Neither 'Deepest, Darkest Peckham' nor SE22: The middle classes and their 'others' in an inner London neighbourhood

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Abstract

This article examines how middle-class residents of an inner London neighbourhood draw up spatial and symbolic boundaries between themselves and their 'others'. Through discussing accounts of two very different boundaries, the boundary of a multi-ethnic high street and a less clearly defined boundary of a neighbouring middle-class area, we argue that middle class identities are produced through classed and racialized discourses of specific 'other' places and the people that use and consume them. This case reveals that the production of middle-class identities is bound up with processes of spatial disaffiliation not only from proximate stigmatized areas, but also from more up-market areas. Against this background it becomes clear that middle-class claims to belonging are made through (1) the processes by which the middle classes segregate themselves from racialized/classed others and (2) the subtle process of distinction that go on *within* the middle classes. Nevertheless, relationships to place remain ambivalent, and as neighbourhoods undergo change, physical boundaries separating one area from another refuse to stay put. We argue that the re-inscription of such boundaries in the accounts of the middle class respondents are attempts to create a stable identity on the shifting ground of the contemporary global city.

Introduction

This article focuses on the various ways that middle-class residents of an inner London neighbourhood define their place of belonging, carving out a space for themselves within the global city. Following the demise of work as a source of identity (Sennett 1998), place of residence has become a key feature of identification and how individuals define their position within the social structure (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005; Butler with Robson 2003). Focussing on an inner city gentrifying neighbourhood in London, we discuss the processes by which its middle-class residents draw up spatial and symbolic boundaries between themselves and their 'others', at the same time presenting their own neighbourhood (or part of it) and people within it as distinct. We thus present the various ways that middle-class respondents draw boundaries around their own neighbourhood, and reflect on their use and consumption of two bordering areas: one similarly middle-class, and another more ethnically and socially mixed.

This article argues that boundary-making is central to (1) middle-class disaffiliation (Atkinson 2006) and selective belonging (Watt 2009), processes by which the middle classes segregate themselves from racialized and classed others and (2) subtle process of distinction that go on *within* the middle classes (Bourdieu 1984; Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992). These processes are made possible or necessary – perhaps uniquely – because of the realities of contemporary life and living arrangements in a global city, described by one respondent as 'a chaotic arrangement of villages bumping into each other' (P14). Disidentifying with neighbouring areas, and striving to take control over how their own neighbourhood is understood and represented, the middle classes attempt to carve out a safe, middle-class haven (Atkinson 2006; Watt 2009), spatially mapping social difference and distinction.

The data used in this article was collected as part of the project 'The Middle Classes in the City: Social Mix or 'People Like Us' a comparative research project focusing on the middle classes living in and around London and Paris.[1] The study examines the middle-class residents living in five different types of neighbourhood across each of these global cities – gentrified, gentrifying, gated community, suburban and exurban. In each of the five neighbourhoods we conducted 35 interviews with middle-class residents, complemented by five interviews with local experts such as councilors, business-owners and heads of local associations. Interviews were semi-structured, incorporating themes such as residential choices, histories and trajectories, social relations, use of public services and local amenities, political engagements, and relationship to place (see also Charmes et al, this issue).

The article proceeds as follows: we first outline the key theoretical debates to which the argument contributes, reviewing literature on elective belonging, selective belonging and middle-class disaffiliation. We then set the scene, introducing the neighbourhood through the descriptions presented by respondents, a map of the area, and relevant census data. This is followed by three empirical sections that focus on the ways that respondents draw boundaries of belonging around their own neighbourhood through their presentations of other neighbouring areas – ethnically mixed Rye Lane, and middle-class East Dulwich. Finally, we reflect on the relationship between these two boundaries, respondents' practice of neighbourhood and their visions for its future.

Neighbourhood boundaries, bounding neighbourhoods, and processes of othering in a global city

This article focuses on boundaries, in particular how middle-class residents in an inner London neighbourhood view, enforce and maintain spatial boundaries, but also the symbolic use of these in their identifications with their place of residence. Borrowing from Barth's (1969) conceptualization of boundaries, the ongoing negotiations by which different, in his case ethnic, groups define who does and does not belong, we argue here that the boundaries our respondents draw should be understood as part of ongoing processes of inclusion and exclusion. As Cohen (1985) argues, group identity relies on the recognition of the similarities between members, while also maintaining a group identity that is distinct from members of other groups. The relationships of our respondents in Peckham with other people and neighbourhoods, particularly their efforts to distance themselves socially and spatially from these others, are central to their understandings of themselves and their neighbourhood. In this rendering, boundaries are central to forms of neighbourhood (dis)identification, and the spatial articulation of (perceived) social difference.

The related literature on the middle classes and place attachment focuses on the ways that (1) the middle classes choose places of residence that fit to their habitus – in turn this generates a sense of 'elective belonging' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005) – and (2) middle-class disaffiliation is a form of segregation (Atkinson 2006) that 'in all its forms involves an element of 'other avoidance'' (Watt 2009: 2890). These processes are both at work in the accounts of our respondents as they make sense of their decision to live in an inner London neighbourhood while also marking out the boundaries of their particular 'niche' within the wider area.

The concept of elective belonging draws attention to how, in an era of globalization, individuals claim belonging, locating their residential choice within their biographical life stories (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). Within these claims, understandings of place are relational: why we can live here and why we don't want to live elsewhere. In this respect, place attachments in a global world extend beyond mere local attachment and are 'related to reflexive processes in which they can satisfactorily account to themselves how they come to live where they do' (ibid. 2005: 29). In London, a global city, the ability to live with and even to celebrate multiculturalism may form part of this discourse of elective belonging. However, as Robson and Butler (2001; see also Butler with Robson 2003) argue, this is an ideal which is rarely matched in reality; using the concept of 'social tectonics' they argue that while people may live close to diversity, there is, in fact, very little mixing between different groups.

While pertinent to our case, this conceptualization largely overlooks the power dynamics embedded within these processes, as the middle classes displace and replace other populations in their efforts to make a home for themselves (and others like them). In other words, they neglect the moral imperatives intrinsic to these middle-class claims to belonging (Watt 2009; see also Sayer 2005). Alternative concepts such as middle-class disaffiliation/colonization (Atkinson 2006) and selective belonging (Watt 2009) more readily recognize the power dynamics embedded in processes of spatial affiliation.

Atkinson (2006) argues that the more affluent, who rely on the city for work and residence, increasingly seek spatial and social withdrawal, justified on the grounds of their social fears and their desire for safety. Watt (2009) builds on this sense of enclavism in his account of how the middle classes in the suburbs strengthen their place attachment through boundary-making, defining their own neighbourhood through the opposition to another, in their opinion, less salubrious local neighbourhood. Middle-class place attachments thus have at their core disaffiliation from other places and the peoples deemed to inhabit them; neighbourhood-making relies on processes of exclusion through which those who claim belonging define themselves against what they are not. Undoubtedly, the processes of disaffiliation that both Atkinson (2006) and Watt (2009) outline have racial/ethnic and class dimensions; the other people and places avoided and stigmatized in middle-class claims to belonging are rarely home to other 'people like us', with such similarities more commonly mobilized as a marker of neighbourhoods appropriate for middle-class residence (Butler with Robson 2003).

However, as the examples presented in this article demonstrate, these processes of disaffiliation not only concern the creation of social distance between classes and ethnic groups, but also *within* classes. As Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding have argued, middle-class groups engage 'in endless though reasonably genteel battles to assert their own identities, social position and worth' (Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992: 100). The spatial dimensions of these intra-class distinctions are marked as people present their reasons for choosing one place of residence over another. For example, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) draw attention to the way that the middle classes in Manchester, and notably Chorlton, identify themselves in opposition to the cosmopolitan middle classes of London, while Benson (2011) demonstrates how British migrants living in one part of southwest France proactively distinguish themselves from their compatriots living in other areas of the French countryside. It is also evident that particular locations have been identified as sites for intra-class distinction. As Cloke and Thrift (1990) argue, while the countryside was once the site of inter-class distinction, as working class populations have been displaced, becoming instead a site for processes of distinction within the middle classes. What we demonstrate below is the extent to which middle-class claims to belonging and the emplacement of these within the global city embed subtle processes of status discrimination *within* the middle classes as well as what Watt (2009) describes as the (almost) violent intolerance that middle classes have for (racialized and classed) others, evocatively citing Bourdieu's account of distaste as 'sick-making' (1984: 56, see also Lawler 2005).

It is conceivable that the context – London as a global city – has set the stage not only for the encounters with multiculturalism that drive othering practices, but also distinctions within the middle classes. The economic re-structuring of London from an industrial to service-based economy, a large player in the global economy, and the associated shift in the occupational structure has encouraged a related social change, with an expanded middle-class population, alongside growing marginalization of the unemployed and ethnic minority populations (Hamnett 2003; Sassen 2001; Massey 2007). The middle classes within the global city are heterogeneous (Hamnett 2003; Butler and Hamnett 2009), their diversity reflected in their possession of various amounts of economic, social and cultural capital. As Butler with Robson (2003) argue, the 'metropolitan habitus' is variously articulated in neighbourhoods around London depending on the relative possession of these different forms of capital, and expressed in the fields of housing, education, employment and consumption (see also Butler and Robson 2001). They thus identify 'mini-habituses' which can be mapped onto the different neighbourhoods in their study.

Although Butler and Robson (2003) make clear the objective differences within the middle classes, they do not account for how middle-class residents see themselves in relation to middle-class others. The presentation below, of how our middle-class respondents draw boundaries between their neighbourhood and a neighbouring middle-class neighbourhood demonstrates the explicit rendering of difference within the middle classes, plotted onto neighbourhood. This is perhaps the result of the diversity within London and in particular within the middle classes resident there. Neighbouring middle-class areas are rendered as different, albeit subtly, in an attempt to displace assumptions of similarity. It is almost as if there is a fear of being tarred with the same brush, of being made indistinct through

approximation. And so, while the middle classes shore up their identities through the discursive construction of other people and places, they also present their own neighbourhood as distinct and unique, in the process self-identifying as distinct; these are more than mere claims to belonging, tied up with middle-class formation and identity, practices of place attachment reveal also the spatial mapping of social difference within the global city-scape.

Bellenden Village: a middle-class 'bubble'

In this article, we focus on Bellenden Village, a middle-class 'bubble' (P12) lying between Rye Lane and Bellenden Road in Peckham.[2] More broadly, located in the London borough of Southwark, Peckham is an ethnically and socially mixed area. It is renowned for gang-related gun and knife crime, as well as associated with a traditional south London working class – courtesy of the popular sitcom 'Only Fools and Horses'. However, in recent years, various interventions have been made to change Peckham and its image. Notably Peckham has more recently gained media attention for its award-winning library and burgeoning art scene. It is within the context of these representations of Peckham that our respondents' accounts of neighbourhood belonging and identification need to be understood (Benson and Jackson).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

> … a lot of people talk about it as being quite a particular area now in the sense that it's got its own identity, whereas it felt before like it was just quite an anonymous place, next to Dulwich village, but also not Peckham (P36).

> … the nice thing about this area is that you get the benefits of having a surprise here and there and you live somewhere that, isn't 'cool' in the way that Shoreditch or Hackney or Bethnal Green is cool but, reasonably cool compared to somewhere like East Dulwich, or Dulwich Village, or Herne Hill, or Balham. But, I think you still have the, comfort and safety – and particularly in these roads, that you get in those areas. It's kind of a transition point. And you notice it very much when you – because I cycle to work … as soon as you cross the Peckham Road, it utterly changes. Very poor (P25).

As these quotations reveal, our respondents engage in efforts to present their neighbourhood – Bellenden Village – as being distinct from other, bordering areas. It is often presented as neither Peckham, nor Dulwich, in a process of neighbourhood change but *not* in transition from one to another. In drawing their neighbourhood boundaries, respondents regularly cited Rye Lane and East Dulwich. The content of these distinctions was notably different: while Rye Lane and Peckham High Street, were definite boundaries that were rarely crossed, the border with East Dulwich (and indeed Camberwell, another middle-class area) was more porous. Indeed, the contrast between their presentations of Lordship Lane in East Dulwich (described as '90% white') and multi-ethnic Rye Lane was extremely stark:

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2 This moniker is used by estate agents in the marketing of the area. We adopt it here to reflect the processes of bounding and bordering that emerge through our respondents' accounts, reflecting the spatial dimensions of their claims to belonging.

> … two worlds, completely two worlds … the other day we were walking down Rye Lane and there were big buckets full of giant snails, the size of a coconut … And then you go round to Lordship Lane and – you could literally walk between the two in fifteen minutes – and you've got shops that are selling nice smelly stuff for fifty quid a bottle (P4).

Rye Lane acted as a powerful referent, used to talk about the multiculturalism of the wider area, to distinguish middle-class leafy Peckham from this bustling and unsettling high street and to talk about possible future improvements to the area. It was a space that middle-class residents moved through on their way to the station (Peckham Rye) or for a limited amount of shopping. Lordship Lane also evoked some ambivalence, but for different reasons. It was presented as an undeniably middle-class area, that many respondents found attractive and used, but it was also an area that attracted other middle-class people who were somehow 'people (not quite) like us', occupying different occupational categories, and having different values and ideologies.

Beyond these reflections on the distinctiveness of their neighbourhood and the different qualities of neighbouring areas, the quotations above also describe how the neighbourhood has changed. Undoubtedly, many of the changes that respondents refer to have resulted from the Bellenden Renewal Scheme, a series of policy interventions by Southwark Council to 'improve' and change the image of the area: commissioning new street furniture from some of its local resident artists (notably, but not solely, Antony Gormley) and supporting the renovation of local shops and houses. In addition, the availability and relative affordability of the Victorian housing stock has encouraged a slow, steady and ongoing process of gentrification.

From our interviews, it seems as though the gentrification of Peckham has taken place in two distinct phases:

(1) In the 1970s/1980s pioneer gentrifiers moved into Peckham, a phase that included artists, who later played a role in the redevelopment and changing image of the area (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008). Many of these people are now aged in their sixties.

(2) In the 2000s, young professional couples started to move in attracted by the relative affordability, fast train connection to central London and proximity to East Dulwich. These residents are now aged in their thirties and some have young children.

Attitudes to neighbourhood change could sometimes be mapped onto these phases, with pioneer gentrifiers more likely to be disparaging about gentrification and the encroachments of East Dulwich, proactively distinguishing themselves from 'East Dulwich-types', while younger, more recent incomers were more likely to look towards East Dulwich in their identifications.

Against this backdrop, it was also clear that Bellenden Village was not an 'anonymous place' (see P36 above), but had its own distinct flavour, in part the result of the types of people who lived there and invested their time and energy into the production of the neighbourhood, but also the result of the burgeoning consumption infrastructure. The independent bookshop, café, chocolate shop, the well-known Indian restaurant, small boutiques and recently renovated pubs were all regularly cited as key to the

neighbourhood's identity. They were mobilized as markers of the bohemian flavour and independent spirit of the area and, as we describe below, were fiercely supported by many of our respondents.

> I describe it as being a 'little Berlin' … I lived in Berlin two years before I came to London initially and so it [Bellenden Village] struck me as being like a bit Boho and a bit, it was way more laid back than central London feels, and lots of nice independently owned little shops and cafes and business that you really get a feel for in different ways than you would just a Pizza Express or a Cafe Nero (P10).

Through their accounts, respondents presented Bellenden Village as a distinct London neighbourhood, uncharacteristic of other middle-class neighbourhoods such as East Dulwich while also a place apart from wider Peckham, characterized by bordering Rye Lane.

Rye Lane and 'social tectonics'

In general, the respondents praised the multiculturalism of the area (cf. Butler with Robson 2003). Indeed being comfortable with difference was described as a prerequisite for living in the area. A vision of 'happy multiculturalism' (Ahmed 2010) was often relayed in relation to contact with neighbours from different ethnic and class backgrounds. For example P19, a corporate lawyer who had lived in the area for 10 years said:

> … most of my neighbours are very multicultural … and you know, and I've had curried goat before and I'm quite happy to have curried goat again, the Indian lady makes lovely Indian food when we go over there sort of thing … so that is multicultural and I like that and I like our neighbours … I like Bellenden area because that is sort of a little villagey sort of feel.

Mix was celebrated within the neighbourhood but simultaneously Bellenden Village was also portrayed as overwhelmingly white and middle class. Rye Lane was presented as a clear neighbourhood boundary, bifurcating the 'two worlds' marked by ethnic and social difference that rub up against each other in Peckham. As P19 describes:

> If you basically walked out on Peckham High Street, or Rye Lane which is the main shopping street, I would say at least two thirds to three quarters if not more of those people are black … you are the minority as a white person, but … if you then go to Bellenden Road to those cafes and those shops, you go to Lordship Lane, it's 90% white. There doesn't seem to be very much crossover.

This division, largely articulated on the grounds of ethnic difference, is evoked by P6 another male lawyer who described the division in people exiting Peckham Rye station at the evening rush hour: the people that turn left towards North Peckham (in his account mainly black and poor) and those who turn right (mainly white) towards the Bellenden Road area. Such presentations separate Bellenden Village as the location of the white middle classes, while the rest of Peckham emerges as the home of the ethnic 'Other'.

These descriptions of neighbourhood relations are in line with what Butler and Robson label 'tectonic' relations, where '[S]ocial groups or 'plates' overlap or run parallel to one another without much in the way of integrated experience in the areas' social and cultural institutions' (2001: 78). As Nast and Blokland (this issue) argue the boundary in the

tectonic relation is not absolute; merely passing by one another is a dimension of living with social mix that, despite the absence of further interaction, impacts on people's sense of comfort, of being at home in their neighbourhood. While respondents equally expressed this sense of 'tectonic' relations, with 'two worlds' existing in parallel, it also became clear that Rye Lane and its population could not just be ignored and passed by. Rather, the presence of Rye Lane, and the presence of people it comes to symbolize, is key to defining the neighbourhood of Bellenden Village and the people who live there as separate. This boundary between the 'two worlds' becomes a point of anxiety and fascination.

Rather than avoid Rye Lane, many of our respondents used it functionally, for example purchasing vegetables and cheap household cleaning products. The two BME respondents in the Peckham sample (from Vietnam and St Lucia) stressed that the ingredients that they needed to make dishes from their countries of origin were available locally on Rye Lane, providing them with a powerful sense of home. These examples notwithstanding, a preoccupation with Rye Lane as a confusing and disgusting space resonated through many of our interviews. So while the ethnic mix of the area is presented as an important and positive factor influencing residential choice, the respondents also demonstrate considerable ambivalence about this diversity, at once overwhelming and to be celebrated. As in P4's encounter with the snails of Rye Lane:

> God you know... Rye Lane it's ... it does have a few chain stores WHSmith and everything, but further down it's just an Afro-Caribbean and African community, so there's shops full of vegetables that you literally, that I couldn't name. You know, the other day we were walking down and there were big buckets full of giant snails, that size [gestures] the size of a coconut, just sort of crawling out of the bucket above my head and I was like 'oh my God' that's a bit too much! ... I think we are those classic people who really do genuinely feel that life is good when there's a diverse community ... we just really appreciate – although Peckham can be dirty and crazy, it's also 'wow', what an amazing place to live where you've got snails crawling out of buckets on the high street and who wouldn't find that – well obviously, not everybody! (P4)

Peckham, the site of the 'Other' (an 'Other' specifically presented as black) is central to respondents' descriptions of Rye Lane as 'little Lagos', 'third world', 'Africa' and 'weird' – like the snails in the basket – as both exotic and frightening. Within these racialized presentations, a concern with the proliferation of butchers, fishmongers and hair and nail bars is repeatedly voiced. The lack of containment of businesses on Rye Lane is a common complaint from our respondents: the hair that gets brushed out into the streets, the smell of the butchers. These uncanny border transgressors – hair and nails – being classic examples of what Mary Douglas terms 'matter out of place' (1966; see also Kristeva 1982). To return to P19, we can contrast his account of eating curried goat with his multicultural neighbours with his concern about the proliferation of butchers on Rye Lane characterized by 'goats hanging in the window'. The goat in the context of the butchers' window on Rye Lane causes discomfort, whereas the goat, cooked and served up by the neighbour becomes acceptable and homely.

The fascination and repulsion that characterizes many of the narratives of Rye Lane demonstrate how forms of disgust that shape process of distinction are mapped onto particular spaces (cf. Sibley 1995), as Bourdieu argues 'Tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of

the tastes of others' (1984: 56). In the case of Peckham, we can see how such forms of disgust are tied to ambivalence about ethnic 'others' and the preservation of boundaries between self and other. The drawing of Rye Lane as an exotic and troublesome boundary serves to separate Bellenden Village and themselves as (predominantly) white middle class people from what one respondent refers to as 'deepest, darkest Peckham'. However, it is the very instability of the boundary that requires it be reinscribed with such 'anxious vitality' (Jacobs 1996). To take the tectonic metaphor further then, in the accounts of our respondents these are not two worlds that slide past each other effortlessly, but that grate, rub and leak over one another.

East Dulwich: the 'other' middle-class place and its people

In drawing symbolic boundaries around their neighbourhood, interviewees in Bellenden Village did not only define their neighbourhood in stark opposition to Rye Lane and other, 'less desirable' parts of Peckham, they also reflected on the relationship of the area to neighbouring East Dulwich. East Dulwich was presented as a more middle-class area, with a corresponding consumption infrastructure (including bars and restaurants), the result of (relatively) recent gentrification, and a clear contrast to Rye Lane. As we argue here, respondents drew upon this boundary in subtle ways to shore up further their sense of the position of their neighbourhood within a wider middle-class map of London, and indeed, their identity and their position within the middle classes.

> I'd much rather have someone think I was from Peckham than from East Dulwich (P25).

> Where we lived was really on the border of Dulwich and Peckham so we never really felt like we belonged to Peckham itself … if you'd asked me where I lived, I used to say I lived in Dulwich rather than saying I lived in Peckham (P23).

The two quotations above demonstrate a certain amount of ambivalence about East Dulwich; some respondents clearly disassociated from it, while others keenly looked towards it in their identifications with place. Such identifications were subject to change over time and as residents became more familiar with and fond of what was on offer, they more willingly identified with Bellenden Village, thus demonstrating the extent to which boundaries may shift and change.

Perhaps more common than these extreme positions, however, was a desire to benefit from East Dulwich – notably through using its middle-class consumption infrastructure – while also upholding their neighbourhood as distinct, with its own (imagined) community of like-minded people. East Dulwich thus acted as a source of reassurance; it was not presented as threatening in any way. But it was also the case that respondents were keen to create some social distance between themselves and 'East Dulwich people' – people who could be characterized as 'not quite like us' – as a way of maintaining the integrity of their own (unique) neighbourhood and distinguishing themselves from the neighbouring middle classes. In these respects, claims to belonging were strengthened not only through disaffiliation from less desirable areas (see Atkinson 2006; Watt 2009), here expressed as visceral disgust, but also through comparison to other proximate, similarly middle-class

areas. But while Rye Lane is perceived as immutable, the boundary with East Dulwich is presented as more porous.

The boundary with East Dulwich worked within respondents' claims to the distinctiveness of their neighbourhood and the people who lived there. In this respect, this spatial boundary became a central feature of their efforts to position themselves within the middle classes. Several of the interviewees had previously lived in East Dulwich. Most often, the decision to move from the SE22 postcode (Dulwich) to the SE15 postcode (Peckham) was rationalized in terms of economics, as it was a widely-held belief that houses and rent in the Peckham postcode area were significantly cheaper than in Dulwich. Beyond this, respondents reflected on the population of Dulwich and how this had influenced their feelings about the place; it had 'got a bit suffocating … very middle-class, very samey' (P25), or as P31 explained, surrounded by people 'probably from similar backgrounds with similar aspirations, it's [East Dulwich] slightly boring actually'.

It is worth noting here that through these reflections, respondents presented the middle classes in East Dulwich as homogeneous and indistinct. In contrast, respondents presented the resident population – in particular the presence of the creative classes and their groundedness (indicated by their choice to live in Peckham) – of the Bellenden Zone as one of the characteristics that made their neighbourhood distinct.

> … a lot of artists live here, whereas I would say that East Dulwich is a little bit more run-of-the-mill middle class (P7).

> [East Dulwich] is very chi-chi. I like the raw-er feeling of Peckham, bit more real life and less yuppie valley (P20).

Such comparisons took on almost moral dimensions (cf. Sayer 2005), drawing attention to processes of status discrimination that take place within the middle classes (Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992). P2, a long-term resident, used his description of East Dulwich as a way of explaining why he preferred to live in the Bellenden area, 'you go to Sainsburys in East Dulwich, everybody is going around feeling very self-important and being quite rude'. P9, who had lived in the area for five years, explained that he thought that if people knew the 'real' Peckham, they might want to move there, but because they had not looked behind the representations, 'people think of Peckham and think, '[Y]uck, don't want to go there', and they think East Dulwich, but then they can keep themselves to East Dulwich'. As this quotation demonstrates, the negative connotations of Peckham are given here as keeping out middle-class 'others', 'people not quite like us'.

Being able to cope with Rye Lane and its 'weirdness' is given as a prerequisite to being a Peckham person. The boundary with East Dulwich is maintained precisely through this (positive) mobilization of the boundary with Rye Lane. The ability to negotiate and cope with difference, their more cosmopolitan outlook, became a measure of what it meant to be a middle-class Peckham resident. This characteristic was presented as distinguishing them from their neighbours in East Dulwich, drawing attention to how particular values, in this case, the valuation of diversity and the sensibilities to live with it, are used to signify the (social) boundaries of belonging to groups within the middle classes. Mapping social

boundaries onto space in this manner can be read as both a spatial articulation of perceived social difference within the middle classes and an attempt to fix such identities in place.

It should be remembered, however, that proximity (geographical and social) to East Dulwich could also serve as an attraction drawing people to the area in the first place, perhaps people who could not quite afford the East Dulwich postcode, as a result of the consumption and leisure infrastructure that it offered. For these people there was no difference between being an East Dulwich or Peckham person (see P23 above). Those respondents who supported the idea that the boundaries between Dulwich and Peckham were blurred, were often aged in their 30s, and were relative newcomers to the area, arriving in the last 10 years. They presented their neighbourhood in various ways, including the conflation of the two areas, 'we're part of Peckham *and* we're part of East Dulwich' (P34), its presentation as a border zone where the two neighbourhoods were (unequally) mixed, 'it really is the cusp' (P4), and as affected by the spread of East Dulwich (and its population) into Peckham, 'The make-up of the area is slowly changing. I guess it's sort of seeping outwards from East Dulwich' (P8).

Longer term residents, however, were less likely to conflate their neighbourhood with East Dulwich, 'The Bellenden Road effort [Renewal Scheme] I think was triggered by what had happened in Lordship Lane … it didn't take off. Not in any *real* sense, you know it's still there festering' (P33). The fact that the Renewal Scheme hadn't 'taken off', was presented as a sign that the neighbourhood was still, and would remain, distinct from East Dulwich. For example, P11 confidently explained, 'I feel it's not going to fall into the East Dulwich side of things'.

While there was evident ambivalence about East Dulwich, many of our respondents seemed keen to use the consumption and leisure infrastructure on offer in its High Street, Lordship Lane. The 'nice shops' – often a reference to independent, rather than chain, shops – 'smart bookshop', delis, the butcher – notably not presented in the evocative terms used in relation to the butchers on Rye Lane – the possibility of doing Pilates, just some of the markers of East Dulwich, marked out that, in contrast to Rye Lane, Lordship Lane offered the possibility of conspicuous consumption and lifestyle Undeniably Lordship Lane was more to our respondents' tastes, and was quite reassuring to them. As P4 explained, 'I love going to Lordship Lane, you know it's like escape, it's safe, it's familiar', even though, coming from a one-income family, she could not afford to buy produce there and had to use Rye Lane instead. While Bellenden Road was in the process of developing an appropriate consumption infrastructure for middle-class consumers, Lordship Lane, which remained close enough to walk to, was a good alternative (cf. Bridge and Dowling 2001), maintaining a sense of the 'authentic' urban experience that middle-class city dwellers seek (Zukin 2010).

Thus, respondents opt in and out of East Dulwich. Its presence provides both comfort and something to define themselves against, as more independently-minded people accustomed to the 'rawer' feel of Peckham. Within this evaluation of what it takes to be a middle-class resident of Peckham, Rye Lane and wider Peckham act as resources to be drawn upon to define Bellenden Village against East Dulwich. Such positioning can be

interpreted as attempts to exact a niche for themselves within the global city and within the middle classes.

Doing the local and the future of neighbourhood

Beyond these efforts to define and make sense of their boundaries, our respondents' accounts also revealed the ways in which their own neighbourhood, Bellenden Village, is imagined and practiced. Respondents expressed a strong affiliation to their neighbourhood and described how this influenced, and was expressed through, their everyday practices. Their particular investments in the local and the performative nature of *doing* 'the local' can be used to extend the discussion of (s)elective belonging. For example, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of actively supporting local enterprise through consumption, that is to say, by supporting the shops, restaurants and pubs around Bellenden Road. The bookshop was particularly pivotal in these discussions and seems to be strongly associated with the liberal, independent, arts-oriented neighbourhood identity expressed by the residents.

As well as supporting local businesses there was also much discussion of intervening in the built environment through restoration campaigns. Visions of the future of the area, repeatedly present Rye Lane as ripe for intervention. This demonstrates that the affective landscape of the boundary of Rye Lane is important, not only in the construction of white middle-class subjectivities, but also as a basis for middle-class mobilization within the local area. The discourses of strangeness and disgust used to describe Rye Lane can also be interpreted as moral discourses about the people who use it, highlighting the disorderly behaviour and disregard for rules and regulations, as well as the polluting nature of these abject 'others' (Watt 2009), which, as Lawler (2005) argues are central to middle-class identity formation.

In the context of these discourses about the 'other', hopes to restore Rye Lane to its Victorian past clearly reflect the aesthetics of gentrification through which the middle classes buy into the history of an area to express their social distance from those in the working classes (Jager 1986), or in this case, the ethnic 'other'. As P14, an architect, argues:

> We would like to have the Rye Lane as a conservation area ... *if you just lift your nose* you'll see all these Dutch-influenced buildings, Victorian brickwork, you know fabulous property, and some should be listed as well. And they are now part of an English heritage survey scheme ... there's a good chance that it could become a conservation area, which would limit developers, and limit owners not to do whatever they want, and you can see, that this is what's happened in the last thirty or forty years. It's really shabby.

Such visions for how Peckham should be are in conflict with their sense of what it is now. Crucially, the architect asks the interviewer to 'lift up your nose', to go beyond the smell of the street level and to instead attune the eye to the architectural features of the past. This highlights the sense that the respondents feel that they can (perhaps uniquely) see beyond the superficial façade, and that they are the ones with 'taste'. Furthermore, active involvement around issues such as the restoration of the 1860s station front square (which would involve the demolition of several shops) was presented as something that would improve the area for everyone. Desires for restoration were embedded in a sense that

Peckham has a longstanding middle-class appeal and presence, emphasizing an interpretation of history centred on the nineteenth century.

Intervening in the definition of Peckham, engaging in their own place-making processes in this way, our respondents conveniently overlook (or erase) other histories of Peckham. As Blokland argues, 'processes of place-making in urban neighbourhoods include accounts of history that may vary among social groups of residents, especially in neighbourhoods that have witnessed decay and/or regeneration' (2009:1593). The recollection of Peckham's middle-class past emerges as a way in which our respondents attempt to make sense of place, and a means of locating themselves within that place. Furthermore, in this manner they made a claim to local space beyond their neighbourhood boundaries, seeking perhaps to gain some control over its definition (see also Benson and Jackson).

More generally, some of the residents regarded the middle classes as guardians of the area and believed that by living in the area and investing in it, they had a right to direct the future of the community:

> [W]hat I'm subscribing to is the fact that, why refuse that you have, because you have a stake in the community – as in, put your hard-earned cash, and mental and emotional stake in a community, you feel as if you have some kind of power over what happens to it ... if *we* didn't live here, what would this area be? [P24]

Undoubtedly, this is a moral discourse that claims a right to power over the future of the neighbourhood and implicitly denigrates other local populations (see also Watt 2009). These interventions in public space are portrayed as being on behalf of everyone and are often articulated alongside a positive account of multiculturalism. As Tissot argues (this issue) 'gentrifiers can highlight their openness to "others," while obscuring any power issues related to the coexistence of racially and socially distinct populations.'

Other residents took a more cautious approach in their claims, highlighting their recognition that not everyone living in the area held in common the same tastes and that perhaps the changes they might desire would not be to the benefit of everyone.

> I suppose, to my taste, I would tidy up Rye Lane. You know, and, I would tidy up the kind of Choumert Road Market, the kind of bit that kind of comes round, because ... it's not how I live. But equally, if you did that, would it make the area better, or just everything the same? (P25)

While on the one hand the discussion of possible changes serves as one way of overcoming feelings of ambivalence, on the other, concerns over how such changes would be received reinforces the respondents' sense that they themselves occupy an ambivalent position within the locality.

In contrast to their reflections on wider Peckham, interviewees' reflections on East Dulwich were not a source of discomfort. Despite the similarities to East Dulwich, Bellenden Village was presented as a place apart. Neighbourhood change and particularly the shifts in consumption infrastructure appeared to emulate East Dulwich, but respondents were clear that these changes shored up neighbourhood identity as they provided a field of consumption locally that had previously been missing. P15, talking about the recently-

renovated pub, *The Victoria*, stressed 'all the people who now go to the Vic were the people that used to go to East Dulwich', a sentiment echoed in the accounts of several respondents. In this respect, changes in the consumption infrastructure allowed greater possibilities for people to practice the local than had previously been possible. Beyond this, for some of the longer-term middle-class residents, there also a sense of resistance to these changes – perhaps highlighting intra-class distinctions going on within the neighbourhood – as they emphasized that the new pubs (particularly) were somehow, 'out of place'. As P25, an art teacher explained, 'I think the Victoria is an interesting marker in how the area has become. It's very much picked up from East Dulwich or Clapham, or Balham; kind of plonked here'. This demonstrates their concern that Bellenden Village, remained distinct from East Dulwich, its similarly middle-class neighbour.

East Dulwich did not stir in our respondents the sense of discomfort that Rye Lane did. They would walk through East Dulwich late at night, while carefully considering their routes back from Peckham Rye station in the evening. They unambiguously presented the consumption infrastructure of Lordship Lane; while Rye Lane was a 'culture shock', East Dulwich was considerably more in line with their lifestyles, priorities and ideologies. In this respect, it did not instill the same 'lack of fit' to their habitus that Rye Lane did (cf. Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). However, it is the very presence of Rye Lane that helps to distinguish the area from East Dulwich. For example, P2 explained that Rye Lane acted as a deterrent, preventing the neighbourhood from being taken over by 'Hooray Henrys'. Ironically, their interventions in Rye Lane, perhaps put at risk this need to live with difference, part of what keeps their area distinct from East Dulwich.

Living with the social and ethnic mix that Rye Lane characterized, respondents highlighted how living in Bellenden Village required a particular habitus, a way of dealing with the world, for the moment setting themselves apart from 'East Dulwich types'. Therefore, while what was perceived as the drift of East Dulwich was resisted in the respondents' place narratives, there was no talk of mobilization around the issue.

Conclusion

As we have argued in this article, boundary-making is a central feature of middle-class claims to belonging in a global city. While other scholars have drawn attention to how such middle-class residents distance themselves from ethnic and classed others (see Atkinson 2006; Watt 2009), what we have demonstrated here is that these processes of affiliation and disaffiliation also involve the mapping of social distance *within* the middle classes onto space. Descriptions of Rye Lane, a socially and ethnically mixed high street, perhaps precisely because of their visceral and evocative feel, were highly visible within our respondents' accounts. Their practices in relation to this contested place revealed a desire to take control of this space, to bring it more in line with a middle-class habitus, while also celebrating its diversity. In contrast, respondents' efforts to distinguish themselves from East Dulwich and its people, which were less emotional in content, articulated a middle-class habitus distinctive to Bellenden Village.

These two very different boundaries, taken together help define the neighbourhood and its middle-class residents. Drawing on and against neighbouring places and peoples, the imagined community of middle-class residents in Bellenden Village construct a narrative of what their neighbourhood is and isn't, and their future plans for intervention and development of the locale and the wider area. With neighbourhood acting as a source of identity, these are as much reflections on who they want to be seen as, reflecting the uncertainty and 'unmadeness' of their own middle-class identities. Beyond this however, their actions can also be understood as a way of claiming space within the context of London as a global and 'super-diverse' city (Vertovec 2007). Nowhere was this as clear as in P22's opinion of what was currently going on in Peckham:

> Each ethnic group in London is competing for its own territory, I think. White middle-class people, establishing their identity in the same way that any ethnic group does. Because I don't think anyone actually has a monopoly on the city I think everyone has to become more extreme than you would find elsewhere. I think when people are having to fight to live in a particular way, or are having to assert their identity, that can sometimes almost make people, sort of more exaggerated in their customs than they would be.

While there is broad agreement within the group of respondents about what the neighbourhood is (arty, liberal, not quite 'Peckham', *not quite* East Dulwich) there is a degree of disagreement over what the neighbourhood *should* be. This disagreement can broadly be mapped onto the different phases of gentrification. For pioneer gentrifiers, too much change may tip the balance, with the neighbourhood then becoming indistinct. The edginess of the area that first attracted them and others like them, risks being eroded by the burgeoning young, professional population. In this respect, further gentrification challenges their understandings of the neighbourhood, which they fear may eventually lead to a sense that the place no longer matches up to their habitus. The challenge to belonging wrought by these changes was also identified by a younger, renting population who fear that as Bellenden Village becomes more popular, they will be priced out.

The more recent phase of gentrifiers, homeowners with young children are keen for further gentrification to take place. Arguably they have the least at stake if these changes continue. The neighbourhood will 'improve' in ways that they value; the consumption infrastructure will grow and develop, their property values will increase. In the fields of consumption and housing, their habitus will be matched. While at present many of these young families plan to move out when their children become of secondary school age, as Bellenden Village becomes more stably middle-class, there is a possibility of increased educational choice locally.

The distinctions that take place even among the middle-class residents of Bellenden Village demonstrate a fundamental problem with assuming that middle-class people find a match between habitus and field – in this case housing – and that is the end of the story. Neighbourhoods change and are changed; these middle-class identities are being constructed on shaky ground. The reinscription of such boundaries in the accounts of the residents can be read as attempts to create a stable identity by fixing themselves and others in place. The process of constructing a stable middle-class identity in the context of the global city, then, is fraught and complex. The respondents draw on their cultural and

economic capital in order to intervene in their neighbourhood and, through attempting to remake it in their own image, attempt to stabilize it.

This article focuses on the middle classes and therefore only gives us a partial account of the relationship between boundary work and the shaping of neighbourhood identity. Other research has pointed towards how imagined boundaries are key to shaping experiences of the city, in particularly in reference to young working-class people (see also Kintrea et al. 2008; Jackson forthcoming). Going beyond the middle classes, this article demonstrates how the interplay of imagined boundaries and changing urban spaces can be read as an attempt to create a stable sense of identity within the global city.

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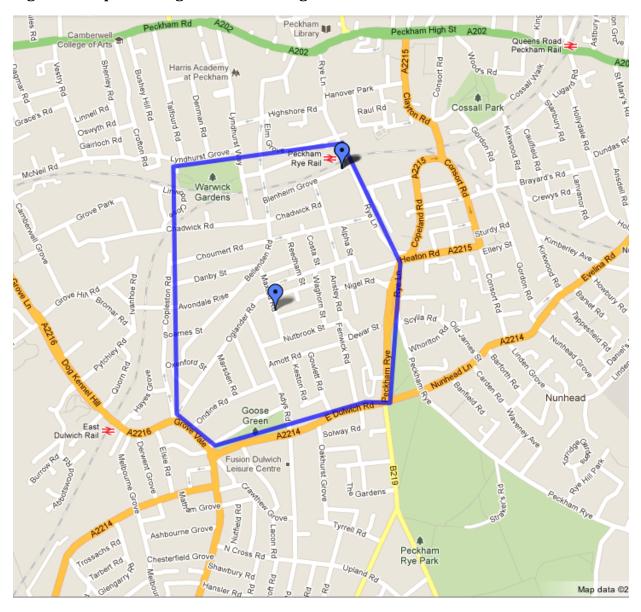Zukin, S. (2010) *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Figure 1: Map outlining Bellenden Village and its borders