A Narrative from the United Kingdom studying St Anns in Nottingham: Belonging, Continuity, and Change

Abstract

This paper focuses upon the St Anns neighbourhood in Nottingham, a community first studied by Ken Coates and Bill Silburn in the 1960’s which noted the great upheavals of the physical and social changes generated by the slum clearance programme of 10,000 back to back terraced houses, and the consequent building of the concrete council estate, that is now St Anns. This paper draws upon both the physical and the social changes within the neighbourhood, and despite the massive upheavals to working class life over the last 40 years what has remained constant. This paper looks at the concept of belonging to a neighbourhood which has been stigmatised, finding value and an identity within the estate, and describing themselves as simultaneously and interchangeably as being from and simply being St Anns.

Key Words
Class, Value, community, neighbourhood, stigma
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Following in the footsteps of the late Ken Coates who has been described as one of the most perceptive minds and eloquent voices in left wing politics, and Bill Silburn who is now in his fiftieth year of teaching social policy at the University of Nottingham, and still engaged in research exposing inequality within the local community has been a daunting task for a new researcher. The original research Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen which was conducted during the mid 1960s and published in 1970 by Penguin books mapped a 5 year period of time within a deprived neighbourhood ‘St Anns’ in Nottingham. Coates and Silburn then published ‘Beyond the Bulldozer’ in 1980 a follow up to the original study, attempting to re-interview residents who had been involved during the 1960’s.

This paper introduces some of the findings from the original study, whilst also discussing the issues arising from a recent re-study undertaken by myself over the last two years. When studying a neighbourhood like St Anns a place which has experienced and been subject to inequality, poor housing, and disadvantage over many generations, but which has also been documented through social research, it is the testimonies of the residents from that neighbourhood past and present which highlight what has changed and what has remained stable. Mike Savage (2010) has recently explored how disenchantment and loss has been at the centre of sociological thinking regarding social change over recent decades. This has been apparent according to Savage, in the ways people think about their neighbourhoods, their narratives of contemporary belonging. He particularly draws attention to ‘nostalgia’ the narrative of belonging to a place which has lost its magic, and ‘elective belonging’ a narrative which describes the connection to a neighbourhood by its residents as embodying magical qualities (pp.21-23). This paper focuses upon the changes which have been significant within this neighbourhood in Nottingham over the last 40 years, but how the ‘narrative of belonging’ in working class communities can often remain stable and un-changing despite the massive upheavals to working-class life. This is especially relevant within neighbourhoods which have long standing working class communities, generations of the same family living in that neighbourhood, and where the narratives of both ‘nostalgia’ and ‘elective belonging’ compete with each other and within generations.

The grey concrete estate that is St Anns in 2012 is unrecognisable from the two-up-two-down brick back–to-backs of the original research in the 1960’s. There are, however, threads and consistencies which attach themselves to the past, and to the traditional working-class lives that other community studies have highlighted (Dennis et al 1956, Jackson 1958, Coates and Silburn, 1970, Pahl, 1984, Young and Willmott 2007). This paper focuses upon those key threads of community, network, and family, but also to the notion of ‘belonging’ and how this impacts upon ‘who we are’. The residents within this neighbourhood describe themselves as simultaneously ‘being’ St Anns an identity they subscribe to, and living in St Anns.

Chris Phillipson (2008) notes that when approaching and revisiting past studies there are always lessons learned, and that past studies are important resources especially when they have illuminated and influenced social change, such as the Coates and Silburn (1970) study in St Anns, the Young and Willmott study in Bethnal Green (1957/2007), and the Pahl (1984) study on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. Although there have been noted fragmentations and severe social change especially in working-class communities over the last 50 years there
are consistencies as Phillipson notes (p.143) that even though family shapes and relationships have changed and become more complex, they are still central to working class communities. Graham Crow (2008, 2002) also discusses the paradox of continuity within changing communities, setting out how change and continuity can co-exist, and noting that within any community relationships one part changing does mean everything else changes or must change as well. Charles, Davies, and Harris (2008) also note in their re-study of the Rosser, Harris, research in Swansea during the 1960’s that continuity and change are key issues relating to re-studying neighbourhoods but also in the ways that research methodology might be conducted differently in a different time period (pp.119-120). Therefore this paper discusses the obvious changes that have occurred in St Anns in Nottingham since the Coates and Silburn study, highlights what may be less obvious but is constant, and discusses the changes in methodology relating to the current study.

However, while the politicians presently debate and the media paint a bleakly homogeneous landscape of social alienation in poorer neighbourhoods, or of segregated inner-city communities embattled and suffering at the hands of ‘mass immigration’, the people who live on this estate tell of a far more complexly textured life. They speak of adaptation, cooperation and a reflexive awareness of their lives. Their accounts are inflected with recognition of heterogeneity and a sense of positive as well as negative aspects of estate life. The complexity, adaptation, and reflexivity of class identity and the consequences relating to stigmatisation of a group or neighbourhood have been recognised and commented upon more closely since the studies of the 1960’s. This has given way to diverse research methodologies, with a greater inclusion of social researchers undertaking key research relating to class inequality, and community based studies. Bev Skeggs (1997, 2004), Diane Reay (2005), and Stephanie Lawler’s (2005) work are examples of the changes within sociological inquiry and methodology over the last twenty years, and are from a more distinct range of the British population, often using their own experiences of working class life to research an interpret the complexities of class and community based studies.

Lynsey Hanley’s (2007) book Estates gives an historical and personal account of the complexity of council estate life, blending her own personal experiences with the shifting trends in urban planning, and constantly changing government policies. Hanley also raises the notion of ‘der Mauer im kopf’ (pp.148-150), the ‘Wall in the head’ a term used by West Germans about former East Germans after the Berlin Wall fell. This term describes the invisible fortresses which have been built up over lifetimes relating to class prejudice, fears of what might be out there, and the lack of substantiated faith in the system, which never seems to work or is proven to work for you and those like you. This term can easily be used to describe a class position relating to council estate residents within the UK, whilst recognising the complexity, and difficulties in commenting about the consequences of social class positioning.

Types of social research which have focused upon specific neighbourhoods, and communities often have noted the importance of ‘belonging’ to both a landscape and a group of people, this paper looks at what happens when you belong to a landscape, and a group which are recognised by their deviance. When a neighbourhood becomes de-valued, and its residents stigmatised, because they have insufficient institutional capital, in the forms of paid employment, transferable work skills, and education. The resources that Pierre Bourdieu (1999, 1990, 1986) argues make-up the forms of social, economic, cultural and
symbolic capital allowing groups, individuals, and communities to become valued. Those communities who are denied access to these valuable resources, and institutional capital do not simply passively accept their fate, but instead engage in a local system that finds value for themselves and their families in local networks and a shared cultural understanding of how the estate works. Coates and Silburn noted in their original study that there was a rich cultural system within the neighbourhood, usually grounded through employment, and community and family social events. This paper looks at how a local value system is still prevalent but has changed considerably from the political and trade union memberships, local meeting places such as public houses and social clubs that the former residents described as having meaning for being part of the neighbourhood. Bourdieu (1986) argues that what is even more important is how value and respect are given to some as if 'natural', making some social identities 'naturally' valued, whilst others have to work at it with no assurance that their goal can be met. It is easy to understand that, if value is difficult or in some respects impossible to attain for some groups within a society, they may create their own endogenously-constructed systems of attaining value for themselves; these can then be exchanged for local resources, which have a use-value for that community, and an exchange-value within the local system. Consequently the recent research in St Anns has focused upon what has happened to this community now there in the absence of the organised social systems described by Coates and Silburn. It seems that, being part of the neighbourhood has become internalised by the residents in ways not noted in the original study, through notions of identity and belonging and where Lynsey Hanley’s comparison with ‘der mauer im kopf’ has relevance.

Poverty the Forgotten Englishmen: The original study

In 1968 two young researchers from the University of Nottingham boldly announced that 'poverty is back among us', Ken Coates and Bill Silburn (1970) argued that during the 1950s there had been a myth that widespread material poverty had ‘been finally and triumphantly overcome’ (p.25). This was in response to the Rowntree and Lavers’ report in 1950 which concluded that poverty in most places had been reduced, and eradicated in the South East and Midlands due to full employment and plenty of overtime for men (Rowntree and Lavers cited in Coates and Silburn 1970 p.45). However, there was a small group of persistent scholars at the time who maintained that there was still a serious problem of material poverty, Peter Townsend being one of the most consistent and vocal. Townsend raised doubts from as early as 1952 about the credibility of the argument that poverty was being abolished all over the UK, and with Brian Abel-Smith (Abel-Smith and Townsend 1965) continued to criticise this notion that full employment was dramatically changing Britain’s living standards for the poorest. Coates and Silburn decided to conduct their own study in Nottingham to discover whether Townsend was right, and at the same time questioned the notion of poverty through a Marxist critique, arguing that relative poverty even in times of full employment leads to a loss of power for the worker and capital becomes more concentrated and continuously extends its dominance over the poorest section in society (1970 p.38). During the mid 1960’s it was an extremely poor and run down area, the residents living in slum conditions, situated three minutes from the city centre, and housing some 30,000 people in the 10,000 two-up two-down back-to-backs, a type of housing prevalent in the City of Nottingham. The St Anns area by 1964 was approximately two miles in radius, with its boundary right on the city centre.
Coates and Silburn over a period of five years went around the neighbourhood knocking on doors and interviewing residents using a questionnaire, a common part of sociological methodology at the time (Savage 2010 p.14). The research also collected statistics and other information on the housing in the area, such as the number of houses which had inside bathrooms and toilets, and also health-related statistics. They found that only 9% of the 10,000 houses had an inside bathroom or toilet, and over half of the properties had no hot water system installed, having to heat up water in pans on the stove for washing and bathing. Coates and Silburn reported in their work that many of the houses and yards (a yard being a block of 10 houses situated together and sharing an entrance, and often outside lavatories) had open Victorian drains with waste running through at all times. Houses were rat-infested, and disease and dysentery was a problem, especially for young children and the elderly. Infant mortality in St Anns was running at three times the national average, and the research discovered that this figure became worse when they studied the newly arriving West Indian families, who were often living in the worst conditions and suffered the most overcrowding (1970 pp.84-92). The study also examined educational ability amongst the children in St Anns and found that only half of the seven-year-olds in the neighbourhood could read. The schools were inadequate, having been built in the 1870s and being in the same run down state as the housing. Consequently and because of the poor condition of the neighbourhood Coates and Silburn asked their respondents how they thought of themselves in financial terms, and over 70% of the respondents ‘did not see themselves as poor; 20% described themselves as ‘hard pressed’. Coates and Silburn have spoken many times at public meetings about the research and some of their findings in St Anns. When asked they have often noted that this was always the most surprising part of the research, the respondents who took part in the survey either did not want to tell the researchers from the University of Nottingham the full extent of their poverty or, as Coates and Silburn suspected, they simply had no way of comparing their own situation to another. They thought this was the case because the people of St Anns during the 1960s had very little interaction with anyone who lived in circumstances different to theirs (pp.128-135).

In 1960s St Anns, Coates and Silburn noted that the ‘poor do not see themselves as a group and are necessarily aware that their own immediate and personal difficulties are elements of a public problem’ (p.68). However they did note that as the study began to get wider public and media attention, there was evidence that within wider Nottingham that the people of St Anns were seen as a group, and the problems that were being reported within the neighbourhood were blamed upon the behaviour of the ‘St Anns people’. The researchers received letters from several groups of Women’s Guilds, local councillors, and other knowledgeable people telling them to go and research the bingo halls, and pubs in St Anns which were always full.

The study was also met with some anger from St Anns residents as it gained publicity locally and nationally. A short documentary was made by Thames Television and shown in 1970 about the neighbourhood and the research featuring Coates and Silburn, with some of the families living in St Anns at the time. After the film was shown and the research had been publicised in the Nottingham Evening Post, some of the residents complained that the research had ‘shamed’ the community by making them ‘look poor’. One engineer who was also a trade unionist at Raleigh Bicycles in Nottingham complained at the time that he was being made fun of by his work colleagues; he recounted his story in Ruth Johns’ (2002) book ‘Inner City voices:'
I went to my lathe one day just after the poverty survey was in the post (newspaper), and there was half a boot strap on top, when I asked what it was some of my workmates said ‘it’s for you poor fuckers as live in St Anns’. (Johns 2002 p.241)

During 2007 the St Anns documentary was shown again at the local arts cinema in Nottingham and then within several of the community centres in St Anns. Coates and Silburn attended the showings and were available for questions afterwards. I went along to the showings and they were well attended by local residents, past and present. All spoke of their hardships within St Anns at the time, but also spoke of the wonderful community spirit they remembered in the 1960s. Many of the residents thanked Coates and Silburn for the research and the documentary. It appears that much of the anger from 1970 had dissipated into what Mike Savage (2010) might describe as both nostalgic belonging, and elective belonging by residents past and present, believing that the neighbourhood has lost something important with the slum clearance, whilst noting it also has something special with the continuity of community spirit through adversity when other neighbourhoods have lost theirs.

By 1970, as ‘Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen’ was published, the 10,000 houses in St Anns had been earmarked for slum clearance and many of the families were already being moved out to the larger and newly-built sprawling suburban council estates on the outskirts of the City. Coates and Silburn followed their original research with a short report ‘Beyond the Bulldozer’ (1980) to note the changes in the neighbourhood this time focusing upon family and community networks, with some echoes of similar processes of redevelopment elsewhere such as Herbert Gans’s (1962) The Urban Villagers based on research in Boston, Massachusetts. What Coates and Silburn discovered in their original research in the 1960s and later in the 1970’s was that St Anns was part of a bigger picture of what was happening throughout the UK. The poorest people here were not ‘work-shy’ and in actual fact there was very little unemployment in the neighbourhood, but poor housing and low wages were at the root of the neighbourhood’s poverty and disadvantage. The poverty experienced in St Anns in the 1960s was out of sight of those who did not reside in the neighbourhood. Coates and Silburn reported that there was a flagrant ignorance of the hardships that were being endured in St Anns, even in other neighbourhoods in Nottingham. However there was at the same time a hope, and aspiration amongst the resident population in St Anns that things might get better, and/or they might get out of St Anns and be rehoused. The hope that Coates and Silburn noted in the original study was based upon either getting out or away from the poor conditions of the housing, and consequently the poor living conditions, in which the residents were finding it intolerable to live in.

St Anns: the re-study, and the change in methodology

The St Anns estate today is among the poorest 10% of neighbourhoods in the UK (ONS 2010). As I have noted the neighbourhood has been subject to a number of harsh social realities: unemployment and low pay, and the lack of decent housing and good education (Johns 2002, Coates and Silburn 1970, 1980). Locally, it has become severely stigmatised with a reputation as a place to avoid, supposedly full of crime and drugs, single mums, and benefit claimants. Although the original study noted that there was a general feeling within the wider population that people’s personal circumstances were mainly due to their own choices, and behaviour, they did not note any particular fear, disregard, or disrespect relating to the neighbourhood or its residents. They noted in ‘Beyond the Bulldozer’ (1980),
that council housing during the late 1960s and 1970's was the principal form of working-
class housing and also the most preferable raising living standards from the slum districts
previously. It seems that the bad reputation the neighbourhood and its residents are now
known by had arisen out of the mass unemployment in the early 1980’s since the closure of
the coal mines, and the major manufacturing industries which were essential in the
Nottingham area for employing working-class people. The neighbourhood also has a long
history as the place where the poorest and migrant workers have resided in Nottingham;
people from Ireland, the West Indies, Italy, Poland, and South East Asia have been
documented as living in St Anns since the early 1950s (Coates and Silburn 1970, Solomos
2003, Johns 2002). The neighbourhood has always been in flux, with people moving in and
then, as they become more financially secure, often moving out. However the West Indian
and especially Jamaican populations who arrived from the 1950s have stayed constant,
creating homes, families, and communities, nevertheless they have always been the hardest
hit by rising unemployment and institutional racism in the 1980’s, then again in the 1990’s
and currently in 2012 where recent unpublished ONS figures have shown that 50% of young
black people in the UK are unemployed (Ball J. Milmo D. and Ferguson B. 2012).

The recent study within the neighbourhood reported here are the findings from an
ethnography undertaken from 2005-2012, from the particular vantage point of an insider. I
have lived in the St Anns neighbourhood for over 20 years, moving into the inner city during
the late 1980’s from one of the outlying council estates in Nottinghamshire, and therefore I
had a personal interest in the Coates and Silburn research, but also in the changes and
continuity to working class life over the last forty years. My positioning as researcher and
resident has been crucial to my relationship with the local community, as Bev Skeggs (1997)
argues that the researcher relationship to their research subjects is important and always
needs interrogation. Consequently my own position and thoughts of the neighbourhood is
that I belong to it, part of my own identity that I recognise and subscribe to is that I am a
council estate girl. This level of reflexivity and acceptance that community studies need not
be the objective and distanced studies that many in the 1940’s 50’s and 60’s insisted upon
through their methodology, has had a clear impact upon this particular re-study (see
research, mapped the neighbourhood and interpreted the findings, but at the same time I am
also a long-term resident of this estate, living in St Anns for more than twenty years, raising
my own children. Therefore the ethnographic methodology used for the study did not present
the usual challenges of access and familiarity: I was already part of the local community, my
own children had attended the local schools and youth clubs and, as a white working-class
woman and mother of mixed-race children, there is a commonality between the residents
and myself. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the difficulties within the
relationships I have formed with the families in St Anns. At times my positioning as resident
and researcher was extremely strained; because I am local the residents were initially
worried what I might say about them. They know I am aware of the negative stereotypes
about the neighbourhood, and I also have insider knowledge about what happens within the
estate. This was sometimes a concern, when residents feared that I could ‘tell them outside
just how bad it is’, and other residents insisted that I should tell ‘them’ how bad it is. I have
over the last 7 years almost had to develop a split personality, the council estate girl can
have access to what happens in this community, and can interpret the rules of the local
value system, however it has been a struggle to be critically positioned as an insider.
The ethnography initially focused in 2005 upon 35 women who are white and are mothers to mixed-race children living on the estate. In the original study ‘Poverty the Forgotten Englishman’ although the research is rich in critique about the neighbourhood, poverty and the inadequate housing the residents were living in, there was a lack of ‘narrative’. That is in-depth testimony from those living in St Anns, and little analysis relating to the consequences of poverty upon a neighbourhood, or a group identity. This is not a criticism of the original research but an observation, and my interest as an ‘inside researcher’ allowed me to think about the consequences upon a neighbourhood being poor for generations, the stigma that council estates now carry by their very nature of being ‘social housing’, and the relationship that social exclusion, and socially excluded neighbourhoods have upon how a resident population knows itself.

The initial interest in this group of women was two-fold, mothers spend most of their time in the neighbourhood where they live, taking children to school, and often have a deeper engagement with the local community, in addition this group of women who were white and had mixed-race children understood the way the neighbourhood had been stigmatised in a particular way because of their social positioning, and their relationships with the West Indian community. The Leverhulme Trust funded a further two years in 2010 to re-study the neighbourhood where the focus was to find out what had happened to Coates and Silburn’s Englishmen, with the spotlight this time upon men living on the estate. I have interviewed and spent time with 15 men they range from ages of 18 to 55, 13 are black African-Caribbean, and black British, and two are white, all have lived on the St Anns estate for most of their lives. Therefore to state that this was a straight re-study is inaccurate; in order to understand the complexities of contemporary stigmatised neighbourhoods and people from an insider position, I was able to undertake a closer and more in-depth ethnographic approach to the research, focusing upon identity, and stigmatisation of the community.

Therefore the aim of re-studying this neighbourhood is to examine how the residents in St Anns today find value for themselves and their families when their estate is often represented as a space of no or little value. The people who live in social housing today have very little institutional capital (Bourdieu 1986) they have limited formal education, those who work tend to work in unskilled insecure, and low paid jobs, relying upon housing and council tax benefit, and tax credits to supplement their incomes. There are also families on this estate as there are all over the UK who are now on the third and fourth generation who have never worked (see Welshman 2000, Gough et al 2006, Power et al 2009). This neighbourhood in the 1960’s was described by Coates and Silburn as a place of almost full employment for men, with many families having two or three adults working at the same address, and employment in the local industries being a big part of the local culture. Today the estate houses a significant number of unemployed adults, in 2010 the Office of National Statistics noted that almost 50% of adults in the neighbourhood are economically inactive, and unemployment in Nottingham has risen since 2010 to its highest point in over 30 years. In addition the attitude towards social housing has changed considerably since the Coates and Silburn study, it is no longer known as preferable, or a part of British working life, as it once was. Rogaly and Taylor (2009) have mapped the changes in the subtleties of how the rough and respectable neighbourhoods are being represented and known through a particular and targeted method of class distinction, with council estates being the vanguard of the rough (pp17-20). While Skeggs (2004) notes that the names of particular council
estates have become shorthand markers in describing what is bad, and who is undeserving in any particular town or city within the UK.

The social landscape described by an insider

The estate sits between two hills with a valley going through it. This main thoroughfare, the St Anns Well Road, runs from one end of the estate into the city centre; effectively it cuts the estate into two. The St Anns Wells Road that Coates and Silburn describe (1970) was once a vibrant and international shopping area, catering for the different needs of those who lived in the neighbourhood. Now it is a two mile long soulless busy road leading out of the city for commuters. It is flanked by the low pebble dashed houses and the backs of the multi-levelled flats and maisonettes, all grey and all pebble dashed. Halfway up the road is the new doorless police station: all communication takes place through the intercom at the side of the blacked out windows. The heart of the community ‘The Robin Hood Chase’ sits to the side of the police station, once a Victorian pathway through a wooded copse, now the local precinct. It houses most of the community projects: Sure Start, the housing office, the local surgery, a non-profit community laundry and the Post Office. There is also a betting shop, a chip shop, and a small Co-operative supermarket, a British institution which never seems to abandon even the most deprived of estates. There is also the community centre which serves the community as a café and meeting place; during lunch time you can buy West Indian food. However, the centre has been severely scaled down because of lack of funding, and Government cuts to the neighbourhood during 2010, and is now run solely by volunteers. The ‘Chase’, as it is known locally, is usually busy in the day, especially on Tuesday when there is a small market; there are always lots of mums and children passing through, pensioners in the Post Office are collecting their money, local men usually standing outside the bookies chatting, and it is often used as a meeting place for young people.

The precinct closes down at night and becomes a very different space. It is the main site for drug dealing, usually heroin and crack cocaine. It is dimly lit, and has a real feeling of fear and insecurity; most residents avoid the area after dark. This space belongs to someone else once the small supermarket has closed at 8pm, and if you are around and not recognised you will be asked who you are and why you are there; if you are known, business will go on around you, socks will be pulled down and crack scored. All this happens 20 yards away from the state-of-the-art police station and in front of the four CCTV cameras on each corner of the precinct.

If you move into the estate you realise that the old St Anns with its narrow streets, haphazard layout, and confused, illogical planning has been replaced with exactly the same only in grey concrete: rows and rows of the same pre-fabricated constructed grey concrete pebble dashed houses, flats and two-storey maisonettes. The flats and maisonettes are suspended on footbridges on several levels and reach each other through underpasses and subways, which are very often dark and covered in rubbish and debris. Between each row of houses there are three-feet wide paths running down the back of the small square back yards; local people call them the ‘rat runs’. Many of these are ill-lit and over the years have been one of the main sources of complaint from the residents. Phase 1 of the City Challenge programme in 1992 gated and walled off many of the ‘rat runs’ in an attempt to stop burglary, muggings, and sexual assaults on women in the area. The gates and walls themselves have become a well-meaning source of aggravation for the neighbourhood; there is no direct
access through much of St Anns, and the gates act as a visual reminder that you are entering a neighbourhood which has a need for heavy gates, bars and locks.

One of the reasons why the estate is difficult to access is because of the loose concepts of 'modernism' the planners were toying with at the time of the redevelopment around 1970. The idea behind this was the 'Radburn layout': community without traffic. Hence, much of the estate is not easy to get to by car, and the public transport does not go into the estate, only through it. This has also left most properties on the estate without adequate parking for the residents. Vehicles are out of sight from their owners and susceptible to car theft and vandalism; there are also parts of St Anns which are completely cut off from any amenities because they are positioned on top of steep hills. Recently, Phase 10 of a five-year regeneration project has been completed, where one section of St Anns has had its housing units literally turned round so the new fronts face the street; previously these had been the backs of the houses. However, much of St Anns still has the original complicated and difficult layout. This has caused problems for deliveries of take away food, milk rounds, and paper rounds; there have been problems with taxis refusing to pick up and drop off in the neighbourhood, either through the fear of crime, or the problems of leaving cabs to find addresses.

Therefore, the neighbourhood’s reputation has always preceded it and the words ‘St Anns’ today conjure up strong thoughts and feelings amongst Nottingham residents in a way that no other neighbourhood has the power to do. Recently St Anns has been linked through the moral panic of media representation, as an area ridden with crime, drugs, gangs and guns, following the high profile murders of several teenagers on the estate. Like so many estates and poor neighbourhoods in the UK, there have also been many incidents of stabbings, and shootings linked to gang involvement, and drug dealing.

The families who have taken part in this research who I have spoken to, and been invited into their homes, and participated in many community events over the last 7 years describe how they know exclusion, through ‘being looked down on’, and demeaned. They discuss these dimensions of exclusion in the way they feel disrespected, but also how they think the neighbourhood is disrespected. This often gives rise to feelings of fear, hostility and anger towards those they believe ‘look down on them’, but also negative feelings about themselves through their powerlessness to change the situations which hurt them.

Neighbourhood stigma

The women on the estate I had become involved with met daily in the local community centre, spending much of their time in the neighbourhood, taking children to school, and meeting up with friends, neighbours and family all living close by. The women used many of the services in the neighbourhood, Sure Start, the housing office and other voluntary run organisations usually relating to skills training, and volunteering in the community. The local neighbourhood was therefore very important to the women, and they had an interest in what was happening with local services, schools, and the general comings and goings within the estate. The women had very particular complaints about the stigmatisation of the estate and in particular how they were stigmatised. They had an acute understanding of how they were known and ‘looked down on’ in wider Nottingham more widely and society generally because
they lived on a council estate. They never denied where they thought they were positioned, often saying we are ‘at the bottom’, or ‘lower class’.

Gina was 21, pregnant and lived alone with her six month and two year old sons who she described as ‘quarter caste’ - their father was mixed-race and lived on the estate with his mother, the whole family was involved in the research. Gina was one of many mothers who told me she felt an acute stigma, particularly whenever she went to any of the benefit agencies. Although Gina was studying at a local college she claimed income support and housing benefit, and therefore was in constant contact with ‘officials’. Gina told me that every time she gave her address to any of the ‘officials’ there was often a silence as they mentally processed her single parent status, the ethnicity of her children, and then her address in St Anns: ‘I know what they’re thinking you can see it ticking over in their brain as you wait for them to think ‘oh it’s one of them from there’.

The residents on the estate often complained about how St Anns was stigmatised and how this affected very simple things in their daily lives. Getting a taxi to pick you up from your home address, or take you home into St Anns after a night out, or having a pizza delivered to your home, are not services that are taken for granted if you live in this neighbourhood. There is a grudging acceptance by the local residents of the restrictions of living in St Anns, often because of the way the estate has been planned and built, but also because there is an acceptance that there will always be crime in the neighbourhood. Tyrone, a man in his twenties told me of an incident where the milkman had been ‘batted and robbed’, and since then it had become very difficult to get a take-away delivered, but understood why this had happened, as he said ‘what can you expect walking round here at four in the morning’. Tyrone thought it was ‘bad’ that the milkman had been beaten up, but did not think it was unusual, and explained it as part of the neighbourhood culture, ‘this is what happens here’.

However there were groups of residents that knew ‘what happens here’, but at the same time was trying to effect change in the community. I became involved with a group residents who were trying to get a local park cleaned up, so it would be safe for children to play in. The park was the only real green space on the estate, as the few children’s play areas dotted around within the rows of houses are also grey, gravelled and concrete. It is not uncommon on this estate that many of the residents are involved in community projects, usually voluntarily/unofficially, though until the recent cutbacks some were paid. The residents involved spoke about ‘their park’ which belonged to the community, and how they had been let down by the City Council. They questioned whether the council thought their children were ‘good enough’ to have somewhere decent to play, and often discussed whether other neighbourhoods in Nottingham would be allowed to fall into such disrepair.

During the 1960’s and 1970’s the park had tennis courts, a bowling green, and a scout hut. In recent years it had fallen into disrepair and the full-time park keepers were made redundant towards the end of the 1980’s, and the Scouts hut had been abandoned at about the same time. Like many of the abandoned spaces on the estate it was now used by drug users, and prostitutes. The park backs on to a popular youth club and community centre, and some of the young people who attended the youth club in the evenings engaged in a game they called ‘brick the cat’. A ‘cat’ is a term that the local young people use to identify crack users, and often when drug users came to the park to score (buy drugs) some of the young people from the youth club would throw stones and bricks at them. Therefore the park
became an extremely unsafe place in the evenings because of the kerb crawlers and ‘punters’ which the drug users and prostitutes attracted, but also for the drug users as the local children and young people regularly threw stones and bricks at them. The young people who visited the youth club did not recognise these outsiders who came onto the estate looking for various styles of business, they were not ‘St Anns’ and felt justified in their harsh retribution. They told me that ‘St Anns belonged to them’ and they were protecting it.

‘Being and belonging to St Anns’:

This notion of belonging to the neighbourhood, but also the neighbourhood belonging to the residents is a strong theme, the young people discuss St Anns as territory that belongs to them, while older residents discuss ‘being part of the neighbourhood’ and belonging to it. However in the 1960’s Coates and Silburn noted that families in St Anns were desperate to get out, and wanted to leave, understanding that getting out meant upward social mobility. Although Coates and Silburn noted that this was mainly because of the poor level of housing, rather than the neighbourhood itself. They noted in 1980 that in actual fact many of the families which had moved out during slum clearance and moved back because they had missed the community spirit (1980 pp.94-99). I met two families who had been moved out during slum clearance, but had moved back into St Anns saying they had felt like ‘a fish out of water’, and did not think they ‘fitted’ anywhere else. Although there were several generations who were now living in St Anns, none of them wanted to move out, despite admitting that it was not always the easiest place to live.

In 2012 ‘belonging’ and staying in St Anns are important, and social mobility in terms of moving out is not spoken about. Consequently the neighbourhood has strong meaning to those who live in it, being known and recognised in the community is very important. It may seem paradoxical that the residents who are stigmatised because they are known as living in St Anns often described themselves as ‘being St Anns’. Most of the residents I spoke to told me at some point that they were typical St Anns, although this often meant very different things. I visited a group of elderly residents who lived in a cluster of bungalows which was warden aided, and the phrase ‘well I’m typical St Anns’ was used to explain all manner of scenarios. I spoke to Joan who had been born in Ireland and her husband Ivan who came to Nottingham from Yugoslavia in the 1950’s they were both in their eighties now, with children, grand-children and great-grand-children living on the estate. We talked about politics and who they were going to vote for in the next election, they both started with well ‘we are typical St Anns we are voting Labour as we have always done’. In comparison some of the younger men on the estate wore T-shirts with pictures printed of the houses on the front and the post code NG3 or Stannz a local term meaning St Anns on the back. When I asked why they wore the T-shirts the conversation started with ‘because I’m St Anns’ or ‘when your repping (representing) St Anns’. The ways residents are connected to the neighbourhood was always spoken of – in order to show they were St Anns, the residents described their family connections in great detail, the length of time they had lived in the neighbourhood and the depth of local knowledge they held about the area and its residents.

Belonging to the estate had practical elements to it, and therefore residents invested into this notion of ‘belonging’. Many of the residents have told me that apart from ‘town’ (City centre) they have little or no contact with other areas within Nottingham or even wider, and their social life is firmly located within the neighbourhood. Most of the residents who were involved in this research have family, friends and a close social network within the estate,
and therefore what happens and how you can operate within St Anns is essential to the quality of life you have. Consequently it is extremely important that you ‘fit in’, and ‘being known’ is particularly important in St Anns. Lena a 28 year old single mum with two children, and who had lived on the estate since her 12 year old daughter was born told me that she rarely left the estate, and enjoyed the benefits of ‘being St Anns’, despite acknowledging that it was known as a bad place to live:

**Lena** ‘I think it’s safe if you live here because people know who you are, it’s not safe if you don’t live here and you’re walking through at night, so yeah you are better off living here if you come here………. I never used to go out a lot cos I had all this paranoia that people were out to get me you know but since I’ve moved down here I’ve started going out… from living here yeah it’s quite easy to make loads of friends erm this stereotype that St Anns has got it’s not like that at all, erm… it would be if you’re not from here it probably would be’.

Belonging to St Anns is extremely important to the people who live in this neighbourhood in many ways, particularly how their association with St Anns affects how they view themselves, both positively and negatively. Although ‘reputation’ and ‘being known’ has been an important theme throughout many studies set in poorer communities past and current (Dennis et al 1956, Jackson 1958, Coates and Silburn, 1970, Pahl, 1984, Young and Willmott 2007, Rogaly and Taylor 2009). The feelings of safety articulated by many residents through their sense of ‘belonging’ to the estate appeared to be as much about feeling excluded from what they called ‘normal society’ or ‘out there’ as it was about belonging to St Anns. Consequently there was a pride in ‘being St Anns’ and toughing it out, as many residents told me that outsiders, ‘those out there’, would not be able to live one day in their lives. The networks, sense of belonging, and family association are strong in St Anns, perhaps even stronger than some of the community studies of the past depicted, especially those which took place in the 1950’s and 1960’s when the language of social mobility, moving on and out, and up, was being discussed in the UK. There is a different language in St Anns now which is related to staying, and immobility, and the fear of exclusion, and of being de-valued. This is a complex discussion relating to class identity and class positioning in the UK. Bev Skeggs (1997, 2004), Steph Lawler (2009), Chris Haylett (2001), and Diane Reay (2004b) have all added to and continue the discussion that class identity is both recognised and recognisable in subtle and often nasty and cruel ways particularly through the rhetoric used to describe those who live on council estates, who are becoming de-valued through how they look, their practices, and their values.

**Social capital and social exclusion**

Therefore it is hardly surprising that if there are groups who are stigmatised, and feel unwanted or of no value to the rest of society that they will find value for themselves, families and locality in what is available to them. This can be described as local social capital, Pierre Bourdieu describes social capital as resources based upon connection, networks and group membership – who you know – and can you use them in pursuit of favour and advancement (1986 pp.361-368). Social capital has often been taken up as a measurement for social exclusion and inclusion, and has been used to explain neighbourhood decline when examining poorer neighbourhoods in terms of the lack of social cohesion, community spirit and social capital (Etzioni, 1993; Putnam 2000, Levitas 2004; Macdonald et al. 2005). This occurs when social capital refers to the quality of contacts that people have the
networks that they can attach to, and can be used as a bridge to counter unfair social disadvantages, rather than networks which bonds people with social disadvantages together.

The residents who live in St Anns understand and know their local networks have a use-value to them, although there is no exchange value on the outside of the estate. Therefore, it may be the case that poor neighbourhoods have extremely strong systems, resources, and social capital but these are not recognised because they have no relationships with the institutional capital which can be exchanged in wider society such as employment, and becoming the respectable working class. As Ruth Levitas argues, the fruitfulness of local social capital is often ruined because those resources are only seen as a means to an end and not as resources within themselves (2004 p.168).

Gough et al. (2006) also argue that the way some social spaces are constructed can also diminish social capital. They use ‘residential exclusion’ through a concentration of one income type as an example to show how the wealthy buy themselves a ‘better area’, whilst poorer families are left with little choice of where they can live. They also argue that many of the council estates in the UK have been badly built without consideration of the impact that environment has on residents. Therefore, the built environment, such as the Thamesmead estate in South London, the Sighthill estate in Glasgow and St Anns in Nottingham, socially excludes the residents from each other and through inconsiderate planning these estates become easy for certain crimes to be committed. Once estates become pathologized, the stigma also prevents residents from networking with anyone outside the estate and again limits the accumulation of the form of ‘bridging’ social networks on the outside of the estate (2006 pp.114-116). A term which explains the consequences of class and place based stigmatisation where residents become inward looking, and often defensive is that of ‘estatism’, Lynsey Handley (2007 p.150) uses it to describe a form of ‘the wall in the head’ relating to British council estates.

Therefore, the argument that poor neighbourhoods can have a lack of bridging capital diminishing and segregating them is valid, however, against these disadvantages there is a set of potential advantages of a spatial concentration for the poor which are rarely recognised. It is already known that, within poor neighbourhoods where there are black and ethnic minority groups, this spatial concentration can become a buffer against racism (Drake and Cayton 1993; Wacquant 2008 p.115-117). What is not widely discussed is how spatial concentration of poor groups within poor neighbourhoods also acts as a buffer against stigma for the whole community, and therefore boosts local social capital within the neighbourhood. There are some who might argue that these things are not resources at all, rather methods of ‘coping’. However, these resources are of use-value for the community, which should not be underestimated because the research in St Anns spanning forty years tells us that local community, and local resources, are very important to residents, and especially through times of adversity.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the significant changes within the estate from the previous study, the physical appearance, but also the changes in employment which has had a devastating effect upon this community. However there are similarities, there are social networks, and a sense of community, although often mis-represented as negative aspects of estate life.
Coates and Silburn noted in the 1960’s there was a language of aspiration by getting out, this seems to have dissipated with the lack of social mobility within the UK over the last 20 years. The paper also aimed to show this complexity and encourage other ways of thinking about poor neighbourhoods. They are not places which simply need ‘changing’ or as Ray Pahl (1995 pp.194-196) argues can be put right through ‘technological, economic or even social fixes’. Consequently there are practices, behaviours, and resources within them, set up by the residents which work well and are valued by the local community. There are strengthened networks, not based upon employment or trade union membership, or even a shared social life as many of the past community studies noted. Instead from a collective feeling of exclusion, and abandonment, therefore the residents know that where they are is where they will stay, therefore they invest in their communities, through a sense of ownership, and belonging. Being a person of value is important here as it is in any group within society, we all want to feel valued and have worth in the things we do. However for those residents who have been part of this study they believe they have been socially rejected by those on the outside and compensate by engaging in what is local and available.

The alternative value system, and the elements which make up this system are difficult to pin down, because of the complex nature of the estate, the constant and shifting power relations between those who are positioned as lack (Lawler 2008), and ‘the rest of us’ (Skeggs 2004). But also the system takes on different forms to different groups within. The women place high value on motherhood, and being a mother is extremely important to them, it is often the only thing the women cite as being proud of in their lives. Therefore being a mother ranks highly on the estate, and the elderly find value in their time spent in the neighbourhood, often describing themselves as ‘lifers’, citing deep histories and memories of the neighbourhood. The young people on the estate value highly their status as ‘being Stannz.’, and protecting their neighbourhood from outsiders. Being authentic to the neighbourhood, being known and fitting in are other elements to how you become a person of value on the estate, but also to whom and how you are connected to the estate is equally important. ‘Being St Anns’ is inscribed upon the community with its nuanced marking characteristics, of look, dress, speech, and practice and condenses a complex cultural history, becoming not only a way of ‘being’ or a way of recognising, but an actual resource within the neighbourhood. What is clear within this estate is that being valued and respected is of high priority, if only within the estate. This suggests that respect and value as resources are not available or not obviously available to those who live on this estate from the outside, therefore to be respected and valued within the estate have become resources in themselves.

This value system, which is very localised on one level, is also class distinctive on another. These problems of ‘estatism’ are replicated in poor neighbourhoods and particularly in council estates up and down the country. The resources within each value system may change, but the need for local value, in the absence of universal value, is the same. The practices which are valued and are part of the local value system have two discourses, initially they compensate for what is not readily available, by giving a sense of status and power, but they also build walls, as Lynsey Hanley (2007) has noted ‘the wall in the head’. Those who engage in these local and alternative value systems which are non-transferable on the ‘outside’ create an ‘inside’ but also put boundaries around the outside, simultaneously creating an outside in which they do not belong.
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