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# Belonging in working-class neighbourhoods: dis-identification, territorialisation and biographies of people and place

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## Abstract

This article draws on repeated, biographical interviews with 18 households to explore how people construct a sense of belonging in two post-industrial neighbourhoods in the 'ordinary' urban areas of Grimsby and Sheffield, UK. It argues that experiences of low-paid, precarious work undermine the historic role that employment has played in identity construction for many individuals, and that places perform a crucial function in anchoring people's lives and identities. Three active processes in the generation of belonging are elaborated. Through identification, dis-identification and the micro-differentiation of space, people constructed places in order to belong with others 'like them'. Residents also internalised the symbolic logics of places through their daily movement, territorialising space as they learned how to be in particular environments. Finally, places were temporally situated within relational biographies and experienced in relation to past and imagined futures. Places fulfilled an important psycho-social function, anchoring people's identities and generating a sense that they belonged.

## Keywords

belonging, class, dis-identification, employment, heritage, history, labour, memory, neighbourhood

## 摘要

本文基于对18户家庭的重复传记式访谈，研究人们如何在英国格里姆斯比和谢菲尔德这两个“普通”城市地区的后工业街区构建归属感。本文认为，低收入、不稳定工作的经历破坏了就业在许多个人身份构建中发挥的历史作用，而地方在巩固人们的生活和身份方面发挥着至关重要的作用。我们阐述了三个产生归属感的积极过程。通过空间的认同、非认同和微分化，人们建造场以归属于“与他们一样”的其他人。居民也通过他们的日常活动将地方的符号逻辑内部化，也就是在他们学会如何在特定的环境中生活的过程中将空间变成他们的“领域”。最后，地方被暂时地置于关系传记中，并与过去和想象的将来相关联而被体验。地方履行了重要的心理社会功能，锚定了人们的身份，并产生了归属感。

## 关键词

归属、阶级、非认同、就业、遗产、历史、劳动、记忆、街区

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## Introduction

Research has considered the role of places in middle-class belonging and identity construction (Benson and Jackson, 2017; Savage et al., 2005), but there are gaps in understanding working-class experiences outside gentrifying or regenerating neighbourhoods. Paton (2013) and Cole (2013) have argued for further research into the formation, development and enactment of working-class place-attachment, whilst Yarker's (2018: 12) work on 'tangential attachments' in regeneration neighbourhoods also calls for research to 'unpack the ways in which belonging is actively practised', considering people's agency in giving meaning to the places in which they live. This article contributes to research by exploring the question: how do people in post-industrial neighbourhoods actively construct places in order to belong? These neighbourhoods are particularly relevant because changes in the nature of work have been linked to mobility of occupation and place of residence, individualism, the erosion of social bonds and short-lived attachments (Bauman, 2005, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, this article uses theories of belonging to highlight that such places fulfil a significant role in identities despite the decoupling of work from historic sites of employment.

Whilst much of the research into urban belonging has focused on large cities (Mah, 2009; Watt, 2006), this study attends to contemporary debates around 'ordinary' cities. Emphasising the ordinary nature of urban places promotes research that considers diverse ways of being in a world of cities (Robinson, 2006), in which 'every urban context is regarded as theoretically generative and relevant' (Schmid et al., 2018: 46).

Whilst this conceptual shift has been applied to scholarship exploring the nature of urban living across the 'Global South' (Qian and Tang, 2018), it also highlights diversity of experience within the 'North'. The ordering of cities has consigned some urban areas – such as the case study neighbourhoods of Nearthorpe and Eastland – to 'theoretical irrelevance' (Robinson, 2006: 114). As their industrial purpose has long-since ceased, there result pervasive discourses about their redundancy (HM Government, 2010; Lawless et al., 2011). Not only is 'ordinariness' a less destructive way to conceptualise urban areas (Robinson, 2006: 10), it is more congruent with resident perceptions of place, which highlight the unexceptional nature of the neighbourhood. This article contributes to these debates by highlighting the processes that individuals engage in to manage the 'spatial taint' (Wacquant et al., 2014: 1270) of living in stigmatised areas. Studies in such contexts can demonstrate whether, and how, people belong in places that are subject to stigmatising discourses, and the value that residents draw from their neighbourhoods.

The next section discusses the labour market changes that have been experienced in the case study neighbourhoods, highlighting increasing insecurity, and relating this to debates on identity. Key concepts of belonging, (dis)identification and place provide the theoretical framing for the article. The methods are then presented, including a detailed discussion of the neighbourhoods in which the empirical work was conducted. The main findings are organised around three processes of belonging – cognitive, territorial and biographical – before a final discussion locates these findings within the broader conceptual framework. Fundamentally, the article argues that places were not just

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important for the provision of practical support through local networks (Preece, 2018); they also fulfilled a broader psycho-social function, anchoring people's identities and generating a sense that they belonged.

### **Precarious work and the construction of belonging**

Theories of modernity suggest that social relations have become dis-embedded from specific locales (Giddens, 1991), with modern eras characterised by greater fluidity and flexibility (Bauman, 2007). Secure foundations such as jobs and friendship networks are seen as being destabilised, with fading bonds and greater individualism (Bauman, 2007). These processes are linked to the negative consequences of globalisation, the decline of the seemingly secure and predictable routines of Fordist work and the dominance of global capital flows over employment relations. Individuals are seen as reconfiguring their notion of selfhood, with a diminished role for work as an expression of social distinction, and identities that are less bound to family and place; as such, the 'workplace is still a source of living, but not of life-meaning' (Bauman, 2005: 66).

Whilst the stability of previous eras of employment can be over-stated, particularly for groups who have long experienced less desirable and precarious employment (Bhambra, 2017; McDowell, 2003), there is considerable evidence that routine employment in post-industrial labour markets is markedly different from that which went before; comparatively high-skilled, high-wage, secure work has been replaced by low-wage, flexible roles (Shildrick et al., 2012). Although the geographical concentration of employment had devastating impacts when industries collapsed, it also gave purpose and meaning to places and the people who lived and worked there. With the loss of

such work, some have questioned whether post-industrial places themselves are obsolete (Lawless et al., 2011). The advancement of insecurity at the bottom of the class structure, by these long-term political and economic processes, has obfuscated shared realities and reduced opportunities for mutual identification (Powell and Robinson, 2019). Indeed, the strategies used by individuals to manage living in denigrated places tend to amplify spatial stigma, displacing the 'stain of dwelling' in an area laterally onto others, who are also marginalised, and undermining collective action (Wacquant et al., 2014).

However, evidence of such fracturing is not necessarily synonymous with the development of fluid and rootless identities. This article suggests that contemporary experiences of working-class belonging are intertwined with the social relations that form part of daily neighbourhood life, pointing to the enduring role of stability and place. This role for neighbourhoods in belonging and identity-formation is often neglected in theories of mobility (Clark and Coulter, 2015). However, the research presented here argues that through practising places, people root their identities and make somewhere they can belong.

Belonging is 'a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings', developed through relational and negotiated processes of identification, and recognition of the self in 'the other' (May, 2011: 368). Whilst belonging operates at different scales (Antonsich, 2010), explorations of everyday practices suggest that place has become an important signifier of classed identities (Robertson, 2013; Savage et al., 2005), affecting how people belong, who belongs and how people relate to places. Although having longstanding connections with a place may foster belonging (Bennett, 2014), for post-industrial neighbourhoods it is paramount to consider the ways in which social,

political and economic processes may generate divisions and complex meanings for residents (Pinkster, 2016).

Research into belonging has largely focused on the middle classes (Benson and Jackson, 2017; Savage et al., 2005), and on how individuals living in neighbourhoods undergoing regeneration maintain a sense of attachment to place (Alawadi, 2017; Yarker, 2018). There has been less attention to contemporary working-class belonging (for an exception, see Pinkster, 2016), with a focus on gentrification (Jeffery, 2018; Paton, 2013). For Paton (2013), the potential for 'elective fixity' as places gentrified was a key issue for working-class residents. However, the potential for immobility is less relevant outside high-demand markets. Dismantling the economic foundations of post-industrial neighbourhoods can erode historic sources of place-based identity (Cole, 2013), creating a yearning for stability (Mah, 2009) and nostalgic ways of belonging (Watt, 2006), including for younger generations (Bright, 2011). This article contributes to this body of research, exploring the ways in which people construct places in order to belong, conceptualising a number of specific processes. The following sections provide the conceptual underpinning for these processes, considering sociological and geographical literatures on: identification and dis-identification; territorialisation as people move through space; and biographical relations to place.

Operating at different scales from the family to the nation, identification is the process by which people come to experience others as similar to themselves (De Swaan, 1995). The dialectic of identification and dis-identification considers identity construction as an ongoing achievement (Lawler, 2014). For example, middle-class identity is partly constructed on the basis of dis-identifying from the disgusting 'other' (Lawler, 2014; Skeggs, 2004). Across social groups, this is a

process which results in imaginary geographies that enable individuals to distance themselves from those who are deemed not to belong (Sibley, 1995). These processes occur in places, but places are also shaped by them. Through mapping class onto place, dis-identification is spatialised at different scales, including micro-differentiation at the block, street or building level (Permentier et al., 2007). This creates a 'geography of roughness' (Watt, 2006) and 'inferior folk' (Blokland, 2003: 162). With the waning of classed boundaries, this is used as a mechanism of distinction, with cognitive processes enabling people to belong at a scale that has meaning to them (Watt, 2006, 2010).

Although places seem durable to the people who experience them, they are constantly being re-made through different processes (Pierce et al., 2011). Indeed, Massey (2005: 141) argues that 'the throwntogetherness of place demands negotiation' to produce communities, identities or coherence. Places are therefore 'a production, an achievement, rather than an autonomous reality in which things or people are located' (Tilley, 1994: 17). Conceptualising place as process involves understanding the ways in which individual practices and experiences are interwoven with structural properties (Pred, 1984). Places can be viewed as 'temporary constellations' (Massey, 2005: 141), co-constructed through a process of 'bundling' that simultaneously draws on individuals' experiences of place and the discourses about place that are sedimented in social relations and structures (Pierce et al., 2011: 60). This resonates for places that have experienced significant changes in the economic foundations that sustained social and economic life, as industrial histories are written into the landscape with which individuals interact.

To be 'in place' is central to what it means to be human, forming the 'bedrock of human meaning and social relations'

(Cresswell, 2015: 50). Places are practised, as daily actions undertaken in places tie individuals to each other in a continually unfolding process of becoming (Degnen, 2016). As individuals move through places, places are territorialised, generating a habitual or instinctive sense of how to behave (Fortier, 2000). This sensory perspective foregrounds how we come to know the world around us through 'embodied experiences of touch, sound, smell and taste' (May, 2011: 371). These lived sensations generate affective atmospheres, which reinforce individuals' searches for sites that will both situate and support practices (Duff, 2010: 892). Mutually reinforcing, the habitual use of places contributes to people's experiences of everyday life, whilst the performance of everyday life creates a sense of 'feeling right' in place (Lager et al., 2016; Pink, 2012).

There is a temporal and biographical element to this, since time spent in a place can contribute to this sense of 'feeling right', as people pull past experiences into the present (Bennett, 2014). Equally, over time individuals experience continuities and discontinuities within places, which may result in a sense of 'otherness' as neighbourhoods and their everyday urban rhythms shift around them (Kern, 2016; Lager et al., 2016). 'Haunted places' (De Certeau, 1988: 108) also have their own histories, which interact with individual biographies as people refer to what used to be but can no longer be seen, and histories that others may not understand. As Bright (2011) notes, labour histories are written through the landscape of post-industrial areas. Places thus represent collections of stories, both contemporary and historical, local and global (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 2005). Understanding place requires 'a narrative understanding involving a presencing of previous experiences in present contexts' (Tilley, 1994: 31). The biographical methods used in this research respond

to this, and are outlined in the following sections.

## Methods

The research draws on repeated, in-depth household interviews in two working-class 'ordinary' neighbourhoods in England. Neighbourhood boundaries were set using UK Census Lower-Layer Super Output Areas (c. 700 households) to enable the use of administrative data. Pseudonyms are used for neighbourhoods and individuals in order to maintain anonymity. The first case study area is Nearthorpe, a post-industrial area in Sheffield that had been dominated by steel manufacturing. As in other places 'haunted' by their heritage (Bright, 2011; Mah, 2009), many old industrial sites remain within the neighbourhood. Nearthorpe is located east of the city centre; it is ethnically diverse, with 2011 Census data pointing to a declining White British population over the preceding 10 years, and increases in Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other White groups. Unemployment levels were twice the national average, and manufacturing, which had once been the mainstay of the local area, employed 11% of Nearthorpe's working population in 2011.

The second case study is Eastland in Grimsby. Built around fishing, the Anglo-Icelandic 'cod wars' had disastrous consequences for local employment; today, the main work is in food processing factories. As in Sheffield, the case study neighbourhood is largely comprised of long rows of terraced housing, built close to the docks to house fishing workers. There are similarly high levels of unemployment as in Nearthorpe, and many residents highlighted the temporary and contingent nature of work. The characteristics of these neighbourhoods can add to literatures on belonging, by moving beyond working-class experiences of life in regenerating or gentrifying neighbourhoods.

The areas were selected to meet a range of criteria. Both were within the top 5–10% most disadvantaged areas in the country according to Indices of Multiple Deprivation. To enable consideration of mobility practices, both neighbourhoods were mixed tenure, although private rented housing was more prominent in Eastland and owner-occupied in Nearthorpe. Both were relatively affordable neighbourhoods compared with national and citywide indicators. The key contrasting criteria were the wider labour market areas and geographical positions. Grimsby is geographically isolated with a relatively self-contained labour market area, whilst Sheffield is well connected to other urban centres and strong labour market areas. One of the aims of the broader research project was to explore whether living in a weaker labour market area influenced residential mobility. These criteria enabled comparison, although the results highlighted the similarities between people's experiences in Nearthorpe and Eastland, despite differences in geography and labour market context. The relationships between historic labour market transitions, experiences of work and (im)mobility behaviour have been reported elsewhere (Preece, 2018).

Institutional ethics approval was obtained, and considered: recruitment, consent, household interviewing, interpreting biographies and anonymity. Participants were recruited by flyers hand-delivered to houses. Screening by phone enabled the collection of socio-demographic data; the aim was to achieve a predominantly working-class sample with mixes of residency length, past mobility and employment status. Eighteen households with 25 individuals participated in the study, which considered experiences of employment insecurity, neighbourhood and residential mobility and immobility. The number of participants was ultimately determined by project resources, but the in-depth approach focused on understanding the 'affect-rich

nature of local belonging' (Tomaney, 2015: 513), enabling exploration of the specific processes involved when people constructed places in order to belong.

Whilst measures such as education and employment histories informed classifications, class is understood here as dynamic, 'materially based but not determined' (Paton, 2013: 85). The study of class is fundamental to understanding the social and the self, and is particularly important in considering places in which the working classes are 'fixed' and rhetorically positioned as 'use-less' (Skeggs, 2004: 94). In this research, the use of class follows Benson and Jackson (2017) in drawing upon Bourdieu and Skeggs, conceptualising class as relational and continually re-produced, by symbolic and cultural processes as well as material and economic conditions. Classification, positioning and experience are therefore ambiguous and negotiated (Skeggs, 2004), and intersectional complexities in relation to identity are important (Lawler, 2014). As Skeggs (2004: 3) notes, bodies are simultaneously inscribed by different symbolic systems, and class cannot be made alone, without all the other classifications.

Whilst this article uses class as the dominant framework, class is part of an economic system which is also racialised and gendered (Bhambra, 2017). For participants like Nadira (a British Asian living in Nearthorpe), caring roles structured her life pathway, but this must not be reduced to a 'culturalist', racialised explanation (Brah, 1994) that essentialises experiences (Skeggs, 2004). As for many women, the interaction of multiple identities gave meaning to Nadira's actions, inactions and aspirations (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009). Similarly, Aisha, another British Asian participant, expressed complex and sometimes contradictory statements about her cultural heritage, parenting role and precarious class position. Although beyond the scope of this article, future

analysis will focus on biographies and the intersections of different vectors of experience, particularly class, gender and ethnicity.

Two in-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with households at home. The first was a joint, whole-household interview, focusing on participants' relationships with their residential neighbourhood. The second was biographical, organised around housing and work transitions. For joint households, individuals were interviewed in-turn until their biographies merged. Participants were given the option to talk separately, but no-one opted for this. Separate interviews would have given household members more privacy, but joint interviews provide an opportunity to see how issues are negotiated and can challenge individual recollections. In the following empirical sections, where participants are first quoted, age ranges and other household members (where relevant) are noted; thereafter, only name and place are reported.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with transcripts coded to a number of themes, which were rationalised following initial coding. Themes were grouped under core headings such as residential mobility, immobility, work and place. The most prominent themes were considered for each household, and then across all participants in a neighbourhood, to enable consideration of place-based differences. Biographical timelines were also constructed, sequencing housing, work and life transitions. Whilst biographical data may be thought of as personal narratives, they are also often full of relational content (Mason, 2004); for this reason, the article refers to 'relational biographies', tracing the ways in which people experience their lives with others.

## Findings

### *Insecure work and identity*

Work in Nearthorpe and Eastland was often insecure and low-paid, with little foundation

to perform other functions, such as identity work. Numerous participants highlighted their employment precarity, particularly in Grimsby's agency-dominated labour market. Most employment 'used to be fish docks and now they all seem to have died a death ... and a lot of things are agency' (Mike, Eastland, 45–54, Mike/Ann), which were 'just giving you what people had called in sick with' (James, Eastland, 25–34). Sarah (Eastland, 25–34, Sarah/Matt) pointed out that 'if you're not worried about stability ... you can go and get work', but whilst this may enable survival, jobs meant little beyond that. As Aisha (Nearthorpe, 25–34) noted, 'I've got qualifications, I've been to college, what job did I get? Nothing. I had to do three jobs just to live.' Participants sought straightforward, ordinary jobs, but as Hasan (Nearthorpe, 55–64) argued, 'these days you won't be able to get a proper straightforward waged job, you have to have two jobs, one early morning, one evening'.

This contrasted with descriptions of historic labouring in Nearthorpe and Eastland, which for some was a gateway to a wider identity and sense of belonging. Carol (Eastland, 55–64), recalled that 'if you wanted a job in a factory, it was decent money', which contrasted with the contemporary labour market in which 'if you get a full week's work in, you're lucky'. Dave (Nearthorpe, 55–64) described his job in the steel industry 'helping labourers out with me mates'; when he was made redundant after 37 years there was a disagreement over his returning to see friends at the factory during working hours: '[my brother] says ... "I want you to keep away from work ... if you slip and bang your head ... they'll blame them, they'll blame you"... well ... I can see me mates when I want'. Losing work had therefore also resulted in Dave's isolation from social networks.

In Eastland, Chris (45–54, Chris/Tina) described how 'if I was ever stuck for a job,



I could always go down the dock and ... get a job painting the boats', with nearby thoroughfares 'absolutely thronging with people ... the pubs would be packed'. This was the working identity and sociability that James sought, reminiscent of the working-class lads in Willis' (1977) study, who sought avenues for masculine expression, diversion and 'laffs'.

I like to get physically involved ... just summit I could get my teeth into, just summit a bit more *alive* than processing ... Or like a job you can get mates out of as well and just become a team ... nothing seems to be like that anymore though. (James, Eastland)

For James, the loss of traditional industry had removed an arena in which he could perform his masculine identity (Butler, 1999), foregrounding the continued importance of historic work.

Changes to the nature of employment in the case study areas did not necessarily displace or individualise identities, since people sought belonging through routes other than work. For example, Nadira (Nearthorpe, 35–44) explained how she had deferred her place at university as a mature student due to an unexpected pregnancy: 'I wouldn't consider going, studying, and having a newborn baby ... I thought I'd done all that and got it over with, my family.' At that time, mothering and locally-based family support networks had a central role in identity and belonging for Nadira, indicating that, for some people perhaps, 'home and family life have ... a higher place than employment in terms of ... your psyche' (Steve, Nearthorpe, 25–34, Jo/Steve). Indeed, rather than fostering dislocation and mobility, the decoupling of work from local neighbourhoods has in many respects enhanced the role of places in people's everyday lives. This is demonstrated through relational processes of identification and dis-identification, territorialisation and

temporally situating places within biographies.

### *Dis-identification, recognition and the micro-differentiation of space*

Identification and dis-identification were central to narratives of place. In explaining their neighbourhood of residence, participants described being 'surrounded by lots of young families the same as us' (Sarah, Eastland), or identifying people who 'looked like us, dressed like us, we liked their car' (Jo, Nearthorpe, 25–34, Jo/Steve). Amir (Nearthorpe, 25–34, Yasmin/Amir) was 'comfortable walking down the street, you know everybody ... in a different area you've gotta rebuild all that'. People therefore drew value from the presence of others 'like them', contributing to their sense of living in a common-sense world (Bourdieu, 1990). Identification did not require deep relationships; many participants referred to neighbourly interactions ('I don't even have to put my own rubbish out', Helen, Nearthorpe, 65–74), which forged connections between households (Pinkster, 2016). Participants drew distinctions, such as 'I talk to those people over the road ... I don't go over and ... knock on the door and say "let me in for a coffee"' (Justine, Eastland, 55–64). Similarly, Chris (Eastland) identified 'a couple of friends across the street ... Not that we ... associate with 'em like, you know, but "hiya!"'. Although neighbours lived separate lives, routine and mundane interactions had value, providing recognition of social proximity and overlapping classed identities (Allen et al., 2007).

Carol's status as a council tenant had conferred respectability, but she saw this being eroded by changing populations:

It just went downhill ... you don't know who lives in them ... you could walk down the street, say 10 years ago and speak, 'oh hello',

and, you see that many different faces come and go, the windows get put in, it is terrible ... Then you go round the corner ... They've had to sell cheap to landlords, right, because they can't sell their houses, 'cos of the area ... the landlords are putting *anybody* in them. (Carol, Eastland)

The shift from 'respectable' working-class council tenants to 'anybody' in private rented housing removed an important source of recognition for participants like Carol. Similarly, in Nearthorpe, Sue (45–54) drew distinctions between homes that had been purchased under the Right to Buy scheme, and those that were still council-owned, which were subject to surveillance: 'they're subletting that house ... They're not in it ... It's not fair ... There's about seven on here bought houses, all others are council.' At the very local level, dis-identification takes place not only between classes but also within, as 'respectable' households negotiate the risk of being identified with 'others'.

Dis-identification has a strong spatial component, with participants locating 'others' outside the boundaries of their perceived local area. This micro-differentiation of space was particularly strong in Eastland, where people highlighted streets with poorer reputations, dis-identifying from no-go estates with 'rough people' (Tina, Eastland, 45–54, Chris/Tina). As Rachel (Eastland, 25–34) noted in comparing two places she had lived, just streets apart, 'if you was from a more upper class, you'd look at it and go "they're both dumps"', but she perceived them in very different ways. Whilst her previous street was 'awful, it was quite a nasty area ... everything's on your door ... here ... you can sit on the front on a night and chat to your mates'. Dis-identification from 'rough' elements can be understood as an attempt to protect her identity, even though outsiders would perceive little distinction (Watt, 2006).

Although participants perceived more desirable areas, they managed the more negative aspects of their neighbourhoods by differentiating at the very local level. For example, although they knew of break-ins nearby, Sarah (Eastland) had 'heard no-one being burgled ... on this street ... it just amazes me how different the streets are'. Similarly, local burglaries in Nearthorpe were put down to a nearby estate with 'youngsters from there, they come up here ... and they're just looking for properties to rob' (Amir). Rachel (Eastland) lived at 'the posh end' of her road, while Ros (Eastland, 25–34) highlighted disturbances nearby, 'but you come this area ... it's quiet, there's no trouble ... it's only like ... 400 yards up the road ... it's such a different place'. Dis-identification could therefore be a technique to insulate residents from the stigmatising discourses associated with living in more disadvantaged areas (Allen et al., 2007; Goffman, 1990).

### *Local residential and daily mobility*

Individuals used territorial processes – local moves and daily mobility – to construct a sense of belonging. In more affordable, flexible housing markets, dis-identification could be physical as well as cognitive, with very local residential mobility and micro-differentiation enabling people to retain a sense of 'feeling right' in an area that they knew. In Eastland, the high proportion of private rented housing was both an origin of dis-identification, perceived to encourage transient populations, as well as a facilitator of the process, as the availability of properties locally enabled individuals to move away from perceived 'others'. This was not identified in Nearthorpe, which has a different housing market profile, comprising a lower proportion of private rented housing and lower levels of empty properties. As

Rachel explained, she had moved down the road because her previous street was:

Rife with drugs and alcohol ... Whereas here, it's all rife, but it's not so much in your face, and it's just a nicer place ... People take it round here, they deal it up there, and all the scum are up there ... round here it tends to be more sociable drugs, whereas over there it's things like smack ... and it's very visible ... Say if you come from out of town and look at it you'll go 'really? Better?', but it is ... there's more family round here, whereas there it was single people that are dodgy. (Rachel, Eastland)

Local residential mobility was a way of physically dis-identifying with others, locating them in a separate space. Ros (Eastland) had moved to escape 'loads of kids rioting up and down the street'. She took 'the first convenient thing that come up ... and then obviously I'd basically moved from one bad area to another ... I knew Proctor Street was a bad area anyway, but it couldn't have been any worse.' In a relatively affordable housing market, movement was a way to do *something* active to insulate her household from neighbourhood decline. Therefore, high levels of local residential mobility are not necessarily an indication of transience or lack of community. Such movement is, however, contingent on the dynamics of local housing markets, which structure routes to belonging.

Daily mobility, through which people came to know a place by moving through it, also facilitated a sense of belonging. As Nadira (Nearthorpe) explained: 'you have to feel at home ... that doesn't include just your own home ... You have to be comfortable within that area and that kind of boundary that you're in.' Ros (Eastland), a frequent mover in adulthood, referred to not feeling comfortable and her instinct that a place wasn't right:

If you moved somewhere like Leeds and like you ... really didn't know the area, you didn't

know anybody ... you'd probably take a half hour walk to get to the shop, when you realise after six months down t'line there's a five minute cut in just across the road, and you didn't even realise 'til you got to be mates wi' somebody that told you ... Knowing layout of the land and people and what areas are like ... Here I can tell you what's a good area, what's a bad area, you go somewhere else it's like, right, am I in a good area or a bad area or what? ... I know where I am here ... it's like routine if you like, it's what I know, whereas ... when we lived up Lancashire, God, I didn't have a clue, not a clue, and I didn't know anybody up there and I'm trying to, I tried to go out exploring to try and venture a bit further each time, but I'd only go so far because I'm scared if I got lost I couldn't find my way back home, 'cos there was so many twists and turns ... I just, no, I can't do this ... I only stuck to the areas I knew, but I didn't feel settled there either ... Then as soon as I come back here it just felt all comfortable and natural. (Ros, Eastland)

This extract foregrounds the phenomenological experience of place that humanistic geographers seek (Cresswell, 2015), as Ros internalises the lay of the land as she moves through it, reading environmental cues to decide whether she is in a 'good' or 'bad' area. This reading resulted in the adaptation of movement to different places, as you have to know 'how to get on with the area ... if you can adapt to it then you're fine' (Ros). Rachel expressed a similar sentiment:

You need to know how to live on an estate, you need to know who to talk to, who not to, who to keep your head down ... if you haven't grown up there, then you need to know who's who before you can speak to people ... You just live on a street, whereas an estate you need to know which areas you don't go into ... a street's just a street. (Rachel, Eastland)

Effectively reading the environment contributed to participants' development of a sense of comfort in their wider neighbourhoods.

This could result in a desire to ‘stay put’ (Dave, Nearthorpe) locally.

### *Situating places within relational biographies*

As well as making distinctions through dis-identification, and territorialising space, participants simultaneously engaged in temporal processes, situating places within relational biographies. Belonging therefore not only was made in the present, but interacted with personal and place histories. For many, belonging involved longstanding connections to places, through childhood experiences and the presence of wider family networks; Mike (Eastland) pointed out that ‘I’ve lived here all my life, I’m from round the corner really ... that’s as far as I’ve got’, whilst Sarah (Eastland) argued that ‘we’ve always been local, stuck to the areas that we knew were ok’. Chris (Eastland) was similarly connected to the local area, arguing in relation to future moves, ‘we wouldn’t go up there anyway ... I mean I was only born just down the road here’. By contrast, lack of connections and unknown places could be discomfoting. For example, in discussing the possibility of moving to access work, Hasan (Nearthorpe) argued that ‘I know nobody ... you can’t go just into a town just like that [laughs] ... where am I gonna go?’

Individuals located places on a spectrum that took into account the other places they had lived. A common refrain was that where they lived was ‘no worse than where I’ve come from’ (Carol, Eastland). Justine recalled living on a ‘rough estate’, dismissing the ‘problems’ in Eastland: ‘*this*, you hear the fighting, the arguing, just take no notice of it’. However, for some, contemporary experiences of place contrasted with their historical experiences, eroding their ability to belong. These households perceived few opportunities for identification and were unable to move elsewhere. Nostalgia became

a route to a bounded and precarious sense of belonging, based on the collective memories of a dwindling population who faced new claims to belonging from the very groups with which they dis-identified. Chris (Eastland) had seen the neighbourhood ‘come down quite a lot’ compared with his youth in the 1970s, when ‘you could walk straight across the other side o’ the docks on the decks of the ships ... that’s how packed the dock used to get’. Carol (Eastland) remembered walking ‘past the pubs and you could smell the beer and ... hear the loud music going on ... somebody on a piano ... it’s all changed’. It is not only older generations who relate to historic understandings of places, but younger residents also draw on social memories of these disappeared industries. For example, Matt in Eastland argued that ‘this place will open up again ... fishing’ll come back sooner or later’. Nevertheless, for some the loss of work represented the loss of community life as well, impinging on the ‘liveability’ of neighbourhoods (Jeffery, 2018).

In Nearthorpe, Dave felt that everything had ‘changed over’, experienced as a loss of control over community facilities. This had a strong racial dimension, with his sister Sue arguing that ‘as soon as one o’ our shop shuts ... [Pakistanis] are coming and takin’ over’. Similarly, in Eastland, some participants believed that ‘Polish people are getting all our jobs’ (Tina) because ‘all the foreigners’ll work for cheap’ (Matt). Indeed, perceptions of places are overlaid by personal and historical filters that give rise to different ways of seeing, as exemplified in discussions of a housing development on an old factory site in Nearthorpe. Sue recalled the factory, with workers who ‘used to stand and have their chips and fish up there ... when it finally shut down they didn’t do nowt ... and then for some reason they built these houses’. For Aisha, this was positive: ‘there’s *so* many different people and mixed

people that have moved in and especially in them houses ... it's nice'. By contrast, Dave argued that 'it's not for me at all, it's for coloureds ... I ain't seen one white going in them houses yet.'

## Discussion

This article has considered how people in post-industrial neighbourhoods construct places in order to belong. It highlights the continuing salience of place in participants' everyday lives, despite external narratives of obsolescence (Lawless et al., 2011). The very changes that supposedly freed people from the geographic constraints of homes tied to sites of employment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) have actually enhanced the role of place (Preece, 2018). Whilst identification with 'noble' industrial work can be overstated for some (Lawler, 2014; McDowell, 2003), for many participants in this study increasing labour market precarity has heightened the symbolic function of places, which root identities through belonging. Places become proxies for different identities, sorting populations through identification and dis-identification, a function that has historically been performed through work.

This article contributes to understanding the complexity of all cities (Robinson, 2006), by exploring belonging in working-class neighbourhoods that are not experiencing gentrification or regeneration. In doing so, it considers not just loss of belonging (Pinkster, 2016), but also how people maintain belonging. The places discussed here are notable in demonstrating that individuals with limited choices and resources, and often no strong preference to reside elsewhere, used strategies of belonging to counter stigmatising discourses of disadvantage and obsolescence. A view of places as practised highlights the active ways in which residents make places that have practical and

symbolic value, which is not commonly recognised from outside (McKenzie, 2015).

The study attends to the complexities inherent in processes of dis-identification and stigmatisation (Powell, 2008). The data show that dis-identification occurs not only between classes (Lawler, 2014), but also within, as 'respectable' working-class residents dis-identify from 'others' who are seen as eroding the value of working-class identity. This can be an adaptive technique to manage the 'spoiled identity' of living in a stigmatised area (Allen et al., 2007), and suggests that more fine-grained differentiation in terms of classed identities is an important area to develop. For many participants in this study, work was not a useful reference point for identity construction, but spatially dividing local areas created a neighbourhood hierarchy through which to fix identities to places. This is a continual process, as residents respond to neighbourhood change, whether tenure shifts in Eastland, or demographic characteristics in Nearthorpe.

As Antonsich (2010) argues, discourses and practices of socio-spatial exclusion are crucial to understanding belonging. Through creating 'geographies of exclusion' (Watt, 2006, 2010), individuals located 'others' elsewhere, enabling a sense of belonging whilst maintaining the recognition derived from local knowledge. Rather than adopting a strategy of non-belonging and disengagement through micro-scale neighbourhood disaffiliation, as in Pinkster's (2014) work with middle-class residents of disadvantaged areas, this study suggests that working-class residents used micro-level distinctions as a route *to* belonging, perhaps because their everyday lives were more intertwined with neighbourhoods. In accessible, mixed-tenure housing markets like Eastland, dis-identification was physical as well as cognitive, including local moves away from 'problem' people and places. This response would be less likely in areas with high levels of social

housing (such as in Pinkster, 2016), or gentrifying neighbourhoods (such as in Jeffery, 2018; Paton, 2013; Watt, 2006), because of the respective constraints of mobility and rising markets. It is also a difference between the case study neighbourhoods, since the possibilities for action stem from the dynamics of local housing markets, specifically more accessible private rented housing, which was not characteristic of Nearthorpe.

Whilst knowledge of the physical layout of a place has been highlighted as a form of practical attachment for middle-class residents of disadvantaged areas (Pinkster, 2014), working-class narratives in this study suggest that such movement through places can foster a deeper sense of belonging and comfort, and more emotional attachments. Participants underlined the value of knowing places and maintaining a 'practical sense' (Bourdieu, 2005) of how to get by. Territorialisation of space through daily movement could also result in the internalisation of the symbolic logics of places to avoid or seek out, affording knowable places a sense of predictability that was comforting (Cresswell, 2015).

This re-making of place occurs not just in the present, but is also biographical as people compare places across their life course. As such, residents can manage the 'blemish of place' (Wacquant et al., 2014) by asserting that they have experienced worse in other times and places. Individuals therefore invoke their own histories in making meaning of places, but places also have histories. Nearthorpe and Eastland are not a 'blank environmental slate' but are understood by people 'in terms of the historicity of lived experiences in that world' (Tilley, 1994: 23). Whilst memories of places can be 'gifted' to later generations (Bennett, 2014), memories are also 'a site of negotiation and positionality' (Degnen, 2016: 1663). Therefore, historic memories can conflict with contemporary meanings.

This is particularly relevant to places that have experienced significant changes in their economic foundations. In Eastland, some young people continued to identify with industries that had long-since departed, whilst in Nearthorpe others rejected historic meanings of place by welcoming the redevelopment of an old factory site. As much as a force to bind individuals together, the co-construction of belonging can also be a divisive process (Degnen, 2016). For some, the gradual loss of institutions such as pubs, working men's clubs and local shops – linked to historic working patterns – highlights discontinuities in urban rhythms, as places are used in new ways by different groups (Lager et al., 2016). Rather than arising from shock events or transformations, discontinuities with place can therefore arise from 'very ordinary, non-catastrophic events' (Kern, 2016: 453).

There is universality to the processes described here, in so far as most participants described identifying and dis-identifying with 'others', drew value from (territorial) knowledge of places and set places within biographies. However, the interplay of these processes, and participants' experiences of them, were more varied. For example, long-standing (older) residents dis-identified from those around them and made micro-level distinctions of space, but these processes were filtered through narratives of lack of control and neighbourhood loss. This was less apparent for younger residents, who made spatial distinctions and dis-identified from 'others', but also found more positive attachments rooted in contemporary experiences of place. This is not solely a generational divide, but relates to length of time spent in a neighbourhood and anticipated futures.

It is also the case that whilst racialised 'othering' and dis-identification was a prominent feature of a small number of White participants' narratives, there were also

more nuanced accounts of the nature of distinction in diverse neighbourhoods. For example, one participant in Nearthorpe described tensions between ‘established minorities and new arrivals’, largely Eastern Europeans, which created a ‘pecking order of who’s the most despised’ (Zahir). Whilst this did not feature significantly in the data for this study, it highlights a broader point about the contingent nature of processes of distinction. It is also relevant to note that – despite the ethnic diversity of the case study areas being a key difference between them – racialised ‘othering’ was a part of narratives of (loss of) belonging in Eastland as well as Nearthorpe.

We therefore cannot understand places without also understanding how they are perceived and experienced in multiple ways by those who live there. The contested terrain of place has been exposed by the EU referendum in the UK. Whilst localised breakdowns of election results for Nearthorpe are not available, data obtained by national broadcasters show that almost 75% of voters in Eastland voted leave (Rosenbaum, 2017). As Pinkster (2016) notes, loss of belonging and sentiments of discontent can scale upwards beyond the neighbourhood, with wider social and political implications. Whilst the data presented here were collected before the referendum, they demonstrate that processes of identification and dis-identification, spatial distinction and contested perceptions of place were longstanding features of everyday life in Eastland and Nearthorpe before Brexit. As Powell and Robinson (2019) argue, pre-occupation with short-term events that seemingly trigger dis-identification ‘can blind us to the processual and relational dynamics that produce them’. In particular, the denigration of migrants – given heightened prominence post-referendum – is part of a longer-term process of advanced marginality in these neighbourhoods (Powell and Robinson, 2019; Wacquant, 2008).

Polarising political debates in the UK and elsewhere have diverted attention from attempts to foster social solidarity (McQuarrie, 2017) and address the poor conditions faced by all workers – which have long been experienced by black and minority ethnic groups (Bhambra, 2017).

Beyond Brexit debates, as McQuarrie (2017) argues in relation to the US Rust Belt, the systematic dismantling of communities that have moved from the centre of capital accumulation to the periphery powerfully shapes those who live there. To understand why people live in places that are stigmatised by narratives of ‘decline’, we must look beyond the practical resources these places offer to consider the ways in which identities and a sense of belonging are fundamentally linked to place. Therefore, whilst these neighbourhoods experience economic marginalisation and are subject to pervasive discourses of obsolescence and lack of aspiration (HM Government, 2010; Lawless et al., 2011), for residents the social function of place holds significant value. Yet, the processes through which individuals manage to belong despite the ‘blemish of place’ also result in the marginalisation of other neighbourhoods and residents. Wacquant et al. (2014) argue that this both displaces and validates spatial taint. This has important consequences in fragmenting social classes and neighbourhoods, further reducing opportunities for mutual identification.

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