' of 'social action' gentrification (Warde, 1991). In both areas at different points in time narratives of social mix have been to the fore but apparently with rather different conclusions being drawn by our two sets of respondents. Are these differences ones of place or of changes in the socio-temporal context? Alternatively, are they indicative of a change in conceptions of social mix as fractions at the lower end of the middle classes become further distanciated from

'gentrification central' embodied in 'super gentrified' areas such as Islington (Butler and Lees, 2006) and Wandsworth? Or, finally, are they indicative of a deeper sense of local engagement as the age of austerity and public-sector cuts has dawned and begun to impact on the lower ends of the metropolitan middle classes? If so, what implications might this have for our understanding of the metropolitan middle classes and their sense of their formation? In examining the limits of 'social tectonics' as a metaphor, we argue that theories of the formation of classed and raced subjectivities (Hall, 1997; Lawler, 2005; Said, 1995; Skeggs, 2004) can be brought into productive dialogue with debates about gentrifying places, social mix and the production of space.

The two neighbourhoods are not given equal weight as we wish to draw on the social tectonics approach, not so much in order to re-evaluate the analysis of Brixton ten years previously, but rather to inform, drawing on our research in Peckham, our understanding of social mix in gentrifying areas of London where the social and economic distance between the gentrifying class and the resident class is not as great as in areas such as Wandsworth and Islington (Butler and Robson, 2003).

From the start, we need to emphasise that the two studies were part of two distinct projects, conducted at different times, based on different interview methodologies. What they shared was a concern with the relations between the middle classes and other social groups in an inner-city gentrifying area in South London. In our view, these similarities make the comparison fruitful despite the studies being part of two distinct wider projects. The study in Brixton used a structured questionnaire with time allocated at the end of the interview for unstructured observations in response to a limited number of open-ended questions. In Peckham, on the other hand, we undertook in-depth semi-structured interviews which were then transcribed. It could be argued that if the Brixton respondents had been interviewed using similar semi-structured interviews, a more complex narrative of neighbourhood and its 'others' might have emerged. Whilst we accept that more nuances might have emerged in the Brixton account, we do not accept that this would have nullified the differences in attitudes to the local 'other' which have helped to inform our account of social mixing in Peckham.

Gentrification and social mix: Contested terms

Definitions of gentrification, like much else associated with the term, have long been contested but can be perhaps be summarised as involving:

> … a process involving a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital. The greater the difference in socio-economic status, the more noticeable the process… (Clark, 2005: 258)

An even simpler definition of gentrification would be the one adopted by Hackworth as 'the re-creation of space for progressively more affluent users' (2002: 1). Both definitions capture the key elements of gentrification which involve a change of use initiated by the more powerful at the cost of the less powerful and poorer, and emphasise that changes are not just social and economic but also that they take place in the context of a change in the built or spatial environment.

Whilst wealth and power undoubtedly lie at the causal heart of our understanding of gentrification as a phenomenon, they do not tell the whole story. Detail, nuance and

context matter, as does the fact that the city in which contemporary gentrification is taking place can often be a very different place from the industrialised and predominantly working-class city in which gentrification was first conceptualised (Butler and Hamnett, 2009; Glass, 1964). Disputes over the nature, causes and consequences of contemporary gentrification (Hamnett 2009, 2010; Slater, 2009, 2010) should not blind us to the different ways in which this process has the potential to unfold across cities and within neighbourhoods and, we would argue, we need to foreground in our analysis the everyday practices and processes that produce (unequal) urban spaces (Lefebvre, 1974). In our view, an important area is the relation between gentrification, the dynamics of neighbourhood and issues of social mix: if the former has dominated academic discourse and been ignored by policy makers, the latter has been a focus for policy,[3] but has been relatively under-researched – at least until recently (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000; Bacqué et al., 2014; Lees et al., 2008; Paton, 2010).

Whilst policy makers have sought to represent investment in the urban infrastructure as socially inclusive urban regeneration that creates 'socially mixed' places, its success stories have often, and rightly, been characterised as gentrification in which the resident population has been engineered out in a process of displacement (Slater, 2006). Whilst social mix might be the holy grail, it has commonly involved burying the few units of 'affordable housing' around the back of the flagship development in a display of architectural and social invisibility – assuming that a 'Section 106'[4] deal cannot be reached to build the affordable housing elsewhere or offer up a landmark cultural building in its place. Thus social mix has largely been a policy smokescreen rather than the subject of explicit social analysis.

An idealised notion of social mix was found to underlie the residential decision-making of some groups of inner London gentrifiers in the 1990s as well as amongst some sections of the middle-class living in and around Manchester during the same period (Butler and Robson, 2003; Savage et al., 2005). Based on their study of Manchester, Savage et al. (2005) argue that a sense of habitus operates across a series of 'fields' such as work, leisure, residence, so implying that Bourdieu's conception of the habitus is essentially spatial:

> 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 … mobility is driven as people, with their relatively fixed habitus, both move between fields … and move to places within fields where they feel more comfortable. (Savage et al., 2005: 9)

The logic of this is that people therefore triangulate these fields spatially so that they live with 'people like themselves'. Savage et al. (2005) use the term 'elective belonging' to describe how middle-class incomers claim neighbourhood belonging through these processes as consumers making a residential choice. However, what happens when field and habitus cannot be made to completely cohere? What our study of Peckham highlights, we suggest, is the need to examine the ongoing interactions, the everyday practices, tactics and trade-offs made by the middle classes that constitute place and classed identities (Blokland, 2003; Blokland and Van Eijk, 2012). Skeggs argues that 'What we read as objective class divisions are produced and maintained by the middle class in the minutiae of everyday practice, as judgements of culture are put into effect' (2004: 118). If we apply this to social relations in a gentrifying neighbourhood, it is possible to explore how symbolic power can be claimed in neighbourhoods through everyday practice and through the judgements made about

(or indeed avoidance of) others of those who do not fit into the middle classes' image of the neighbourhood. Such judgements and distinctions are central to the formation of classed and racialised identities of the middle-class people themselves (Hall, 1997; Lawler, 2005; Said, 1995; Skeggs, 2004). In both Brixton and Peckham, such divisions have both strong class and racialised aspects to them that cannot be neatly separated.

Moreover, our Peckham data show that middle-class people also live with contradictions and in situations where habitus and field do not neatly line up and these contradictions are often pieced together into a narrative of neighbourhood in order to electively belong. Through this process the presence of 'exotic' people and places can be absorbed into the resourced middle-class self as a form of cultural capital (Skeggs, 2004; see also May, 1996; but compare with Watt, 2009). Or, over time, what was once considered exotic or alarming becomes unremarkable.

In what follows, our focus is on the nature of the social interaction that occurs between those living in an area and how they negotiate divides and differences in the practice of everyday life.

Brixton in the 1990s as a gentrified 'village in the mind'

The research in two study areas within Brixton was carried out in 1999 as part of a wider study of the middle classes in London undertaken as part of the *ESRC Cities: Cohesiveness and Competitiveness Programme* (CCCP). It investigated the middle classes in six areas of London contrasting different stages in London's gentrification process (Butler and Robson, 2001, 2003). Brixton, in the London borough of Lambeth, has long been regarded as the centre of London's African Caribbean community. During the 1980s and 1990s Brixton

gradually became perceived as a centre for middle-class habitation, although in fact it had a long-standing – and somewhat alternative – middle-class presence. While over the past two years there has been extensive media coverage of gentrification in Brixton, at the time of the research (1990s), Brixton was selected as an area where the gentrification process was comparatively recent and not complete. Seventy-five structured interviews were conducted in Herne Hill and the 'Poets Corner' area which runs off the Railton Road in central Brixton (see Figure 1). The questionnaire was completed by the interviewer and included both fixed-choice and open-ended questions; extensive field notes supplemented the responses to the open-ended questions. The sample was overwhelmingly white, most respondents were in their late 20s to mid 40s in a range of household types and were owner-occupiers.

Contemporary Peckham: Caught between 'them and us'

The Peckham research was conducted as part of a comparative research project (*The Middle Classes in the City: Social Mix or 'People Like Us'* (MiCCy)) focusing on the middle classes living in and around London and Paris (Bacqué et al., 2014, in press; Benson and Jackson, 2013; Jackson and Benson, 2014). The study examines middle-class residents living in five different types of neighbourhood across each city – gentrified, socially mixed but gentrifying, gated community, suburban and exurban. Peckham was our example of a socially mixed but gentrifying neighbourhood (see Figure 2). Peckham, in the London borough of Southwark, is both ethnically and socially mixed, shaped over the years by changing economic fortunes and waves of immigration. Over the past 20 years it has become a hub for London's West African communities. A stigmatised neighbourhood for
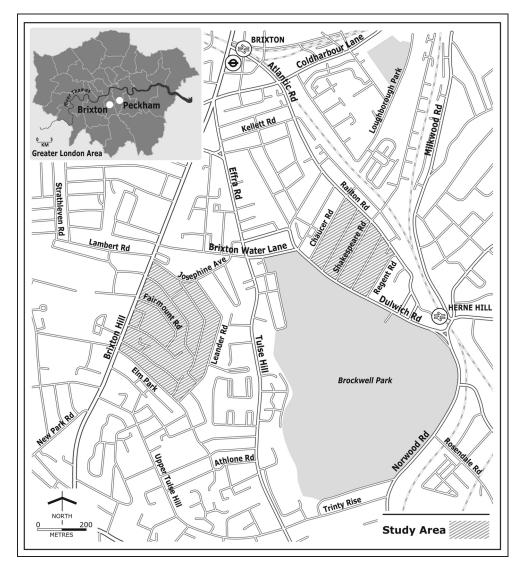
Figure 1. Brixton study area.

many years, Peckham has more recently become known for its art scene and trendy bars. We conducted 48 interviews with residents and local key informants in this neighbourhood. The respondents in Peckham ranged in age from their 20s into their 80s and included a diversity of household types – married couples, single people, families with

children and, whilst they were mainly owner-occupiers, a significant number were private renters.[5] Our sample was predominantly white British and European, with only two Black and Minority Ethnic interviewees.

In many ways, the research aims and the samples were remarkably similar between the two projects and both areas occupied a
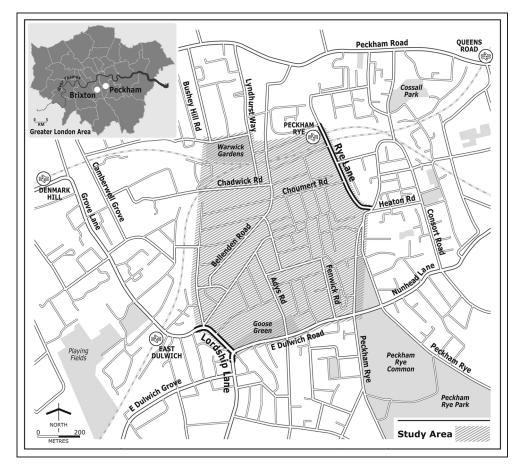
Figure 2. Peckham study area.

somewhat similar position in the contemporary social, cultural and urban imaginary within London at the time they were undertaken. Just as today Peckham is at the cutting edge of a new and 'edgy' arts-based entertainment economy which has global reach, so too was Brixton in the late 1990s (see Talbot, 2007). In both places, this was a definite 'pull' factor for an incoming middle class wanting to distance itself from the more stereotypical view of the consumption-oriented London gentrifier. In this more recent research, however, we have brought to light a range of practices through which

the middle classes strive to make their neighbourhood in their own image which also incorporates their 'other' in ways that either did not happen in Brixton or we failed to recognise (Benson and Jackson, 2013).

The middle classes and their 'others'

In the earlier study of Brixton, it was argued that the two main social groups, a white middle class and a black (and largely) working class, moved past each other like the tectonic plates under the Earth's crust with little day-to-day interaction or friction (Butler and

Robson, 2001). Brixton was attractive to the incoming middle classes because it was such an emblematically ethnically mixed area. The research found however, that their day-to-day lives were lived separately with little contact and even less social interaction between the incoming middle class and the long-standing resident population; for the incoming white middle classes, ethnic mix represented little more than attractive social wallpaper. In coining the term 'social tectonics', a picture was painted of two groups that had little to do with each other and in which neither played a large part in the day-to-day consciousness of the other group – except when things went wrong. This largely occurred around education and schooling when their children were forced to acknowledge each other in the context of what the middle classes regarded as a largely dysfunctional system of (particularly secondary) education. This often forced them to re-evaluate why they lived in Brixton and whether they wished to continue living there and frequently involved them in a judgemental evaluation of their non-middle-class neighbours through the perceived behaviour of their children.

In the more recent study in Peckham, an equally iconic socially and ethnically mixed area of South London, we have observed a rather more complex process of social segmentation between Black African and Black Caribbean groups, on the one hand, and an established and incoming white middle class on the other (Benson and Jackson, 2013; Bacqué et al., in press). In contrast to their Brixton counterparts ten years previously, we have noted the importance of the former groups in relation to the way in which the latter self-construct their classed and social identity as inhabitants of the gentrifying Bellenden Road area of Peckham which formed the core of our research area. Middle-class residents do this, in part at least, by 'pushing back' against two images

of class and ethnicity: those of the busy, multi-ethnic shopping street of Rye Lane (see Hall, 2012) and of the settled white middle-class consumption zone of gentrified East Dulwich (Jackson and Benson, 2014). Lying inbetween the two, our respondents construct a 'gentrified but not-gentrified' self-image of themselves in which narratives of social mix speak out loudly but ambiguously and not always comfortably. Furthermore, the respondents in Peckham are more heavily invested in neighbourhood and involved in a range of practices that have remade the neighbourhood in their image than those found in the Brixton research of ten years previously.

In the remainder of this paper, we briefly revisit the original research on social tectonics in Brixton which we subsequently contrast with the experience of our Peckham respondents who adopt a more active approach towards negotiating an accommodation with social mix. We argue that our respondents' perceptions in 2010–2011 in the Bellenden Road area of Peckham of the 'other' – characterised for the most by the shopping street of Rye Lane – are something which they both incorporate into their narratives of themselves and use to mark out the boundaries of middle-class identity and area. We suggest that the interviews we undertook in Peckham demonstrate the need to build on the concept of social tectonics in order to understand how the presence of classed and ethnic 'others' can become central to the formation of middle-class identities in middle-class enclaves within the city. In addition, we suggest that neighbourhood practices and attitudes can change over time. In our conclusion, we argue that this articulation against and with the 'local other' reflects a growing internal segmentation of the middle classes linked to a more intense investment in 'the local' and their sense of 'being middle class' in London – both socially and spatially.

Social tectonics and gentrification's other: The Brixton story

The account developed in relation to the gentrification of Brixton in the late 1990s emphasised the attraction to sections of the new urban middle classes of socially and ethnically mixed areas such as Brixton (another example might be Dalston in Hackney). It wasn't simply that such areas were relatively cheap with an attractive housing stock and good transport links to the centre, it was that they were also were not full of middle-class people in the way that Islington and Wandsworth had become (Butler and Robson, 2003).

The Brixton to which the incoming white middle classes were attracted contained elements of the 'urban other', mainly Black Caribbean residents, many of whom had lived there since they originally came to Britain in the 1960s when, finding themselves unable to rent because of blatant prejudice, had been forced into buying in areas such as Brixton (cf. Rex and Moore (1967) for an account of these housing classes and their histories, albeit in the rather different context in inner city Birmingham). By the end of the 1990s, these areas which the white middle classes had once regarded as 'no go' had become increasingly desirable.

To the white gentrifiers, who bought their houses, the black population of Brixton lived in a parallel universe and were largely ignored. As one resident put it:

> I like the tension that exists here, and the peculiarity of enjoying this kind of inner city atmosphere while surrounded by people like ourselves – I really enjoy this tension ... It's not multi-cultural, it's black *and* white – I like the way that people live together *and* ignore each other ... It's a genuine model of city living

… the edginess of central Brixton is a buzz. (BN15)

However, social mix perceptions moved from the benign, to the indifferent, to the malign as the middle-class incomers began to experience the Brixton schooling system. Black young people became seen as increasingly problematic by the incoming white middle classes who identified them as the 'street kids' who they held responsible for making their children feel uneasy on the street and contributing to the reputation of Lambeth's low-achieving schooling system (Butler and Robson, 2003).

Only one primary school (Sudbournes) was regarded as acceptable (and it had a catchment area of less than 100 m) and no secondary school fell into the 'acceptable' category. Many parents left the area (and indeed London) as their children approached the secondary transition at the age of 11 years whilst despairing of the perceived 'poverty of aspiration' amongst its non-middle-class population (often equated with being black) on the performance of its secondary schools. Oliver Letwin a local resident – and currently a government minister – once said he would prefer to beg on the street than send his daughter to Lillian Bayliss school; this view, whilst extreme, reflected the developing middle-class sense of living in Brixton. In the next section we show how this has worked out for middle-class residents in our Peckham research area, who are more reflexive about their position and place themselves between a mainstream middle class and the ethnic and classed 'others' of the wider Peckham area. We argue that difference is articulated in a different way to that found in the 'mark 1' version of social tectonics (Butler and Robson, 2001) in the context of Brixton where the middle class reflected less and less critically on social difference and proximity.

Revisiting social tectonics: Being middle class in Peckham

On one level, the social divisions along ethnic lines described by the Peckham respondents seem to be an almost exact replication of the Brixton story of 'social tectonics'. 'Social tectonics' were reflected in our respondents' accounts of neighbourhood practices and mapped onto the local area, with Rye Lane acting as a fault line. The area to the west side of Rye Lane was characterised as predominantly white and middle class, whereas there was little knowledge about, or engagement with, the other side of the road ('I've not ventured that much into Peckham itself, like Rye Lane, and I certainly haven't really ever gone north of Peckham Rye, so I suppose Rye Lane is quite a culture shock.' (P25)). This characterisation of Rye Lane as fault line would seem to be reinforced by the riots that took place there in 2011.[6] The same was also true of the border of Peckham High Street to the North, with the North Peckham estates talked of as places of poverty and violence but that largely unaffected the lives of middle-class residents on the other side of the road. For example, a respondent described the process of leaving Peckham Rye station in the evening where those who turn right, towards the Bellenden Road area, are middle class, white and suited and those who turn left, towards North Peckham, are black and poorer. This divide is illustrated by P11 by the example of Farmer's Market:

> One quite interesting observation, there's a farmers market, in, next to the library on that open square every Sunday … it's very small about six or seven stalls of people who come up from Kent and Sussex. Essex, and virtually the whole of the clientele who go there are European. You get very few Afro-Caribbean's buying that type of food. So I would say that, that's what illustrates Peckham, there isn't much … crossing over. (P11)

This division between the middle classes and the rest within the area was experienced ambivalently. While some respondents expressed regret about a lack of mixing across the divide of Rye Lane ('I wish there was more mix because I don't like the way that they're separated like that you know, that they're, um, Western African culture over there and White Middle class here because, you know, I like the idea of living in London and that there's so many cultures.' (P9)) for others the division reinforced a sense of their neighbourhood as a middle class, and therefore secure and separate place, as one of the interviewees put it 'Peckham is something, Peckham *Rye* is something else' (P32). In these respects, social tectonics as a metaphor still has resonance in this gentrifying area.

Just as in the previous study in Brixton, alongside this story of two 'separate worlds' we found a discourse on the value of diversity. That is to say, the multi-ethnic character of the area was celebrated and given as a positive reason for living there. These celebrations referenced two kinds of relationships. (1) Interactions with neighbours from different classes and/or ethnic backgrounds. (2) Everyday interactions with the space of Rye Lane. The first category of interactions came as part of a wider story of general neighbourhood change, a typical gentrification story of the older generation of white and Black Caribbean working-class people leaving or dying and being replaced by white couples or white couples with young children (again, echoing the Brixton research). In this sense, those older white and Black Caribbean working-class people who remained provided reassurance for the new arrivals of the multi-ethnic and socially mixed character of the neighbourhood. Out of the five neighbourhoods studied for a project on the middle classes and the city, it was in Peckham where we found the most insistence on strong neighbourhood bonds

and a convivial community and relationships with neighbours were central to this:

> next door, my Pakistani neighbours, we know each other very well. Quite a traffic of food between us. (P1)

> I'm Australian, my partner's English, and we're gay. Next door, the lady is Australian, across the way, the lady is Indian, has been in – both these people have lived in Peckham for a long time and in these houses for a long time. Um, she's from India her partner is from Denmark and they have a house in France so he kind of lives part time in France and part time in England. Next to them is another couple, he's English, he's also lived there a long – they're quite old though … and his wife is from St. Lucia. So, where I live is very multi-cultural and we all feel, we all went for dinner, for example, on … Saturday night. (P19)

The second kind of relationship was more complex. Alongside worry about a segregation of 'two worlds' and a celebration of difference we found deeply ambiguous attitudes to the wider area of Peckham as a place with a multi-cultural ambience, these attitudes often centred on the perceived African-ness of Rye Lane.

Rye Lane is a shopping street stretching from Peckham High Street to Peckham Rye Common. Its central role in the accounts of our interviewees was striking. Rye Lane was described in terms of an overwhelming of the senses, the smell of meat, the noise of the shoppers. As such, it was a site of both fascination and repulsion ('I personally think it's disgusting, most of Rye Lane.' (P24), 'Nigerians when they come here say, quite honestly and genuinely, it's like coming home to Lagos … I don't want to live in the grime of Lagos' (P43)).

The vivid accounts of Rye Lane centre on food, particularly the meat and fish which are displayed in open shop fronts ('It is quite shocking when we first moved to the area and there's so many butchers shops, with just old chickens hanging' (P29), 'you've got loads of people selling meat, it's all a bit crap, it's all a bit gross' (P16)). In this case, the 'disgusted subjects' (Lawler, 2005) are not separating themselves from white working-class people but from what they read as an exotic but disturbing place of 'otherness', a place that is read as Black and African (referred to as 'Little Lagos', 'Third World' and 'weird').

Despite their ambivalence about Rye Lane many of the respondents used Rye Lane in a functional way, taking advantage of the cheap fruit and vegetables on offer there.

> I probably use Rye Lane far more … um … I love going to Lordship Lane, you know it's like escape. It's safe, it's familiar, and it's, there's lovely stuff near Christmas and nice delis and stuff … But I don't shop in those sorts of … we are middle class but we have one income – I don't work at the moment so we have a budget and so I go to Rye Lane more than Lordship Lane. (P4)

Our respondents could not ignore Rye Lane, they felt bombarded by its presence but also reassured (see Hooks, 1992: 21–39; Frankenburg, 1993, for a discussion of how contact with racial difference can be cast as both desirable and threatening). The presence of Rye Lane as a neighbourhood edge was drawn on by the respondents in order to distinguish their area from other more solidly middle class and less ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, most often nearby East Dulwich (including Lordship Lane, mentioned above), which borders the neighbourhood to the South, a place that was considered to be more solidly middle class, and less 'edgy', described by P16 as: 'That other kind of edge where you can go there and enjoy it, but that's also really Dulwichy,

… that's kind of a bit nauseating. It's a little bit too far, the other way.' (P16).

A sense that Peckham was different to this kind of middle-class area was also shared by P22, a nurse in her 20s, who characterised Peckham as resisting gentrification:

> It doesn't feel as middle class as areas like Clapham or Balham … I think maybe because it's not as gentrified as those areas, I don't know whether it ever will be, um, I think some areas can resist the total gentrification that other places have, in a way that I think Brixton … does as well … I haven't witnessed any particular tension myself. (P22)

Within the Peckham sample, younger people working in the public sector, such as P22, and older people who had moved to the area in the 1970s and 1980s were more worried about the intensifying gentrification of the area and more likely to insist on being part of a wider diverse neighbourhood. For example P3M, a solicitor in his 60s, was concerned about the influx of younger middle-class people into the neighbourhood:

> When you get middle-class people together, outside the pub or in the bar under the arches, something that I can't quite put my finger on that irritates me about it. It's sort of, that feeling of 'entitlement' or … well they're smug bastards basically … so I'm really happy that it's a mixed area, and if it became totally gentrified I dunno what I'd do … I'd get very upset. (P3M)

While the presence of Rye Lane showed the edges of the middle-class area and middle-class identity, valuing or being able to cope with diversity – and with Rye Lane – was part of middle-class identity in Peckham. They drew on its presence to distinguish between their area and other more gentrified neighbourhoods. ('I do like East Dulwich and it's very chi-chi, but there's something not … I like the raw-er feeling about

Peckham. More real life and less yuppie valley.' P20) in order to place themselves as a different sort of middle class.

To be sure, some of the consumption choices (Rye Lane over East Dulwich) of our respondents seemed to be linked to the impact of the aftermath of financial crisis and recession. To return to P4, she reflected how recent times had been a time of financial insecurity for the family:

> Emma: In terms of that wider recession, economic situation, do you see that as impacting on your life at all?
>
> P4: Um … well it certainly did because my husband worked in media and lost his job in June'09. So that definitely affected us, in a very big way, but he got a new job, but, it impacts us just because um … even though he's got a new job in the media he could never really be properly secure, particularly in that profession.

It is also worth noting that attitudes towards neighbourhood and neighbourhood practices were not unchanging. Some of our respondents described how their attitudes towards Rye Lane changed over time. For example, P10, an academic, described how her relationship with the neighbourhood had 'evolved':

> Initially I was very much just on this road, on Bellenden Road and now I use Rye Lane much more, um, before I was like, I was a little nervous of Rye Lane, like, a little scared of it – no fresh flowers! [laugh] – yeah, gentrified areas have fresh flowers [laugh] … yeah I wasn't used to it, whereas now I relish going there. Um, and you get such really good quality cheap fruit and vegetables as well so, as I was saying then there's the places on Bellenden Road but I now use Rye Lane more. (P10)

This was an experience that was also shared by P34, a university administrator: 'Rye Lane [laughs] … It's all just chaos and dirt,

and chaos! And I didn't like it at all. And then moved to [street] and then Rye Lane became a completely different experience. I find it charming now.' (P34). This change is important as it shows the possibility of breaking down tectonic neighbourhood relations over time.

The Peckham respondents incorporate part of Rye Lane into their narrative of 'elective belonging' (Savage et al., 2005) while also insisting on Rye Lane as a boundary. And, in some cases, the neighbourhood also acts on its residents, so that the unusual, exotic and alarming becomes banal over time. This example demonstrates how identities are never complete but are rather in process, and as Hall argues 'always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other' (1997: 47). At the same time, 'coping' with diversity becomes claimed as a kind of cultural capital (May, 1996). This is different to what Watt (2009) terms 'selective belonging', referring to a process of classed distancing whereby middle-class people disaffiliate from the less 'respectable' areas around them.

What we found in Peckham was stronger, more ambiguous and altogether messier than disaffiliation or clear social tectonics. First, the separation of middle-class space and 'other' was often made in visceral terms that 'selective belonging' does not capture. Second, an ability to live with difference was part of what it meant to be a Peckham person (see May, 1996). Third, we found that in some cases people's relationship to 'other' spaces changed over time.

The middle classes do not just slide past Rye Lane but grapple with it, adapt to it, sometimes incorporating part of it into their story of 'elective belonging' but also pushing against it as a boundary (see above, '*Peckham Rye* is something else') and through contrasting it with East Dulwich make themselves out as a different middle-class group.

Another difference between the neighbourhoods was the sites of encounter and attempts to manage them. In Brixton the middle-class response to confronting the 'wrong sort of mix' in schools was focused on education strategies. By contrast, in Peckham we could see a variety of strategies being used to manage difference within the wider neighbourhood. For example, many residents expressed a strong sense of responsibility to support the businesses on Bellenden Road that catered for the middle-class population (the independent bookshop, the café etc.) (Benson and Jackson, 2013). Furthermore, these residents were adept at mobilising around campaigns, for example, successfully closing down a fish market that opened, on the corner of Rye Lane and a residential street:

> This enormous fish and meat market opened … it had been an old warehouse, and this, bearing in mind this is a conservation road with no shops in it, it just opened and then – no planning permission was sought and the whole thing was illegal, and it sort of stank and um … there is a very good … sort of action point in Peckham, which tries to monitor things and, I mean it took, Southwark would have done nothing, they had to be dragged by their heels to … shut it down. (P11)

Such place-making practices within the neighbourhood are geared towards reproducing a particular (middle class friendly) version of the local (Benson and Jackson, 2013).

This shows up the need to add more layers and nuance to the 'social tectonic' metaphor. The concept of social tectonics fails to explain the full complexity of social relations in a place such as Peckham where the presence of 'others' is central to the *active formation* of middle-class identities, of place and of self and where these relationships and spatial practices can change over time. The net effect may, of course, still be a

tectonic social structure but it is experienced, explained and rationalised differently.

The Peckham research suggests that middle-class residents have an unsettling and unsettled relationship with Rye Lane and those who live on the other side of it. Mapping difference onto space with a clear boundary is an attempt to fix identity in place, yet there is concern about preserving the boundary (a good instance of this would be the fish market example given above) or indeed hopes of making Rye Lane more suitable for the middle classes.

The Peckham case shows how 'others' are both incorporated into middle-class identities and stories of self and of neighbourhood, yet are simultaneously pushed away. Many of the Peckham respondents bemoan the lack of connection between their side of Rye Lane and those who are on the other side. In this respect 'social tectonics' fits these descriptions of neighbourhood relations. However, despite its descriptive attractiveness, the concept of 'social tectonics' fails to capture the role played by 'others' and 'other' spaces in the formation of middle-class identities, where 'others' might be passed by and often not socially interacted with but are by no means fully ignored.

Conclusions: Class formation, incorporation and 'pushing back'

So, how does the Peckham example enhance or challenge an understanding of social tectonics? First, there are clear differences – as well as similarities – between the two residential neighbourhoods. In Brixton the place that is described as 'chaotic' or 'vibrant' is the area around Brixton tube, from where both residential areas in the study are slightly removed – unlike Rye Lane and Peckham Rye station which were immediately adjacent to Bellenden Road. Most respondents valued the fact that where they

lived was relatively quiet and cut off from central Brixton. Although an association of Railton Road – the site of the unrest of 1981 and a border of 'Poets Corner' – as front line lingers, it was not described with the same intensity as Rye Lane. Instead, concerns about the wrong kind of mix came out more through a discussion of schools and the streets of central Brixton than neighbourhood places. This was a middle class which, despite its wish to appear diverse, did not wish to 'do diversity' through any kind of social interaction in their houses, on the street or particularly at their children's schools. As so often with the middle classes, their fears and sense of identity were lived through their children.

In contrast, the middle-class residents of Peckham did not have children, had grown-up children or, for the most recent arrivals, had pre-school or primary school-age children. The parents were negotiating the terrain of the primary school through getting involved. There was some concern about secondary schools but this still seemed a far-off problem and one that could probably be negotiated through the new schools architecture (Academies, Free Schools etc.).[7] However, the proximity of Rye Lane and the extreme contrast between the two neighbouring areas (seemingly a more spatially tectonic situation than Brixton) meant that difference had to be confronted almost on the respondents' doorsteps and therefore could not be held at arm's length.

A second explanation could be to do with time, changes in class formation and conceptions of the local. In Brixton (1998–2000) the predominant neighbourhood feeling was about a commitment to living with difference (albeit tectonically) and an appreciation of proximity to the consumption infrastructure of Brixton. However, it was also characterised by a 'flight from social obligation' (Butler, 2002) in which the respondents in this area, in contrast to those studied

elsewhere in the research, articulated a sense of local non-engagement in ways that echoed traditional views of the city as a socially segmented place in which there was little sense of social belonging. In contrast, there was a much stronger sense of identification with place in contemporary Peckham and a strong sense of social obligation. It would seem that this section of middle-class people are starting to engage and invest more in their local area, and that there had been an intensification of the 'developing sense of localism' (Butler, 2002). This shift might also be linked to the impact of the financial crisis and public-sector cuts on some sections of the metropolitan middle classes, as middle-class people are pushed to make changes in their consumption habits and feel more separated from more affluent middle-class groups.

A deeper engagement in the neighbourhood combined with close proximity to the street of Rye Lane and the symbolic and physical hub of Peckham Rye station means that social and ethnic 'others' cannot simply be ignored. Indeed they become a way to distinguish oneself from a more mainstream middle class, here identified with the nearby sanitised East Dulwich. Thus 'others' are simultaneously incorporated into a discourse of place and pushed back from.

These conclusions have implications for theorising the relationship between the middle classes and space. Rather than being a frivolous add-on to the gentrification debate, understanding the ways in which the middle classes interpret those around them is important; to borrow the words of Edward Said, configurations of identities are 'not mental exercises but urgent social processes' (1995: 332). Such understandings of 'other' people and places are realised through spatial practices and interventions. Also, 'other' people and places can become incorporated into the identity of middle-class people. The Peckham example demonstrates how 'elective belonging' may not just be a case of lining up of habitus with various fields but may also involve more complex processes of patching together a story of neighbourhood that draws both on 'other places' (in this case Rye Lane) and those that are more middle class (in this case East Dulwich). While this paper finds social tectonics a useful metaphor, it does not completely capture the relationship between the constitution of classed/raced space and identities in gentrifying areas and thus argues for a theorisation of the dynamics of neighbourhood that can account for nuances, contradictions and everyday processes.

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2. A problem with the term 'social mix' is that it can be used to gloss over the impact of specific local histories. While we are comparing Brixton and Peckham as 'socially mixed' areas that have undergone gentrification, we recognise that Peckham and Brixton have separate, though inter-related, histories.

3. A set of related debates about 'community cohesion' (Cantle, 2001) and concern about communities living 'parallel lives' (Phillips, 2005) emerged in the wake of riots in the English mill towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001 (see critical discussion of these debates in Jones, 2014 and McGhee, 2003) and the London bombings of London. However, while the object of concern in these debates was segregation along the lines of ethnicity within predominantly working-class areas, the academic debate about gentrification and social mix in the UK has been framed largely in terms of class.

4. Section 106 agreements refer to the provision whereby Local Authorities and developers in the latter contribute to the local infrastructure by the provision of affordable housing, enhancements to the road system or other facilities (e.g. a primary school) as part of the negotiations over planning consent.

5. There has been a marked increase in private rented tenures in London between the two studies with the proportion of private rental increasing from 12% to 21% between 2001 and 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

6. In the interviews carried out in Peckham before the riots we found a degree of worry about the economic downturn and how this might negatively impact on the area, particularly in terms of a rise in crime. This was more pronounced in Peckham than in our other case study neighbourhoods.

7. We are not discounting the possibility that concerns over secondary education might in the future lead to similar patterns to Brixton.

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