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Fragmentation, demonisation and
breakdown: an exploration of how
neoliberalism and the recession have
affected older people's lives in Stoke-
on-Trent

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For my Grandparents and Great Aunty

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¹ (Foucault, 1999:81)

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Abstract

Whilst there has been an academic ‘obsess[ion]’ with the topics of neoliberalism and the recession, there remains a significant gap in sociological and gerontological literature concerning how these macro forces have impacted upon real people, specifically older people, within a real-life context (Purcell, 2016:615). In order to overcome this significant omission, in this thesis empirical research was undertaken in Meir North, a deprived area in Stoke-on-Trent, to identify how neoliberalism and conditions of austerity have impacted upon older people’s ‘state-of-Being’ at an everyday level (Heidegger, 1962:78). The central objectives of this research were to explore the relationship between the macro and the micro, notably through the creation of a mid-range theory of social transformation in a low growth area under conditions of neoliberalism, and to demonstrate how those in old age are having to negotiate change in their daily lives. The research is based upon a phenomenological view of ontology, which informed the chosen methodology (interpretive) and methods (semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and photography), and encouraged reflectivity in relation to my own ‘being-in-the-world’ and the data analysis (Heidegger, 1962:78). The findings from the ethnographic research revealed that whilst the older people have been detrimentally affected by these socio-economic transformations including experiencing social exclusion, weakened community bonds, and the fragmentation of the working class, they have also attempted to resist such processes through drawing upon their past experiences, which are imbued with nostalgia, to creatively develop their own ‘grey’ and ‘gift’ economies and ‘personal communities’ (Mauss, 1990:4; Pahl, 2005:636). The thesis concludes with a critique of neoliberal normativity as it is argued that an ‘alternative’ is possible, and ways

forward, notably in relation to innovative future research projects, are presented (Foucault, 1999; O.Jones 2012:251).

Chapter One

Introduction: The Contextual and Thematic Foundations to the

Ethnographic Quest

‘Indeed, it is not difficult to detect a distinctly postmortem scent in the air. Austerity politics seem to epitomise neoliberalism’s paradoxically undead presence: intellectually bereft and operationally vacuous, yet retaining an icy grip.’²

This chapter will begin with an exploration of the key aims and objectives of the ethnographic research which was undertaken in Meir North, a deprived area in Stoke-on-Trent. Following this, the chapter examines where this research fits in terms of its sociological and gerontological value and contribution. As will be shown, there are currently gaps in these fields of knowledge, and therein the aim was to overcome this and develop an original and insightful thesis. The background context of this research, notably consisting of a historical overview of neoliberalism, inclusive of its political, economic and social significance, and the recent economic recession will also be provided. This serves to ground the research, and to show how the nature and force of these macro processes have shaped the contemporary world. Moreover, there is an in-depth examination of the key themes of the thesis, including the amalgamation of biology and politics, leading to the creation of new neoliberal bodies, anti-collectivism, anti-welfarism, anti-egalitarianism and the rise of the individualist state, geographical inequality and the stigmatisation and exclusion of the poor, the fragmentation and reconceptualisation of the ‘working class’, and nostalgia and the

² (Peck, 2013:720)

wish to go back in time. These themes serve as the main theoretical framework for the thesis, and create the foundations for the continuing analysis. In addition, there is a rationalisation for, and synopsis of, why Meir North has been chosen as the case study for this research, and the ways in which it has been detrimentally affected by neoliberalism and the recent recession, including deprivation and a decaying urban infrastructure. Finally, to conclude there is an explication of the following chapters within this thesis in order to enable the reader to easily navigate their way through the stages of the ethnographic research, to map the explorative journey, and ultimately comprehend the central findings of this methodological quest.

Aims and Objectives

One of the key aims and objectives of this thesis is to understand the socio-economic experiences of older people in Meir North, an area in Stoke-on-Trent, in relation to wider social, political, economic, and cultural conditions. This will show how the new phase of neoliberalism, notably the roll out (growth state) to roll back (recession, bankruptcy and so forth) phase, works in place as Stoke-on-Trent is a low growth area and therefore is at the frontline of the crisis of neoliberal economic reform (Peck, 2013:719). Conversely, writing about neoliberalism and the economic recession is not, in itself, revolutionary or awe inspiring, as Purcell (2016:615) aptly notes:

'...we have become enthralled by neoliberalism. We are utterly fascinated by it, tracking its every move, cataloguing its many sins, grudgingly admiring its power to maintain its domination. We write brief histories (Harvey, 2005) and primers (Chomsky, 1999), we map

its geographies (Brenner and Theodore, 2003), we dissect its logics (Peck, 2010), we chart its spread to other parts of the world (Park et al., 2012), we document the way it destroys the environment (Heynen et al., 2007), we show how it lurks behind natural disasters (Johnson, 2011), how it persists even after the crisis of 2008 (Mirowski, 2013), and we examine it up close with every method in our arsenal, both quantitative (Dumenil and Levy, 2013) and qualitative (Greenhouse, 2012). We are relentless. We are obsessed.'

Thus, in relation to this admission, the second key aim and objective of this thesis is to address the problem in literature on neoliberal political economy, specifically its tendency to treat it abstractly (high theory) with no sense of how it impacts upon real social life embedded in a place. Many scholars, as stated by Purcell (2016:615), have discussed the broader issues linked to this topic, specifically its origins, how it has affected the landscape and the environment, and its resistance to collapse despite the catastrophes of its own making (like the financial crisis of 2008), but they do not give a voice to the very people they discuss, nor do they consider to any significant degree place and the environment. In many of these texts, some of which will be used in this thesis (Baudrillard, 2004; Bauman, 2007b, 2012; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Bourdieu, 2013; Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; Elias, 1991; Foucault, 2008; Giroux, 2008; Lazzarato, 2011), the only voice you hear is that of the author and their theories are cross-applied to the whole of society without consideration of the divergences between people and places. Whilst their viewpoints and analyses are interesting, and unquestionably help to unearth the impact of these global processes, they do not, in my view, get to the heart of their effects because there is a fundamental omission of

subjective experiences and state of 'being-in' (Heidegger, 1962:79). Thus, on the basis of this critique, the thesis aims to situate neoliberal political economic change within an experiential framework in order to understand how it functions socially. It is through the use of the case study of Meir North that this thesis will unearth neoliberalism in practice and reveal the way in which abstract ideology works on the banality of everyday life. These ideologies are not simply Platonic forms, but have real effects in everyday life, and play out across the life course.

Contributions to the Fields of Sociological and Gerontological Research

As has already been noted, whilst much sociological research has been undertaken in relation to neoliberalism, in many cases, specifically those connected to macro sociological theory, the voice of the individual is lost. For example, Bauman (2012:2,7,15) writes extensively about the ways in which neoliberalism has altered modernity from 'solid modernity' to 'liquid modernity', but broad generalisations about the shape and nature of society are made, notably concerning individualisation and the destabilisation of society. Beck (2007) and Giddens (2002) critically analyse the consequences of forces such as neoliberalism, including risk and insecurity, but all the examples provided are mass applied to the global population without distinction. Bourdieu (1990:64) refers to a 'game' notion, a notion that is used repeatedly throughout this thesis, which alludes to the neoliberal drive to encourage competition and egotism, but the individual is lost within this theorisation. Foucault (2008) discusses how neoliberalism has altered human subjectivity and the ways in which people think, again another key theme within this thesis, but he generally describes this process, without basing his findings upon in-depth, ethnographic research.

Finally, Giroux (2009b) utilised Marxist theory to highlight the gross inequalities within society, particularly between the rich and the poor, and issues relating to derogatory stereotyping, exclusion and marginalisation. Whilst this theory is invaluable and very insightful, the feelings, perceptions and beliefs of individuals, especially the poor, are ignored.

Furthermore, when the individual is considered there is a tendency in the field of sociology to overlook older people; they are not deemed as being an interesting cohort to study. For example, Tyler's (2013, 2015) research closely correlates to my own as it discusses themes such as subjectivity, identity, prejudice, the struggles of the working class, discrimination and inequality in the context of neoliberal society, but her concentration is upon groups such as single mothers, ethnic minorities and the disabled; the old are excluded as if this cohort are not as significant as others within society. Charlesworth's book, *'A phenomenology of working class experience'*, is also very applicable to this research because it captures the voices and everyday experiences of those living within working class areas, specifically in Rotherham. However, not all voices are heard because focus is largely given to younger people, a cohort who are often placed at the centre of studies concerned with the consequences and effects of neoliberalism and the economic recession (such as Beatty and Fothergill, 2011; Featherstone, 2013; Giroux, 2009a; O.Jones, 2012; Klein, 2010; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; McKenzie, 2013; Skeggs, 2004).

In addition to this, whilst gerontologists have placed older people at the centre of their research, attention has predominantly been given to policy reforms in this area and the impact they have had upon those in old age without significant reference to theoretical contentions. For example, Macnicol's (2015) book, *Neoliberalising Old Age*, discusses various topics of interest to this research project including retirement and inequality, but there is a tendency to embed the arguments in political discourse and a trajectory of political reform, rather than to consider theoretical assertions (although there are Marxist undertones). Higgs and Gilleard (2010) focus on issues such as intergenerational conflict, social class and consumption, but traditional (high) sociological theories are not extensively applied in their work. Moreover, Leach et al (2013) have undertaken some fascinating research with older people, specifically baby boomers, and their attitudes towards consumption and relations between their generation and that of younger people. This research is particularly useful for this research and is used to help explicate the attitudes of the older people in Meir North. However, the analysis tends to focus upon generational conflicts caused by social, historical and economic divergences and is not embedded within a high-theory framework.

Thus, many sociologists appear to overlook the individual and see society purely in collective terms, often make broad generalisations without having undertaken ethnographic research (with real people in real places), and they ignore older people. In contrast, gerontologists focus upon people in old age, but they tend to ignore theory, or only marginally utilise it within their analyses, causing their research to, at times, lack deeper understandings of social issues. Hence, to overcome these significant omissions this thesis seeks to take a multi-disciplinary approach

(sociological and gerontological) towards the study of neoliberalism and the recession; bridging the gap between sociological theory and a research focus upon older people. This thesis seeks to fulfill the ethical objectives of understanding the link between the micro and the macro, attempting to develop a mid-range theory of change (which coalesces theory and data) in neoliberal society (in a low growth area) and comprehending how neoliberalism and the recession have impacted upon older people who must negotiate change in their own lives. It is through the creation of a mid-range theory that an original approach to the study of neoliberalism and the recession will be devised, leading ultimately to a potentially new, and innovative, research ‘obsession’ (Purcell, 2016:615).

The Emergence of Neoliberalism and the Contemporary Economic Recession

To provide context for this thesis, attention is turned to the emergence of neoliberalism and the causes and consequences of the recent (2008) global recession. Thus to begin, in 1979 the world experienced a ‘revolutionary turning point’ (Harvey, 2005:2). Drawing from the neoliberal doctrine advocated by many liberals throughout history, notably Smith (a classical liberalist who wrote the prominent *‘Wealth of Nations’*), Friedman, and Hayek (twentieth century liberalists), Margaret Thatcher (British Prime Minister) and Ronald Reagan (American President) sought to alter the global economic paradigm from being based upon Keynesianism to neoliberalism (D.Jones, 2012; Harvey, 2005). This shift was due to the belief that the former economic approach placed too much emphasis upon a ‘parasitic’ welfare state and union power and subsequently caused economic ‘stagflation’ (stagnation and inflation) and rising monetary deficits (Clarke, 2005; Harvey, 2005:12; Shaikh, 2005).

This was a radical and far-reaching transformation. Thatcher overhauled the former (largely industrial) British economy which rested upon a form of ‘managed capitalism’ and embedded fiscal, protectionist and ‘demand-management’ policies, in favour of a (service) macroeconomic monetary policy that advocated the tenets of competition, privatisation, de-regulation, marketisation and reduced trade union power (O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:41; Harvey, 2005:12). This dramatic shift was considered both ‘natural’, as Thatcher argued that there was ‘no alternative’ (especially not Keynesianism as this was considered the enemy of the state), and *evolutionary*, as competition has always been the *raison d’être* of society (Read, 2009:30,36; Schirato et al, 2012). This economic strategy would devise a harmonious paradise for all self-governing and self-responsible beings and therefore required no further deliberation.

The shift to open markets and free-trade restructured national priorities, as the needs of the economy, specifically the private sector, were prioritised over the needs of individuals according to the premise that market freedom and ‘perfect’ competition would positively serve all people’s economic and social needs due to the purging of Keynesian defects, unconstrained job opportunities, capital production and reciprocal exchanges (Arestis and Sawyer, 2005:202). However, whilst neoliberal supporters encouraged nations to identify and construct markets within international cities and states, they also contended that nations’ powers should be curtailed, specifically in relation to its interference with markets once they were competently trading because the nation state did not have adequate data to ‘second-guess market signals (prices)’ (Harvey, 2005:2; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011). Thereby the market and its ‘invisible hand’ in the global economy were given full control, premised on the belief that its

own independent functioning guaranteed the enhancement of living standards for the whole of mankind through the granting of choices, rights and freedoms (Harvey, 2005; O'Byrne and Hensby, 2011:34-54).

This Anglo-American concentration upon neoliberalism encouraged a worldwide transformation because nearly all countries across the globe (there was resistance from South Korea, Japan and the 'Asian Tiger' countries) began to embrace the neoliberal ideology, specifically its 'stateless market utopia' and its contention that competition and free markets were beneficial for all human beings around the world (Davis and Monk, 2007:X; Shaikh, 2005:48). As a result of this shift, the former boundaries between nations were dissolved leading to the devising of communication and transportation technologies that geographically broadened, but temporally and spatially reduced, the distances between market exchanges (O'Byrne and Hensby, 2011:42). This 'time-space-compression' produced 'global cities' such as London, New York and Tokyo, enabled all people from all 'corners of the world' to access data, and collapsed barriers between countries to reconfigure a new 'borderless', competitive and paperless global economy which was responsible, unlike the nation-state, for fiscal and economic accumulations (Harvey, 2005:4; O'Byrne and Hensby, 2011:34,38; Sassen cited in Ong, 2006:8). These large cities have become the financial hubs of the economy, they situate multinational banks, 'transnational corporations', and firms that contribute substantially to the production and regulation of wealth; they are what Sassen (2012:16) terms the 'global city of production function'. Thus, neoliberalism repositioned nation states to form a 'new world' that was both timeless and space-less in conception, and for many decades this political and economic theory worked very successfully (Bauman, 2001c:35). Countries all

over the globe experienced decreases in unemployment, a deterioration in inflation and heightened economic wealth (O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:51). This led to global prosperity and the belief that the newly founded economy was a well-coordinated and ‘marvelous’ ‘miracle’ which would, forevermore, eradicate periods of ‘boom and bust’ and enable individuals to be eternally free (O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:51; Lee, 2009).

However, between 2007-2008 the unimaginable happened; there was a distinct ‘crisis of capitalism’ as the world experienced a grave financial catastrophe (Jensen, 2013:60). This economic disaster began in America, which was, as Stiglitz (2010:27) notes, in a state of ‘freefall’ and was set to ‘take down much of the world economy with it’. Due to reckless banking practices, specifically in relation to subprime mortgages³, the market began to collapse (Eichengreen, 2015:4). The American economy dragged the rest of the globe into a grave morass (Harvey, 2010:2). The consequences of this economic crisis were, and still continue to be, disastrous; as markets across the world collapsed one after another like falling dominoes. Corporate and retail organisations plummeted by the wayside and whole economies, such as within Iceland, Spain and Argentina, crashed causing them to default on their debt contributions and, in the instance of the former country, to go bankrupt (Harvey, 2010:5; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:53).

³ One of the most ‘reckless’ policies conducted by bankers, specifically US bankers, was the permitting of sub-prime mortgages wherein families with low socio-economic statuses and ‘poor credit histories’ were given high mortgages which they could not afford to pay (O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:52). These sub-prime mortgages were re-sold to investors with the highest ‘AAA credit ratings’ and were increasingly employed as ‘trading chips’, falsely ensuring for a short-period of time a prosperous mortgage economy; until it became apparent that there was a significant gap between the mortgage value and its worth in reality (sub-prime mortgages were ‘repackaged debt’) and were therefore worthless (Harvey, 2010:2; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:52).

Due to the severity of the economic downturn, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank imposed stringent austerity measures upon all people across the world. These organisations affiliate with the neoliberal discourse that ‘parsimony over prodigality’ is the most effective way to combat the financial crisis as it will lead to growth in the economy, and that this should be prioritised over democratic rights because ‘consent and consensus do not seem to apply’ under these conditions (Klein, 2008:140; Whiteside, 2016:362). During an economic crisis, especially one of this magnitude, it is not the aim of these global financial organisations to please the people, to satisfy their needs, or to ensure they have positive wellbeing, but to curb spending, to take back control of the economy and ensure ‘stabilisation’ (Klein, 2008:140,164,168). According to Knox (2017:181), the approach taken by these global organisations signifies a form of ‘violence’ against the people because they have increasingly conflated the law with austerity policies (referred to as ‘law-sterity’), enabling repressive policies to be passed without protest. All countries are expected to impose severe austerity measures upon their populaces or they will experience sanctions, including the retraction of capital needed for economic growth and stability (Knox, 2017:181). The increasing levels of inequality, poverty and insecurity caused by the implementation of these austerity policies is excused by legal statutes which dictate that these detrimental consequences must occur for the survival and eventual freedom of the global population (people must suffer now for the greater good of the future), leading ultimately to the ‘rise of disaster capitalism’ (Klein, 2008:168; Knox, 2017).

According to Klein (2008:140), countries across the world have become subject to a ‘shock doctrine’, whereby stringent policies of austerity have been imposed to help curb spending and reduce state deficits. The IMF and the World Bank have dictated to state leaders that they must impose ‘structural adjustment’ programmes, involving extensive alterations to their economies, in order to decrease their financial debts (this process has been conceptualised as the ‘dictatorship of debt’) (Klein, 2008:161). Whilst all countries have experienced ‘shock therap[ies]’, the austerity conditions imposed upon the United Kingdom (UK) have been particularly severe as this country has been used as a role model to ‘lead the way’ in cutting national debts, beginning with a ‘25 per cent’ reduction in most ‘departmental budgets’ (Klein, 2008:163; Whiteside, 2016:363). Many people in the UK, like other countries across the world, have thereby experienced a plethora of punitive consequences including a sharp increase in the price of everyday goods, such as food, clothes and petrol, heightened levels of unemployment, home repossessions, capped wages (specifically for public sectors workers) and repressive interest rates (nearly to ‘zero’) which have reduced their life savings (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:368; Harvey, 2010:5; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:50-55). These detrimental effects are considered essential for the survival of the economy, but in fact signify a repressive governance regime which has relentlessly punished the people for almost a decade.

Hence, this economic downturn was, and still continues to be, so severe that it has led to the belief that it is one of the worst in history. In particular, Eichengreen’s (2015:1) ‘Hall of Mirrors’ theory infers that the consequences of the most recent recession are of greater severity than the ‘Great Depression of 1929-1933’, and Gamble contends that this is ‘one of the most dramatic and extraordinary financial crashes in the history

of capitalism' (Gamble cited in O'Byrne and Hensby, 2011:50). We as a global society have never experienced levels of austerity, hardship and economic decline on this scale and therein the future looks bleak as governments do not know how to effectively deal with this current crisis. Moreover, the UK exit from the European Union (EU) is likely to exacerbate this already fraught situation as investors and global companies no longer have confidence in this country's economic positioning, and fear that they will make significant financial losses from this break, and therein retract substantial economic and financial support. Therefore, whilst all countries are contemporarily experiencing disastrous consequences due to the global recession, the UK is in a particularly precarious position as it battles with these two significant processes simultaneously.

Key Themes of the Thesis

1. An Amalgamation of Neoliberal Politics and Biology: The Recreation of Human Subjectivity

One of the key themes of this thesis is the link between neoliberalism and human subjectivity (Foucault, 2008). Whilst the shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism radically changed the economic system, it also had profound consequences upon the formation of human subjectivities, alongside beliefs, values and human perceptions (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is one of the most powerful discourses to permeate the contemporary world. It has become the bones of society, the oxygen that people breathe, the rationality behind their thinking and the lifeblood of their existence; it has become their entire entity without which they would not function. It's got a hold on society so tight, that even its apparent contradictions, inherent antithetical

prescriptions and evident inequitable processes cannot loosen its 'icy grip' (Peck, 2013:720). It will not let go; it cannot let go (Peck, 2013:720). As a result of this, neoliberalism has ultimately helped to construct a new form of power that has permeated human consciousness to such an extent that people's subjectivity (who they are), their way of understanding everyday reality, their perceptions of the world and their behaviour and actions, have become constructed around neoliberal tenets (Foucault, 2008).

Michel Foucault (2008:27) studied the relationship between neoliberalism and the human body and consciousness, and proclaimed that a new 'art of government' had been established since the late 1970s. In order to demonstrate why this 'government' is 'new', Foucault (1979, 2008) undertook a comprehensive study of power and wrote extensively about its changing nature throughout time (specifically within '*Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*', '*Abnormal: Lectures at the College De France, 1974-1975*', and '*The Birth of Biopolitics*'). Beginning in the medieval period, Foucault (1979,1999:56) explicates the ways in which power was overtly repressive as those in authoritative positions, notably monarchs within European countries, ruled their people according to divine right and 'laws of nature'. This power was absolutist and overt, as all subjects were expected to submit their bodies to the ruler of their country and adhere to their laws, specifically those concerned with wealth and land, or experience public torture and humiliation as consequences of their defiance (Breuer, 1989).

However, in the ‘eighteenth century’ this type of power changed as individuals became subject to a disciplinary form of power that sought to transform their entities into ‘docile’ objects (Foucault, 1979:136). This power rested upon a dominant form of control whereby every ‘movement, gesture [and] attitude’ of human beings were worked on from the outside by external forces and transformed into a useful and efficient entity (Foucault, 1979:137). It was from this period onwards that bodies would become ‘docile’ as they became governed by an omnipresent surveillance and controlling practices, including ‘distribut[ive]’ measures (they were to be confined within a specific place), time restraints (they were to utilise their time according to a ‘*time-table*’ (italics in original)) and regulations of the ‘*body and the gesture*’ (italics in original) (to ensure complete productivity) (Foucault, 1979:141-152). This power was disciplinary and punitive, and sought to covertly control the conduct of all subjects (Foucault, 1979:141,152).

By the late 1900s, a new form of power was emerging as part of a governmental reaction to the problem of populations, specifically the ‘governability of the social’ and nebulous populations (Brass, 2000:317; Rose and Miller, 1992:175). This power was not sovereign, nor was it disciplinary. It did however embed these former powers into its formation, whilst functioning on a completely ‘different level’ and employing divergent ‘instruments’ (Foucault, 1979:242). The form of power being described here is ‘bio-power’, wherein the political discourse of neoliberalism amalgamated with the biological (the human body) to create new anatomical formations (Foucault, 1997:242; Foucault, 2008). This fusion of politics and the body helped to overturn former disciplinary forms of control (that restrained ‘man-as-body’) with an all-encompassing form of power that permeated the whole individual, inclusive of their

consciousness and their soul (the ‘living’, breathing ‘man’ or woman) (Foucault, 1997:242). This type of power did not represent overt violence, but covert repression, as it falsely proclaimed a discourse of liberty wherein every subject was considered a free ‘agent’ with the ‘freedom to act’ (specifically in terms of being able to make ones ‘own decisions’ and determine ones ‘own destiny’) whilst being subject to the dominant discourse (neoliberalism) of the state (Bartky, 1998:39-42; Bevir, 1999:5; Read, 2009:29; Rose and Miller, 1992:199-201).

These ‘creative’ agents were to be governed by seemingly antithetical ‘technologies’, including ‘technologies of the self’ (wherein they were empowered to govern their own entity), and ‘technologies of domination’ (whereby the omnipresent gaze of the ‘other’ was installed within their subjectivity, leading to an ‘internalisation’ of control and the (subtle) redefining of their behaviour and consciousness) to ensure that they became both self-responsible and self-policing (Foucault, 2008; Peterson, 2003:189). This new form of power subtly invaded the nature and cognition of the subject in order to deliberately transform their subjectivity into an ‘object’ of governance through *informal* (individuals were given the ‘agency’ to control and regulate their own bodies in accordance with social norms and were made ‘responsible’ for their own governance and that of others - referred to as the ‘conduct of conduct’) rather than *formal* (with a clearly defined monarch or sovereign) ‘techniques of government’ (Bever, 1999:5,12; Lemke, 2002:3,14; Lemke, 2007). What this ultimately created was a mass of ‘disciplined-sovereigns’ who were free and repressed at the same time; neoliberal subjects were targets of power and ‘vehicles of power’ as they helped to construct their own anatomical formations (Foucault, 1986:234; Peterson, 2003:19; Schirato et al, 2012:134). This contemporary form of power is therefore considered

the most ‘deceitful’ to have ever existed because it conglomerates discipline with sovereignty and penetrates all ‘fields of action’ (Bevir 1999:15; Read, 2009:29).

This shift in power has ultimately created a new type of human subjectivity. As both Foucault (2008:225) and Schirato et al (2012) explicate, all human beings have become ‘machine[s]’, that are made up of many components, including rationality, self-centeredness, competitiveness and resilience, and possess an attached ‘lifespan’ and expiry date (a ‘length of time that [they] can be used’) (Schirato et al, 2012:133). These ‘machines’ are perpetually worked on from the inside out (beginning with the inner being, moving to the ‘outer frame’) by ‘techniques of power’ to ensure their efficiency and high levels of competence (Foucault, 2008:224-226). All ‘machine[s]’ are programmed to perpetually work and consume; these are its essential functions, without which they would have no value to society (Schirato et al, 2012:133). The value of these ‘machines’ could also increase with ‘improvements’, such as the individual possessing good health, having high levels of educational attainment, possessing large amounts of experience and/or being young and physically fit, because these traits would enable higher levels of productivity (Schirato et al, 2012:133). Thus according to this perspective, capital subsumes society in its entirety, leading to the formation of ‘*homo economicus*’ subjects (italics in original) (‘economic subjects’) which are no longer ‘divided in relation to [themselves]’ (‘abstraction’), as their skills, consciousness and body are entwined and invested into by both the individual and the state (Foucault, 2008:222-226).

This new form of governmentality has also rearticulated human subjectivity to be 'entrepreneurial'; the '*homo economicus*' (economic man and woman) (italics in original) should possess an 'entrepreneur[ial] self' (Foucault, 2008:226,303). All 'entrepreneur[s]' are considered as being in control of what they 'produce', how much they earn and what they consume and therefore it is up to them alone, through competitive actions (they must outdo all others), to ensure that their own needs are met, that they are 'satisf[ied]' and that they are contributing to the global economy (Foucault, 2008:226,303). In a neoliberal society there is no collective, only a cohort of individuals who 'pursue [their] own interest[s]' and fulfill their own egotistical drives as part of a process of individualisation (Foucault, 2008:271). As Foucault (2008:271:303) states, 'from the point of view of a theory of government, *homo economicus* (italics in original) is the person who must be left alone', causing a significant break in social bonds and the demise of 'civil society'. The individual should not consider the thoughts and feelings of others (these are merely unnecessary 'obstructions') but seek only to outperform them through competitive actions which ensure their own survival (Foucault, 2008:280). The only consideration that needs to be given to the broader 'totality' is how the individual's choices accord with the objectives of the global economy; freedom is not unconditional, it comes with some restrictive and repressive terms (Foucault, 2008:278).

Moreover, the neoliberal concentration upon self-responsibility has reconstituted what it means to be 'abnormal', or more specifically a 'moral monster', in contemporary society (Foucault, 1999:81). In the past, such as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'monstrosity' was linked to 'unnatural[ness]', notably 'unnatural' characteristics like 'madness', and later in the nineteenth century, criminality

(Foucault, 1999:81). If an individual demonstrated mental ill-health or committed a crime, they were considered 'mad' and were placed into an institution (a hospital and prison respectively) in order to control their deviousness and protect the remainder of society (Foucault, 1999:81). However, neoliberalism fundamentally altered the 'laws of nature' and with this came a new conceptualisation of deviancy, inclusive of those who do not work (such as the unemployed, the sick, and retired older people) and do not consume (such as the poor) (Foucault, 1999:91). Individuals who failed to uphold these practices, regardless of personal circumstances and/or global economic trends, were to be considered as pathologically ill post 1979, as having a 'disease' which must be treated immediately before it became infectious and caused a global contagion (Foucault, 1999:91). These 'monsters' symbolised the 'limit' of normality, the 'impossible' and the 'forbidden', and therefore were not only to be punished for their devious actions, but also to be excluded from society (Foucault, 1999:56).

What this essentially means, is that there are certain groups within society that have become stigmatised and marginalised because of their perceived lack of contribution to society (Foucault, 1999). One of the major cohorts to experience negative labelling and exclusion are the unemployed, as these people are viewed as having deliberately chosen not to help strengthen the economy and of undermining its stability and prosperity. This group includes retired older people, such as those who partook within this ethnographic study, because they oppose the 'laws of nature' and do not work or consume (certainly not to the degree which is expected of a neoliberal citizen) (Foucault, 1999). As such, retired older people are viewed by society as being a burden, as having an incurable illness (a 'disease') which cannot be cured and can only be managed through exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Foucault,

1999:91). Whilst many retired older people may have contributed to society in the past, notably because they are likely to have worked for many years, the neoliberal doctrine does not make exceptions – all individuals must work all of the time if they are to be considered a valuable asset to the contemporary global marketplace (Foucault, 1999). Neoliberals do not deliberate past contributions, it is merely about the present, and how individuals in this very moment help uphold the global economy. Thus retired older people are considered ‘monsters’, they represent the ‘impossible’ and the ‘forbidden’ and are deemed as being deserving of punishment for their uncooperative and self-centred (not citizenry) behaviour (Foucault, 1999:56).

Foucault’s (2008) arguments will become of particular importance for this thesis in two significant ways. Firstly, on a more practical level, it will be shown how neoliberalism and the current emphasis upon employment and consumption have directly affected the lives of the older people in Meir-North (Foucault, 2008). Issues such as class fragmentation, demonisation and marginalisation will become of central concern, as the thesis explores how these broader macro forces have detrimentally impacted upon those in old age living within an area of severe deprivation. Secondly, on a more theoretical level, this thesis will also show how neoliberalism has shaped the perceptions and consciousnesses of the older people, and the ways in which they perceive others, notably younger people, within society. The key objective is to understand the ways in which neoliberalism has contributed to the formation of the older people’s identity and their mental constructions of the world, and the impact this has had upon their wellbeing. As will become clear throughout this thesis, neoliberalism and the recession have had a significant and complicated impact upon the older people’s lives, their thinking and selfhood. In the contemporary era, the

older people in Meir North are having to contend with a complexity of changes and it is these which this thesis seeks to explore, critically analyse, and ultimately comprehend.

2. Anti-collectivism, Anti-welfarism and Anti-egalitarianism: The Rise of the Individualist State

The transition from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, and the alterations made to human subjectivity, as explicated by Foucault (2008), also led to a completely new way of thinking, notably by those in power such as Thatcher and Reagan. Whilst in the past liberalism was associated with ‘egalitarian and idealist concepts’, linked to equality, in the contemporary era the notions of a ‘common good’ and the ‘public’ were to be systematically re-evaluated and ultimately abandoned (Davies, 2014b:1,4). These concepts inferred a ‘dangerous mysticism’ that socialism was advantageous for all, when antithetically they undermined the power and influence of the economy and left countries with increased levels of debt (especially due to welfare spending) and therein were detrimental to economic growth (Davies, 2014b:4). The ‘neoliberal pioneers’ thereby proclaimed that ‘classical liberalism’, linked to leftist policies of inclusivity and fairness, was no longer applicable to contemporary society because it posed a significant threat to economic development and the procurement of wealth (Davies, 2014b:5). Within the new competitive world not all people can win, only those who effectively utilise their skills and talents will succeed (Davies, 2014b; Foucault, 2008).

As a result of this transition, there was a ‘disenchantment of politics by economics’, whereby the power to control and influence the economy was systematically taken away from the government (the state), and given alternatively to ‘spontaneous forces of society’, specifically global markets, which were perceived to require little intervention from outside forces because they alone could govern the global economy (Davies, 2014b:4-5). ‘Economic freedom’ was to lie at the crux of this new liberalism (‘neo’- liberalism), necessitating the retraction of state power and the reconstruction of state bodies, organisations and institutions (including health and education) in accordance with a ‘market ethos’ and quantitative forms of calculability; everything within society was deemed reducible to a number, a price, a statistic (Davies, 2011:187; Davies, 2014b:5-6; Gane, 2014:6). The market and its ‘invisible hand’ in the global economy was to be given full control premised on the belief that its own independent functioning guaranteed the enhancement of living standards for the whole of mankind via a ‘trickle down’ effect (Gough et al, 2006:170). Neoliberals proclaimed that this new economic model would allow wealth to be more evenly distributed as it would transfer from the rich to the poor, eliminating poverty and granting all people personal freedoms, inclusive of the autonomy to make reasoned choices and to exercise individual rationality (Gane, 2014:6; Harvey, 2005; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:34-54). Neoliberalism was to become the savior of the people.

Neoliberals perceived ‘big government’ and the welfare state as a hindrance to economic development because they undermined people’s willingness and motivation to work and created ‘poverty traps’ (MacGregor, 2005:143; Ong, 2006:10). Thus, dominant neoliberal institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, have deliberately imposed ‘shock therap[ies]’ upon countries with embedded welfare

systems because it was believed that they offered ‘overly generous welfare state programmes’ and possessed a ‘bloated public sector’ which were encumbering market growth and needed to be made better (they were sick countries) (Karger, 2014:33; Klein, 2008:136). Hence, in relation to the UK, whilst the welfare state was once a celebrated creation, notably ‘post-Second World War’, it has since the late 1970s been dismantled in favour of laissez-faire and private forms of aid according to the rationale that the latter had the potential to develop an ‘enterprising culture’ that would enhance the global economy and improve the quality of all individuals’ lives (Gough et al, 2006:17; Jessop, 2002:462). The role of the state was no longer deemed to be to protect citizens from insecurity because social policies were considered socially regressive, but to grant them the autonomy and freedom (through work and consumption) to personally and efficiently create their own ‘individual utopias’ through taking responsibility for their own lives and overcoming misfortunate life events (Giroux, 2008:112; O’Byrne and Hensby, 2011:36,38).

This doctrinal shift to self-responsibility led to the construction of an ‘anti-welfare’ discourse and an attack upon collective forms of help and state intervention (MacLeavy, 2016:253; Ong, 2006:10). As Ong (2006:6) notes, neoliberalism (and later the conditions of austerity) caused a ‘disarticulat[ing] and rearticulate[ing]’ of citizenship, as the right to benefits and state forms of aid were realigned with market forces and the ability of individuals to contribute in a meaningful and profitable way to both the national and global economy. The self-governing and self-responsible were deemed as worthy and ‘preferred citizens’, whilst those people without perceived talent and capacity were considered ‘noncitizens’ (what Tyler (2013:9) refers to as ‘national objects’) who were unworthy of status, entitlements and social

rights (Ong, 2006:16). The changing philosophy behind the giving and receiving of benefits created new categories of the deserving and the undeserving welfare claimant, with the latter becoming deemed as a public burden (MacLeavy, 2016). New prejudices were therefore formed, as those who received benefits but did not give anything back to society were viewed as lacking ‘self-respect’, as being irresponsible and morally and behaviourally deficient, and as constituting a failure because they had not utilised their entrepreneurial skills to deter such hardships (MacLeavy, 2016:253). The undeserving welfare recipient was a failed neoliberal subject.

Therefore, whilst the welfare of the people had, under the former Keynesian model, been attributed to the state, in contemporary society it was believed that the market would offer greater relief due to its competitive drives and its employment and consumerist potentialities (MacLeavy, 2016:253). As such, there was a systematic transference from a state of universalism whereby the most needy were provided with benefits, to ‘means testing’ because the state chose to adopt a reductionist approach to welfare and believed individuals should create their own safety net for personal hardships (MacLeavy, 2016:253). Collective forms of benefits such as healthcare, pensions and social care have increasingly become privatised, and welfare provisions, notably sickness and housing benefits, which were previously controlled and provided for (for free in some instances) by the government, have been retracted (Phillipson and Estes, 2002; Harvey, 2010; Jessop, 2002). As Peck (2013:719) notes, a ‘zombie metaphor’ can be utilised to explicate this process because the remaining ‘warmblooded regions of the body politic’, notably the poor, the unemployed and marginalised individuals, are being attacked by those in power (the ‘zombies’) as they

‘roll back’ the welfare state and systematically remove their lifelines, causing immeasurable ‘pain and suffering’.

In addition to the general retraction of welfare benefits, the ‘zombies’ displaced ‘Keynesian welfarism’ with ‘neoliberal workfarism’, whereby unemployed people were to be actively encouraged, through force, to transition from a state of unemployment (and a reliance upon welfare) to employment (to the status of an independent entrepreneur) (MacLeavy, 2016:252, 256; Peck, 2013:719). The unemployed were no longer allowed to simply receive benefits from the state without any obligations because this would lead to longer periods of economic inactivity, discourage them from looking for work, and reduce their personal talents and abilities (exacerbating levels of unemployment as employers would not want to hire unskilled people) (Burnett and Whyte, 2017; MacLeavy, 2016). Many neoliberals believed that the giving of benefits without any obligations would simply lead to a ‘welfare trap’, as individuals would not see the need to work (MacLeavy, 2016:257). The ethos of ‘no work, no benefits’ was thereby to be adopted by all UK governments, particularly post 2010, due to the belief that people should earn benefits and should be subject to a scheme of ‘welfare conditionality’ (Burnett and Whyte, 2017:59; Dorling, 2015:153). Moreover, this transition gave authorisation for the constant ‘surveillance’ of those who received unemployment benefits, inclusive of state hired observers (who closely focused on the behaviours of the unemployed to check that they were seeking work and were taking any available job) and ‘conditionality checks’ (to ensure that the claimant qualified for state support), in order to ensure ‘market-compliant behaviour’ was being upheld (MacLeavy, 2016:252-254). Thus, as MacLeavy (2016:256, 259) summarises, ‘there is now a ‘tough love’ approach in which people are ‘helped and

hassled' back to work' according to the premise that this is for their own good; a healthy and happy neoliberal subject is one who works.

Ultimately, Clarke and Newman (2012) and Jensen (2013:60) argue that the austerity measures placed upon the global population since the financial crisis have become rationalised as a form of 'discipline' that is needed to solve the contemporary 'crisis of capitalism'. The general population has been coerced into accepting a 'form of false consciousness' which stipulates that the 'correct' way to help society recover from the financial crisis is through 'shrink[ing] the state', limiting the amount spent on the public sector and ultimately eradicating any 'waste' (referred to by Clarke and Newman (2012:299) as an 'alchemy of austerity') (Clarke and Newman, 2012:301; Jensen, 2013:60). Politicians and those in power indoctrinate the population into believing that poverty and exclusion are a result of an individual being too dependent upon welfare, sustaining a 'culture of entitlement' and being 'irresponsib[le]'; they have effectively contravened the rules of being a resilient neoliberal entrepreneur (Foucault, 2008; Jensen, 2013:60). Austerity has therefore helped to 'subject-mak[e]', as it has created disciplined individuals who incontestably accept 'magical beliefs' about society (that self-sacrifice will save society from complete collapse) and the need for severe austerity measures (Jensen, 2013:69). Those who daringly challenge such tenets or who do not adopt this way of thinking are punished for their undesirable deviancy (Clarke and Newman, 2012:301; Jensen, 2013).

Wacquant (2009:41) also accords with this perspective, as he contends that this attack upon the welfare state is an attempt to ‘punish the poor’ and to ‘criminalise’ those living within poverty. Although his theory largely analyses American culture, similarities can be drawn with other countries, including the UK, which has increasingly begun to punish those who appear to break with the conventions of neoliberal rule i.e. those who fail to look after one self and are not entrepreneurial. In the UK, the poor are being penalised through the retraction of welfare benefits and an emphasis upon ‘workfare’ as part of a management plan to control ‘poor populations’ (Wacquant, 2009:44). The poor are considered as failed citizens because they are perceived as having deliberately rejected the ethic of work promoted by neoliberalism and therein are undeserving of state benefits (Wacquant, 2009:44). Those who receive benefits, especially those who are not considered the most needy (such as those people who are only unemployed and do not have any other conditions that prevent them from working such as a disability or terminal/debilitating illness) are considered as ‘second-class citizens’ or ‘social parasites’, because they receive state help without giving anything back to society; a practice which is antithetical to the tenets of neoliberalism and of being a good neoliberal subject (Wacquant, 2009:46).

It is this shift in welfare thinking that has ultimately lead to a ‘*war against the poor*’ (italics in original) because they have become the ‘scapegoats’ for all the detrimental conditions within society (including the economic crisis) and are exposed to what Wacquant (2009:49) terms as ‘punitive and humiliating measures’. Like a criminal who has broken the law, the poor have contravened the ‘civic law’ of employment and therefore are considered ‘*criminals*’ (italics in original) and reprimanded for their deviancy (Wacquant, 2009:60). In a neoliberal world every individual has choice, and

this choice is very simple; either work (even if it is not a job you wish to undertake) or experience social condemnation, punishment and exclusion (Wacquant, 2009). The poor are used by those in power to show the effects of defying neoliberalism and to warn the population as a whole that a work-shy attitude will lead to disciplinary sanctions (Wacquant, 2009). These detrimental consequences are part of living within an 'evil paradise' of neoliberalism's making; we now have to uphold forms of inequitable 'distributive justice', within an un-unified 'space of citizenship', that seeks to reward the good (those who work and consume) whilst simultaneously punishing the bad (the unemployed and non-consumers) (Davies and Monk, 2007:VIII; Ong, 2006:9,16).

3. Geographical Inequality: The Stigmatisation and Exclusion of the Poor

In addition to the alterations made to human subjectivity, the economy and the state, specifically in terms of welfare provisions, Brenner and Theodore (2002:349) also assert that neoliberalism has 'creative[ly] destruct[ed]' space. These scholars devised the concept of 'actually existing neoliberalism' to explicate current urban developments, as they contend that space is not neutral, but politically inscribed with economic and social discourse (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:351). Neoliberalism has helped to create new spaces (these are '*embedded*' spaces (italics in original)) whilst simultaneously destroying others, causing spatial unevenness and inequality (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:351). In particular, since the late 1970s there have been specific 'destructive and creative 'moments'' that have profoundly altered the geographical landscape (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:357). For example, old industrial working class areas have experienced a 'moment of destruction' due to state abandonment and the revoking of their former reputation and image (they have become portrayed as

areas of ‘urban disorder’, decay and criminality) (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:366,372; Soja, 2000:165). In contrast, other areas, such as inner-city, middle class areas, have been strategically identified by the state as being potential hubs of economic growth and consumerism and therein have experienced ‘moments of creation’, inclusive of financial investment, effective economic planning and processes of ‘gentrification’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:366,372; Paton, 2010:137; Soja, 2000:165). Cities have therefore become ‘incubators for...the reproduction of neoliberal regimes’ (Peck et al, 2013:1096). Cities are areas used by governments and leading organisations to harbour the ideas of neoliberalism, to keep them warm and to nurture them; they must keep this discourse alive through careful and diligent actions.

However, this ‘incubat[ion]’ process is problematic and complex because whilst all cities are expected to cultivate neoliberal ideas, they are not all given the same resources to achieve such an objective (Peck et al, 2013:1096). As Peck (2014:398) notes, all cities are coerced into a ‘game’ wherein they must compete for the prize, specifically in the form of monetary capital, required for infrastructural development and service provisions, but they are not all given the same starting position (they are not all dealt a good hand), leading to inequitable urban expansion. This point is exemplified by the significant ‘geographical divides’ within the country, between ‘rich’ areas in the south and ‘poor’ areas typically found in the Midlands and old industrial areas in Northern Scotland and Wales; the UK has become divided by winning and losing areas (Dorling, 2010:288). Thus, the life support required to sustain the ‘incubators’ of neoliberalism is not equitably maintained, as for some cities this has been turned off leading to their eventual demise (Peck et al, 2013:1096).

Conversely, whilst it is evident that urban development has been uneven, neoliberals proclaim that these unjust and imbalanced geographical progressions are not the fault of their policies because they have applied policy reforms in an egalitarian fashion (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:353; Soja, 1989:162). However, a 'one size fits all' approach fails to consider the uniqueness of specific places and their different historical trajectories, including local infrastructures and economic traditions (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:353). Market driven policies cannot be applied to all areas with identical outcomes because whilst some will benefit from high rates of 'capital accumulation', others will fall into destitution with no prospect of prosperity (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:353,355). Neoliberalism has caused space to be divided into 'core' and 'peripher[al]' areas wherein the former receive investment and thereby can provide many economic opportunities (neoliberal 'policy experimentation' has successfully worked in these areas), whilst the latter are left to suffer economic and social breakdown (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:355,357). The competitive drive of neoliberalism has therefore not only transformed people into winners and losers, but also space, as only those who live within winning, lucrative areas, benefit from this 'neoliberal offensive' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:355, 376).

Furthermore, the 'rules of [this] game' have changed within recession hit countries like Britain (Peck, 2014:398). In today's society, there is a 'resource-starved environment' requiring rapid and extensive investment which cannot be sought due to the economic crisis (Peck, 2014:398). When city representatives compete for a prize, they know that the money they receive is likely to only make a marginal difference because it will not be enough to cover the costs of all the services required and therefore further cutbacks will need to be undertaken (Peck, 2014:400). Cities are

forced to engage in this seemingly futile ‘game’ because neoliberalism has repositioned them, like all subjects, as entrepreneurs in their own fate which are ‘responsibilised’ (or even ‘over-responsibilised’) for their own survival; they need to be ‘*seen to [be] act[ing]*’ (Peck et al, 2013:1097; Peck, 2014:398). These urban areas experience ‘intensifying pressures to act’ despite reduced winnings and the constant exposure to risk (which has to be dealt with via a form of ‘defensive entrepreneurialism’) (Peck et al, 2013:1097; Peck, 2014:400). Hence, under conditions of austerity the act of winning the ‘game’ becomes a façade, because in reality no city truly benefits from this competition (Peck, 2014:398). Some cities might win more than others causing an inequitable divide, but in reality all triumphs are based upon very insecure and unstable foundations (Peck, 2014).

There are also many arguments concerning the ways in which neoliberalism has helped to control the masses, referred to as ‘biopolitics of disposability’ (Giroux, 2007:309). In particular, Gough et al (2006:28) contend that the population is managed through the deliberate development of ‘poor’ (‘bad’) and ‘normal’ (‘good’) places. In neoliberal countries like Britain, space has increasingly been used as a tool for the government’s ‘poverty polic[ies]’, wherein the poor are confined in anomic places (lacking economic opportunities and services), which breed feelings of alienation, resentment and anxiety, and encourage deviancy and criminality (Gough et al, 2006:28). These ‘bad’ spaces of unproductivity and isolation are typically produced in areas that have lost their central economy, such as in places wherein manufacturing and mining were prevalent, and have been unsuccessful in reviving their status (Gough et al, 2006:28,72). This consequently causes a ‘vicious circle’ of decline because people with higher statuses and greater wealth move out of these

increasingly desperate areas, causing a further lack of investment (there is no point in investing in the un-investable) and the entrapment of the disadvantaged (Gough et al, 2006:116-117). Space has become divisive in upholding inclusionary and exclusionary practices because the poor and destitute are segregated from 'normal' people (those with wealth and status) and confined within some of the 'worst neighbourhoods' (also referred to as 'sink estates') in the country that encourage only hopelessness and despair (Gough et al, 2006:28,38; Skeggs, 2004:89).

In support of this perspective, Wacquant (2008:234) argues that cities have become spaces of 'advanced marginality' and inequality. Whilst some cities have benefitted from the shift to neoliberal economics, notably those with successful service economies in the south, many others have experienced high levels of unemployment, poverty and community breakdown (Wacquant, 2008:229). The cause of this division is perception, because whilst some areas are perceived as having positive reputations (they are successful, safe and secure areas), others are considered as 'territories' for the 'refuse of society' (the unemployed and the dispossessed) who in their desperate state have to live in areas which have no potential and are permeated by insecurities such as high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour (Wacquant, 2008:237). Once these 'penalised spaces' become labelled as areas for the downtrodden, the useless, and the dangerous, they become vilified and a permanent stigma is attached (Wacquant, 2008:237). The application of negative reputations can lead to the creation of 'neighbourhoods of relegation', whereby investment for vital services is denied, further punishing the poor and the destitute (Wacquant, 2008:239,254). For the people entrapped in these enclaves of poverty, they come to suffer with the 'disabilit[y]' of derogatory labelling and exclusion that can prohibit their inclusion into broader society (Wacquant, 2008:238).

Goffman's (1990) theory of stigma can also be applied here, because whilst his theory largely centred around the human body, space can also be stigmatised enabling interesting comparisons to be developed. Space is not just an area of land, it is embodied with meaning and significance which have an influential impact upon how inhabitants perceive their own sense of self and their identity, especially when it is used to segregate the 'respectable' from the 'rough' (Gough et al, 2006:38). Those who appear to be suffering the disease of failure are systematically abandoned by those with a higher status and those who have the power to, in essence, make them better, including investors, 'employers [and] also...service providers', leaving them to live in areas that have 'spoiled identit[ies]' (Goffman, 1990; Gough et al, 2006:127). Neoliberalism has helped to recategorise space into 'normal' and 'stigmatised' spaces, causing the former to be ascribed with 'deeply discrediting' features, such as poor and unsightly infrastructure and markers of criminality and anomie (like vandalism and graffiti) (Goffman, 1990:13,155). These places and their residents do not have the power, capital or influence to control how they are represented to outsiders, they cannot undertake processes of 'passing' and 'covering' as part of a strategy of 'impression management', and thereby they are 'type-cast' to play a degrading and dishonourable role in the world economy (Goffman, 1990:155,164). Hence, whilst to some, inequitable geographical recovery post-2008 is considered an accident of market forces, it is in fact a deliberate outcome of repressive spatial policy (a policy of 'poor people removal') which seeks to contain and control 'stigmatised' bodies in 'stigmatised' places (Goffman, 1990:165; Gough et al, 2006; Harvey cited by Soja, 2000:107).

Overall, a 'state of exception' has been created, wherein the 'downtrodden and dispossessed' (the losers of neoliberalism) have become confined to a particular space, and marginalised from the remainder of society (Springer, 2016:154). The 'violence' of neoliberalism has caused significant inequality between divergent cohorts, particularly the rich and the poor, as whilst the former are rewarded for their high status with environments that are economically and socially viable, the latter are punished by confinement in depressed and despairing places (Springer, 2016:156). The poor have become viewed as 'Others', as alien beings (as 'enemies'), and therefore are abandoned according to the rationale that they have deliberately chosen to defy the logic of meritocracy and self-success, and therein deserve to be segregated from the remainder of society (Springer, 2016:156,158,160). As Agamben (1998:72) notes, it is the poor who have become 'excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured' because they are marginalised from mainstream society, but have become part of a segregated group who are trapped within a place of poverty and decline. Inequality is considered an 'achievement' of neoliberalism because it serves as a warning to the unemployed that they too could become entrapped within some of the poorest places, experience stigmatisation for being non-citizens and ultimately be marginalised from broader society (Springer, 2016:156).

Neoliberalism has therefore helped to '(re)produc[e]' space according to a paradigm of 'violence' which at first appears 'exceptional', as only undertaken in the most extreme of circumstances, but has contemporarily become viewed as 'exemplary'; an ideal which should be sustained across the globe because no successful individual should have to associate, or come into contact, with the useless (Lefebvre, 1991; Springer, 2016:157). Space has become used as a tool to divide people according to

their level of social worth leading to the separation of divergent cohorts, specifically those with wealth and economic status and those without, and confinement of the poorest people (Springer, 2016:160). It is through these processes that ‘violence’ has become normalised, it has become part of a man-made nature, helping to detract feelings of disgust (Springer, 2016:154). As Soja (2000:267) aptly notes, neoliberalism has ‘normalise[d] social inequality and represents it as an intrinsic part of all contemporary capitalist societies’. People no longer feel like they should care for the poor, they are failed citizens and therefore deserve to be marginalised and segregated from the remainder of society.

4. The Fragmentation and Reconceptualisation of the ‘Working Class’

In order to understand the consequences of neoliberalism and the recession, class analysis becomes essential, especially in relation to the ‘working class’ and the impact these global processes have had upon this cohort. However, whilst the word ‘class’ is freely used within this thesis, there has been much debate in the field of sociology concerning both the meaning of this concept, and also its value. For example, Jackson (2016:267) contends that class has been completely removed ‘from social analysis’ due to the neoliberal concentration upon capital and meritocracy. All individuals within a neoliberal society are supposedly given an equal chance to succeed, and therefore class has become a redundant concept (Jackson, 2016). Beck supports this contention, as he argues that class has become a ‘zombie category’ because society has become so individualised people cannot be grouped together by class categorisations (there has been a ‘decomposition’ of class’) (Beck cited by Tyler, 2015: 498). In particular, Beck proclaims that ‘society can no longer look in the

mirror and see social classes. The mirror has been smashed and all we have left are the individualised fragments' (cited by Tyler, 2015:497-498). Bauman (2012) and Giddens (2002) affiliate with this perspective, believing that processes of deindustrialisation and individualisation have undermined former class identities, culture and communities, leading to a permanent state of ambiguity and insecurity. Finally, Wacquant (2008:250) argues that the term 'working class' (typically associated with 'occupation') is 'fast disappearing' under conditions of neoliberalism and thereby should be *'revise[d]'* (italics in original) in accordance with new economic (employment), social (community) and spatial (how space is used for control purposes) tenets.

It is due to these perspectives that the concept of 'class' has largely been ignored in sociological analysis. Sociologists have tended to believe that this term belongs to the former economic paradigm of Keynesianism and managed capitalism, rather than to the contemporary neoliberal system established upon a global free market, and therein it has been left 'to die' (Tyler, 2013:157; Tyler, 2015:497). As Tyler (2015:497) notes, many 'sociologists have struggled to make sense of the disorientating transformations' that have occurred since the late 1970s and thereby they have overlooked this term, they have retreated from employing it, and they fail to see its importance in the current context. This suppression of class analysis has made sociological research linked to this term appear 'out of date', 'backward', 'embarrassing' and even 'shameful' (Charlesworth, 2000:14; Tyler, 2008:20). Working class academics appear to have become ashamed of their class heritage and shy away from writing about as if it is a 'dirty secret' (Tyler, 2008:20).

However, in contrast to these arguments, Tyler (2015:497; 2008:20), Paton (2013) and Skeggs (2004) believe that an analysis of this type, wherein class lies at the core, should not be a 'dirty secret' and therefore seek to unearth 'class-based inequalities' within society, notably linked to how those at the bottom of the social hierarchy are exploited, marginalised and stigmatised. There is a common belief among these scholars that 'class distinctions do not die: they merely learn new ways of expressing themselves [because] each decade we [have] swiftly declare[d] [that] we have buried class [but] each decade the coffin stays empty' (Hoggart 1989:vii, cited by Tyler, 2013:77). Rather than believing that 'class' has become a redundant term within contemporary society, these scholars contend that sociologists need to understand how 'class' has become coalesced with the notion of '*struggle*', leading to 'othering' processes, the creation of 'new [class] cultural figurations' and '*problems of inequality*' (italics in original) (Skeggs cited by Tyler, 2015:501; Tyler, 2015:498, 500, 506).

It is with this debate in mind that attention is turned to how neoliberalism has altered the British economy and reconceptualised the meaning of 'class'. As noted earlier in this chapter, post 1979, Thatcher radically altered the British economy and began promoting neoliberal ideas of individualisation, competition and privatisation (Harvey, 2005). However, although Thatcher and her neoliberal government proclaimed that these economic shifts would alter society and the economy in advantageous ways, i.e. they would raise living standards, procure wealth, ensure security and enable personal liberties, they antithetically caused a series of detrimental consequences. In the first instance, the emphasis placed upon free markets and the 'flexibilisation of labour' broke the dominant 'social contract' between the

employer and the employee (derived during the era of Keynesianism) exposing workers to new types of individualised risk, personalised insecurities, and ‘unfreedom[s]’ (Strauss and Fudge, 2014:2, 12; Theodore and Peck, 2014:26). Whilst in the past many workers, especially working class workers, could have expected to have found permanent work in factories or manufacturing plants, they have increasingly been exposed to short-term, unstable contracts that offer only ‘temporary agency employment’, few rights, low pay and zero-hour contracts, causing a permanent state of ‘precarious[ness]’ (Strauss and Fudge, 2014:2-15).

This lack of employment security has been coupled with a re-politicalisation of democracy and a redefining of ‘cultural politics’ (Giroux, 2008:113). The neoliberal ideology serves as a new contemporary pedagogy, a form of ‘permanent education’, which constructs human identities and ‘subject positions’ in an individualised manner and diminishes authentic (social and collective) democracy (Giroux, 2008:114). According to Giroux (2008:118,120), neoliberalism has ‘attack[ed]...all things social’ causing a ‘crisis...of democracy’. Former reciprocal exchanges between people have been diminished and ‘democratically configured space[s] of the social’, which are vital for public deliberation, engagement and action, have been eradicated (Giroux, 2008:118,120). Democracy used to represent true freedom wherein people could passionately discuss politics with others, gain a political identity through shared solidarities, and feel part of intimate political communities that understood the individual’s ideological standpoint and equitably sought similar ‘democratic possibilities’ through combined action (Giroux, 2008:118-122). However, politics in contemporary society has become an individualised activity, a one-person sport with

no team spirit or public presence. Freedom is individual not plural; the ‘realm of the social’ is officially dead (Giroux, 2008:119).

Whilst this re-politicalisation of democracy had significant consequences for many people within society, it was the working class who took the brunt of these changes because although they were given the right to vote like any UK national, their former trade union rights, inclusive of social protection and protest (which constituted their ‘money power’), were revoked through a series of victorious assaults (Giroux, 2008; Sennett and Cobb, 1972:36). Neoliberals did not support unionism because they believed that it gave too much power to the employee rather than the employer who was also exposed to the vulnerabilities of risk associated with competition (Jackson, 2016:263). Whilst workers could choose which job they had, and could move to where job vacancies arose (they had freedoms), employers were subject to the rules of the market and were being increasingly threatened by unions who were ‘willing to use coercive force to achieve their goals’ (Jackson, 2016:263). The constant fear of worker action was not conducive for a competitive neoliberal market, as Hayek stated, unions were the ‘main reason for the decline of the British economy in general’ because they helped to intensify social fragmentation, increase levels of worklessness and undermined the state’s role as a ‘neutral arbiter’ in the new global economy (Cited by Jackson, 2016:264; Jackson, 2016:264,266). Neoliberals, inclusive of Thatcher, saw the working class as ‘dangerous’, they were to blame for all the ills of contemporary society (they became scapegoats) and thereby needed to be destroyed (Klein, 2008:138).

Furthermore, although the mainstream political parties in Britain still align with particular groups in society, their policies have increasingly overlapped as former left-wing and centre parties have moved steadily to the right with the aim of upholding neoliberal policies. Thatcher and her conservative party may have been more radical and ‘antistatist’ than the more ‘socially moderate’ neoliberals of New Labour under Blair and Brown, but they all still affiliated with this market ideology and the notion of global competitiveness over collective protectionisms (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:362). Thereby, whilst in the past the working class could seek hope in voting for a Leftist party to enable them to oppose unjust policy reforms (notably in relation to exclusion and the retraction of state welfare), they now had the ‘choice’ of voting for three very similar parties that overlooked structural inequalities in favour of sustaining the market economy (Tyler, 2013). Thus, as Tyler (2013:7) summarises, ‘as both the left and the right share the neoliberal consensus there is effectively no mainstream political opposition to the modes of neoliberal governmentality’. The British political system does not allow there to be an alternative, causing deep-seated ‘left melancholia’ and a society based upon inequality, un-freedoms and repression to be perpetually defended (Foucault, 1997; Tyler, 2013:8).

The shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy not only altered levels of worker security and union and democratic rights, it also redefined what it meant to be working class. Whilst in the past the working class were ‘subject[s] of value’ (or what Foucault (2008:225) and Schirato et al (2012:133) refer to as ‘machines’ of value) because their skills were needed by the economy, in today’s society they are perceived as being ‘use-less subject[s]’ due to having nothing to offer; they are simply human ‘waste’ (Bauman, 2003:123; Skeggs, 2004:62). These working-class

individuals are viewed as immoral because they have not ‘take[n] responsibility’ for their own actions and have not shown the key traits of a neoliberal subject, particularly rationality and entrepreneurialism (Skeggs, 2004:63). Working class people are essentially considered worthless and they cannot challenge this derogatory positioning because they do not have the required talents to ‘enterprise themselves ‘up’’ (especially older working class people whose ‘machines’ have become obsolete, with poor ‘capital-ability’); they are anchored down by their own pathological incapacities and failings (Foucault, 2008:225; Schirato et al, 2012:133; Skeggs, 2004:63,75). Whilst middle class people have chosen a way of life that is valuable for the new global economy via work and consumption practices, and display an ‘ethical self’, working class people defy societal expectations through the creation of meaningless and unusable subjectivities and therefore are both a ‘blockage’ to global success and a burden upon society (Skeggs, 2004:73,80). Thereby, everything that is associated with the working class, including their identity, their sense of self (which opposes the required ‘optimising’ self), and their culture have become viewed as irrelevant to neoliberal society; they are the new ‘exception’ attracting only feelings of ‘disgust’, detestation and shame (Agamben, 1998:72; Skeggs, 2004:84; Tyler, 2013:3).

Tyler (2013:3,5) similarly argues that we are living within ‘revolting times’, a period wherein a new ‘*state of being*’ and a new ‘*state of belonging*’ have been devised according to a theory of ‘*social abjection*’ (italics in original). The working class have become viewed as ‘*revolting subjects*’ (italics in original), as objects of social disdain, because they are considered as being ‘failed citizens’ due to their lack of useful skills and talents and their inability to be more successful and work their way up through

the social hierarchy (Tyler, 2013:12). The working class symbolise stagnation and regression. Neoliberalism has created a new ‘dirty ontology of class struggle in Britain’ wherein people lower down the social hierarchy are having to constantly defend their position, whilst those with higher social status perpetually try to keep them in their place (in part as a protection against their own downfall, but also to prevent coming into contact with these ‘disgust[ing]’ people) (Tyler, 2008:18,25). These cohorts (the ‘Other’) are placed upon a ‘vampiric axis of blame’ and are in turn blamed for the deficits and ills of society, such as the necessity for stringent austerity measures and the declining economy (Tyler, 2015:506). The ‘neoliberalisation of disgust’ is therefore a divisive political discourse which serves to punish the poor and sustain inequality (Tyler, 2013:25).

Bauman’s (2003) theory of ‘human waste’ affiliates with Tyler’s (2013) perspective. This theory outlines the ways in which a ‘waste-disposal industry’ has been produced, wherein all unwanted subjects are thrown aside like unwanted garbage (Bauman, 2003:123-124). Under conditions of neoliberalism and austerity, people are considered ‘human waste’ if they are deemed as being ‘unfit for the new order’, which in this instance applies to the working class because their identities, skills, and sense of self are embedded in a world that no longer exists; a world of industry and manufacturing (Bauman, 2003:123). The skills of the working class are no longer considered beneficial or useful for modern day society because they are inessential to the marketplace and therefore they become appraised according to a discourse of parasitism (Bauman, 2003:123). In order for the neoliberal economy to survive, it has to be purged of people who seek to uphold a form of existence that opposes its very nature and threatens to undermine its success from the inside (Bauman, 2003:124).

Therefore the working class have had to be cut out of society, like cancerous cells within a body, to ensure healthy 'economic progress' (Bauman, 2003:124).

Thus, whilst it could be argued that neoliberalism and the economic recession have impacted upon all people regardless of socio-economic position, their affects have not been uniformly felt as working class people within traditional working class areas have predominantly experienced 'the brunt' of these processes due to a 'dying out', or decaying of, their traditional working class identity, 'habitus' and forms of social solidarity (Bourdieu, 1993:2; Charlesworth, 2000:3-23; Sennett and Cobb, 1972:28). The overturning of the manufacturing sector in the 'modern metropolis' in favour of a service sector in the expanding 'postmetropolis', has caused de-industrialisation and the eradication of working class people's 'economic roles' and social status (Charlesworth, 2000; Jessop, 2002:454; Soja, 2000: 5). As a result of this, this socio-economic cohort can no longer expect to be employed in traditional working class jobs, such as within factories or down coal mines, and therein have to contend with the disadvantageous effects of 'low-paid, low-quality casual work' which predominates in the new service sector economy (MacGregor, 2005:144). The New Right may have proclaimed that significant changes in the economy would lead to prosperity, higher living standards and an increased quality of life for all, but they failed to account for the severe inequalities that would arise as a response to the neoliberal principle of competition (Charlesworth, 2000). The working class have therefore increasingly become people without a voice, people without a 'value', and most importantly, people 'without a reason for being' (Charlesworth, 2000:6; Skeggs, 2004:62).

5. Nostalgia: If Only We Could Go Back In Time

Finally, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, one of the most common themes to emerge from the ethnographic data was that of nostalgia. As Boym (2001:xiii) aptly summarises, nostalgia ‘is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship’. What is meant by this, is that many individuals look back in time, notably during their childhoods, with affection and try to sustain that feeling like a ‘souvenir’, whilst not recognising that such memories are often falsified and imaginary (Bauman, 2017; Lowenthal, 2015:33). The brain systematically filters many of the negative experiences of childhood and early adulthood, so that the individual only remembers warmth, fondness, and happiness (Lowenthal, 2015:40). As Lowenthal (2015:31) notes, ‘nostalgia is like a grammar lesson. You find the present tense, but the past [is] perfect.’ However, whilst memories from a former era are not factual representations of reality as the individual creates imaginary recalling’s of the past, they do help to create an ‘elsewhere’, another lived reality, which the individual can embed (Boym, 2001:xiv). When the present moment and the past appear too frightening to consider and experience, especially when they pose a threat to an individual’s wellbeing and sense of security, the recalling of happy nostalgic memories serves as a ‘defence mechanism’ against such threats and the risky unknown (Boym cited by Bauman, 2017:3).

Although the notion of nostalgia is not new, its significance has become of even greater importance since the late 1970s and the introduction of neoliberal policies (Bauman, 2017). The changes that have occurred since this era have been so profound, especially the shift to individualisation, the retraction of state welfare and

heightened levels of insecurity, alongside the demise of collectivism, urban inequalities and the fragmentation of the working class (as explicated earlier in this chapter), that many individuals have created what Bauman (2017:5) terms 'retrotopias', referring to 'visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past'. Neoliberalism poses a threat to modern day welfare, and has systematically restructured the world in ways that for many, especially those in old age who have seen the greatest changes and experienced its ferocity, are too great to truly comprehend (Bauman, 2017). In fact, it is not implausible to suggest that the recent vote to leave the European Union (EU) (referred to as 'Brexit') is in response to people, particularly those in old age, wishing to return to the past, to an industrial past, which appears more prosperous in their memory than the present. Many people who voted to leave the EU were looking back in time, nostalgically seeking a world they once knew which enhanced their sense of self, and heightened their sense of security.

Thus in sum, the future seems 'untrustworthy', it appears as though it is spiraling out of control, and the only way to survive this era is for people to 're-invest' [their hopes] in the vaguely remembered past' (Bauman, 2017:6). Nostalgia enables people, especially those in old age, to remember what they used to have, which includes a productive industrial economy, a 'community with a collective memory' and a sense of 'continuity' that is increasingly being eradicated by neoliberalism (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995; Boym, 2001:xiv). The past signifies an era of survival, it is a period in an individual's life that they can draw from to gain strength, to learn from, to reinforce their own identity, and most importantly, to create a shield (as a form of 'rebellion') against the threats that exist in the contemporary neoliberal world

(Bauman, 2017; Boym, 2001:xv). In the continuing chapters of this thesis, it will become clear what role nostalgia plays in the older people's lives, especially in a place such as Meir North which has experienced significant damage due to neoliberalism and the recent economic crisis (which is explored in the following section), and how it is used as a form of protection against the detrimental consequences of these global forces.

It is also of importance to note, that it is not just the participant's nostalgia that is a recurrent theme within this thesis, as in order to adopt a phenomenological approach, I, as the researcher, also have to reflect upon my own 'being-in-the-world' and life history, as they have helped shape and determine the objectives and outcomes of this study (Charlesworth, 2000:11). My perceptions of the subject matter will have originated in my 'primordial grounds of sense', which have been anchored to my being since its existence, adjoining my body and my person to the world around me in order to become a 'body-subject' (Charlesworth, 2000:18). As Charlesworth (2000:17) notes, 'I perceive in relation to my body because I have an immediate awareness of my body as it exists *towards* the world'. Everything I feel, the emotions I show, the thoughts that I think and the beliefs I uphold, are part of my 'socialised body', they are outcomes of social interactions with others, of memories, of experiences and of personal perceptions which have made me 'sensitiv[e]' to specific circumstances and issues (Charlesworth, 2000:18). The very meanings that I attributed to this piece of research will therefore have been derived from my own positioning and practices, which have been attained and sustained during the course of my life, and it is these tenets that I will reflect upon throughout the thesis (Charlesworth, 2000:15). The theme of nostalgia therefore lies at the crux of this

research, notably because it has helped create memories of the past, which we (both the participants and myself), have used to construct the narratives and understandings of our worlds and have used to inform our appraisals of 'Being-in' Meir North (Charlesworth, 2000:15; Heidegger, 1962:78).

Violent Assaults Against the Working Class: The Case Study of Meir North

At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that Meir North, in Stoke-on-Trent, had been chosen as the case study for this research, but what was not explicated was why. After all, the literature discussed within this chapter suggests there are many areas in the UK that could have been chosen, so why was this place selected above all others? The answer to this question lies in this place's economic and social history. Beginning in the 1600s, the economic and social landscape of North Staffordshire (the county to which Meir North belongs) began to alter as natural resources, notably clay and coal, were identified within the local area and were employed to establish a lucrative 'pot' and 'pit' industry (Cartlidge, 2005:63,67; Cooper, 2002:79). By the 1630s, this economy had, according to Cooper (2002), witnessed and experienced a 'substantial boost' as the demand for ceramic produce increased, alongside the requirement of coal for the 'Cheshire salt industry' and the general population (wood at this time was becoming too expensive to burn) (Cooper, 2002:75).

In the 18th century, which was marked by the industrial revolution, roads, railways and canals were vastly improved allowing local employers to transport their produce both across the British Isles and to other countries, procuring wealth for local businesses (Cooper, 2002:77; Taylor, 2003:xv). The new open access to raw materials

helped to develop factories from small scale ‘cottage industries’ to global producers, substantially increasing the employment rate for many local people (Cooper, 2002:77; Taylor, 2003:xv). Furthermore, it was due to this advancing economy that the wealthy (notably the aristocracy and local gentry) began investing significant amounts of money into technological advancements to enhance productivity and profit, leading to considerable growth in steel and iron output and a global expansion of the ceramic industry which had previously been very localised (Taylor 2003:xv,xvi,85). These industries ultimately attracted many people into North Staffordshire, especially those who wanted to work in the world famous factories and potbanks, and Stoke-on-Trent (which was officially created in 1925) became the ‘eleventh largest city in England’ during the 1930s/1940s (Cartlidge, 2005:63; Taylor, 2003:68-74).

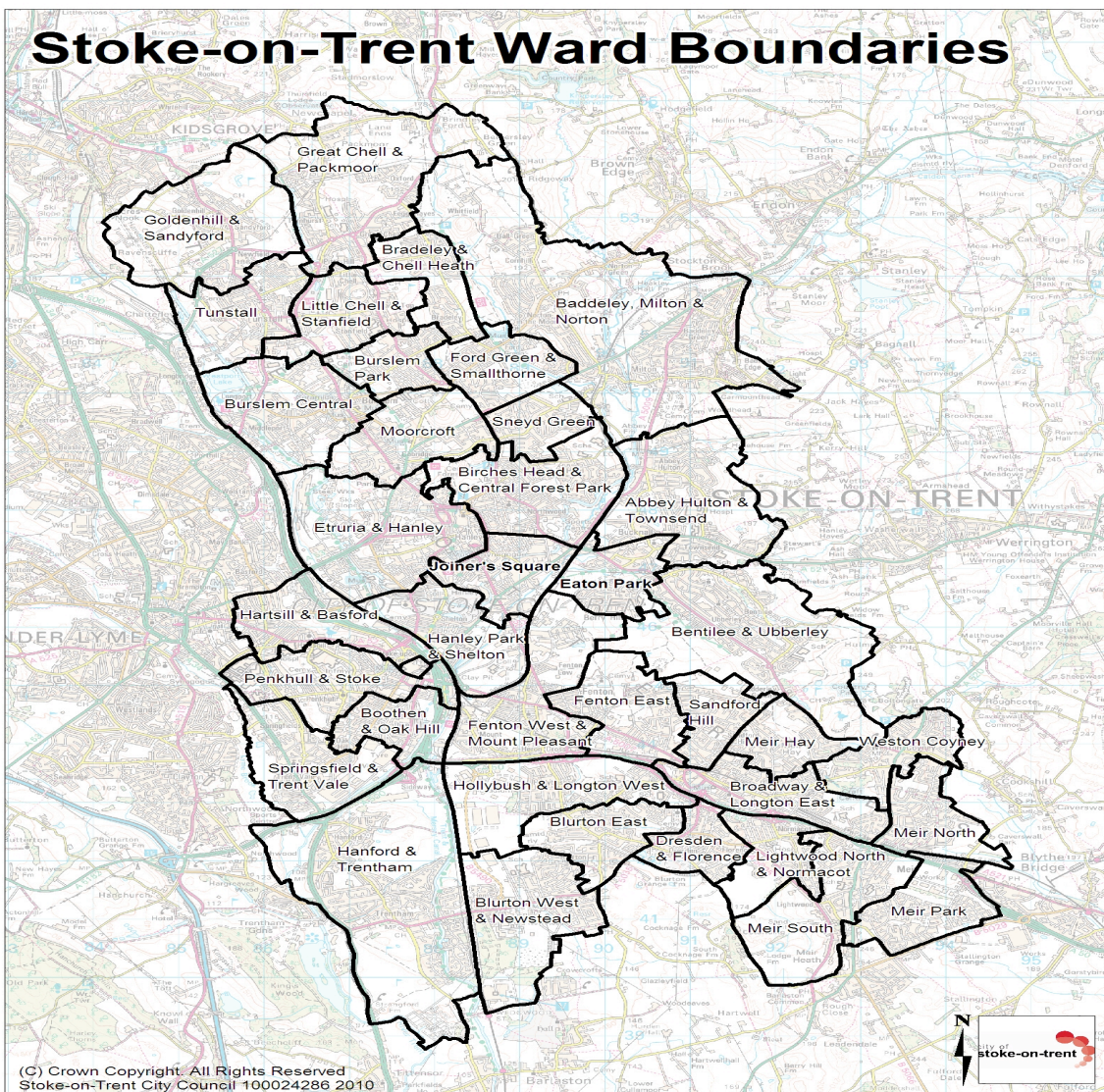
However, in the 1950s and 1960s, this economic prosperity was revoked due to the recession which caused the collapse of many small businesses, high levels of emigration (‘over 21,000 people left the Potteries in search of work and better housing’) and a demise of the local infrastructure, including the ‘boarding-up [of] houses’ and the dereliction of land (about ‘ten per cent’ became waste land) (Long, 2000:Introduction; Taylor, 2003:75-76). Furthermore, from the late 1970s and the election of the New Right, the initial process of deindustrialisation was exacerbated by the development of the service economy required for the ‘new world’ (Bauman, 2001c:35). The consequences of this shift were disastrous for those living in northern manufacturing centres because although the coal mining and steel industries had been in retrenchment since the early 1950s, it was this economic shift that hastened this decline and caused the collapse of the main industries in North Staffordshire (Taylor, 2003:81). For example, the *‘Shelton Iron Steel and Coal Company’* was closed,

followed in the late 1990s by the closure of the mining industry (the last mine at Silverdale was shut off in 1998), and subsequently there was the scaling back of the pottery industry as a plethora of world famous pottery companies collapsed (Long, 2000: introduction; Taylor 2003, 80). The former lucrative years of North Staffordshire's economy was therefore over, especially because it had not transformed from a space of production into a space of consumption. As a result of this, the area was left on the periphery of the global economy with only memories of what it was like to be economically viable and successful before its 'heart' was so abruptly and savagely 'ripped...out' (Ted Smith cited in Long, 2000; Introduction).

It is against this regional background that Meir North experienced its own economic and social downfall. Before explicating this however, it is of importance to note that Meir North is one of four areas that constitute the 'Meir', inclusive of Meir South, Meir Hay and Meir Park. Conversely, despite these areas being geographically close in proximity, they have not all experienced the same outcomes under conditions of neoliberalism and the recession. For example, in 2016 a house could be bought in Meir North at an average price of '£82,360', whilst in Meir South the average house price was £118,298, in Meir Hay '£118,382' and in Meir Park, £183,093 (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017:24). In addition, the average income for an individual in Meir North was '£20,849', whereas the average income for an individual in Meir South was '£23,292', in Meir Hay '£35,217' and in Meir Park '£42,251' (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017:24). As these statistics show, space has undergone a process of 'creative destruction' because whilst some areas within Meir, like Meir North, have *not* been identified as 'incubators' of neoliberalism and have essentially been left to die, other areas such as Meir South,

Meir Hay and Meir Park have been provided with investment, enabling infrastructural regeneration (inclusive of housing, job opportunities and services) and, particularly in the areas of Meir Hay and Meir Park, successful ‘gentrification’ processes (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:349; Paton, 2010; Paton, 2013:89; Paton et al, 2017; Peck et al, 2013:1096). Figure 1 indicates where Meir North situates within Stoke-on-Trent more broadly, and its proximity to these additional Meir wards.

Figure 1: Stoke-on-Trent ward boundaries⁴



⁴ (Stoke-on-Trent City Council)

Returning back to the history of this place, Meir (inclusive of all four wards, as the boundaries were not yet defined) was, like the rest of the Northwest, arable land in the early 14th and 15th centuries but became a prosperous urban city in the 20th century (Cartlidge, 2005:67,74). This shift rapidly increased the population from ‘2,800’ people in the 1890s to approximately ‘14,000’ in the ‘early 1930s’, causing pressure to be placed upon housing tenures and many people (‘one out of every five’) to live in houses that were deemed unsuitable for residence (they lived within ‘squalor reminiscent of Dickensian times’) (Cartlidge, 2005:7,8,60). Although the housing conditions were far from ideal, Meir did attract people from *all* social classes because it possessed a vibrant hub of social and economic enterprises, inclusive of a shopping centre, independent shops (grocers and butchers), ‘The Broadway Luxury cinema’ (which opened in 1936), a golf club, car garages, public houses, schools, churches and medical surgeries, and perhaps less well known, an aerodrome for the lay public and the rich and famous (both the Australian Prime Minister (1935) and Prince George flew to Meir) (Cartlidge, 2005:8-10,63-72,193-195). Thus Meir experienced a ‘Golden Age’ of development, it was a vibrant, dynamic and well-connected area, which even after the Second World War was still a ‘land fit for heroes’ and met the needs of most of its inhabitants (Cartlidge, 1996:191-192).

However, in line with the broader regional and national trends, Meir North (excluding Meir Park, Meir South and Meir Hay) also experienced a slow decline from the late 1950s onwards. The economic and social trends which hit North Staffordshire, including deindustrialisation and the retraction of localised economic trade, lead to the closure of the commercial shopping centre, the golf club, the cinema and other local attractions, and high levels of unemployment (Cartlidge, 1996:212-213). Social

spaces, such as 'tennis courts', 'bowling greens' and public houses were closed down, reducing community involvement and the aerodrome was replaced by low cost housing (Cartlidge, 1996:213). In addition, in the 1990s this desperate situation was worsened by the construction of the A50 (a 'high speed link between the M1 and M6') directly through the middle of Meir North (Cartlidge, 2005:143; Long, 2000). This development involved the removal of many of the historic buildings which were associated with this area's flourishing past and a reconstruction of this areas' identity; it became a place where people passed through (at least '70,000' vehicles), rather than a place where people stayed and called 'home' (Cartlidge, 2005:143; Long, 2000). Hence, Meir North lost its former reputation and subsequently became a place of despair, wherein only the downtrodden and the excluded came to reside.

This contention is supported by statistical data provided by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The '*Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics*' (2017:5-6) indicate that there are '6,197' people living within this area, of which '1,509' are aged '0-15', '821' are aged '16-24', '1,582' are aged '25-44', '1,333' are aged '45-64' and '1,006' are aged '65' or over. Within this population group, '80.6%' of people are considered financially vulnerable, '40.9%' of people rent their homes from the council and '42.1%' of people do not own a car (2017:20,25,53). There are also a large proportion of people seeking benefits, including Jobseekers Allowance ('2.0%'), Disability Living Allowance ('9.4%'), Income Support ('3.6%') and Employment and Support Allowance ('14.5%') (2017:42,43). Furthermore, in relation to employment and education, '34.4%' of households have no adult in employment with dependent children, and this rises to '53.9%' when considering just households with no adult in employment (of working age) (2017:51). For those who are employed, many still

experience financial hardship as ‘39.9%’ of households earn less than 15,000 pounds a year because they are employed in low skilled areas, such as manufacturing (‘14.4%’), construction (‘9.3%’) and processing plants (‘12.7%’) (2017:44,49,50). Finally, only ‘25.7%’ of the local population have five or more GCSEs (A*-C, including Mathematics and English), ‘45.4%’ of people aged 16 and over have no qualifications and only ‘8.1%’ and ‘7.4%’ of people aged 16 and over have any level three or level four qualifications respectively (2017:56,57).

What this data ultimately shows is that Meir North has been severely affected by ‘moment[s] of destruction’ since the late 1970s, as is indicated by the high levels of unemployment within the area (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:349,366,372; Peck, 2014:398). Meir North appears to have lost its place in the ‘game’ of competition and consequently, its people are suffering (Peck et al, 2013: 1097). The statistical data also infers that many people within this area will have been affected by the ‘shock therap[ies]’ imposed by the IMF and the World Bank as part of their initiative to reduce welfare spending (Klein, 2008: 136,140,161). In areas such as Meir North wherein welfare dependency is an unavoidable way of life, any retractions to state services are likely to be harshly and detrimentally felt (Klein, 2008). Finally, the statistical data suggests that the majority of people who live within this area are subjects without a ‘value’ (as indicated by the education and skills data) and thereby are vulnerable to social condemnation and disgust for being ‘*revolting subjects*’ (they are not ‘*homo economicus*’ subjects (italics in original)) and lacking the neoliberal traits of self-responsibility, rationality and resilience (Foucault, 2008: 226, 303; Skeggs, 2004:62; Tyler, 2013:12). Therefore, Meir North symbolises an extreme space of deprivation and provides the opportunity for an original and in-depth

analysis of the extent to which neoliberalism and the global recession have shaped the lives of the poor - have this cohort really lost their 'reason for being' (Charlesworth, 2000:6)?

Outline of Continuing Chapters

To accomplish the aims and objectives of this thesis, specifically in relation to unearthing the ways in which neoliberalism and the economic crisis have affected the lives of older people living in a deprived area in Stoke-on-Trent, an ethnographic study was undertaken in Meir North. In the next chapter, '*An Ethnographic Examination of Older People in Meir North: Methodology and Methods*', the approach taken towards this ethnographic research, including its epistemology and ontology (linked to the phenomenological tradition), research design (case study) and methods (inclusive of semi-structured interviews, participant observations and photography) are explored, alongside the analysis undertaken (thematic analysis) and ethical tenets. However, this chapter does not just seek to describe and appraise the methodological approach, it also serves to provide the reader with insightful information about what it is like to 'Be-in' Meir North (Heidegger, 1962:79). Hence, there is an in-depth examination of the local area, its social milieu and infrastructure. It is through this exploration that greater context and meaning is provided for the ethnographic research, and the reader can begin to understand how the older people's social 'habitus' and environment may have contributed to their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and values which are displayed later in this thesis, alongside comprehending how they have helped construct their 'state of Being' (Bourdieu, 1984:165; Heidegger, 1962:78).

The third chapter, *'The Antagonistic and Divisive Nature of Neoliberalism: Conflict, Discord and Fragmentation'*, focuses on the neoliberal recreation of human subjectivity, specifically in relation to the tenet of employment, and how this has affected those in old age. In particular, attention is given to the ways in which 'bio-power' has helped shape the older people's views about employment and those who contravene the basic obligations of contemporary living, such as benefit claimants (Foucault, 2008:226,303). A cross-comparative analysis of the life trajectories of the older people in Meir North and younger people more broadly is conducted in order to contextualise their divergent states of 'Being-in' this world, especially as the former continue to appraise contemporary society through a nostalgic lens (Heidegger, 1962:79). Finally, this chapter further explores the notion that working class people have become a cohort 'without a reason for being', through an in-depth examination of the 'class war' initiated by Thatcher in the late 1970s and the breaking down of the 'solid' 'atoms' of working class culture (Bauman, 2012:1; Charlesworth, 2000:6; O.Jones, 2012:194). It is within this chapter that the darker sides of neoliberalism and the recent recession are revealed.

The fourth chapter titled *'Abnormal Abnormality: The Resistant 'Monsters' of Consumerism'*, seeks to explore how the recreation of human subjectivity, specifically in relation to consumption, has impacted upon the lives of the older people in Meir North (Foucault, 1999:81; Foucault, 2008). To accomplish this objective, the older people's attitudes towards commodity ownership and indebtedness are cross-compared with those of younger people and the life trajectories of these two generational cohorts are examined. In particular, attention is drawn to the ways in which the older people in Meir North are resistant to neoliberal forms of consumerism, largely because of their past experiences (they grew up in post-war

Britain), and demonstrate this through the construction of their own ‘grey economy’ and their frugal and prudent practices (Bramall, 2015; Campbell, 2005:23; Crawford, 1997:15). This chapter concludes with an exploration of the detrimental effects of living within a ‘consumer society’, as some failed consumers turn to crime to achieve a socially acceptable status within the ‘social game’, and the detrimental impact this has had upon the older people’s quality of life and wellbeing (Bauman, 2002:183; Bourdieu, 1990:70). It is within this closing section that the neoliberal pathology of ‘monst[rosity]’ is examined, notably the newly devised dichotomy between authorised and unauthorised forms of abnormality, and it is shown that the older people within this study have become the most ‘monstrous’ ‘exception’ of all because they are beyond reform; they cannot, and will not, be transformed into neoliberal, consumer citizens (Agamben, 1998:72; Foucault, 1999:81).

The fifth chapter, *‘Individualism, Insecurity and Egocentricity: The Irrevocable Demise of the Community?’* explores the extent to which the older people in Meir North feel part of a community, inclusive of their ties with neighbours, family members and friends. It is within this chapter that the term ‘community’ is investigated and a meaningful, theoretical framework is constructed for the continuing analysis. Following this, the chapter goes on to explore two contrasting perspectives concerning the community, including the older people who believed they were not part of a community and therein were isolated and lonely, and those who believed they were part of a community and thereby felt a ‘special sense of belonging’ (Blokland, 2003:117). The detrimental effects of neoliberalism and the recession, including individualisation and the establishment of a ‘money economy’, are counterbalanced by the development of a defiant community spirit, the creation of a

‘gift economy’ and the inherent nature of individuals to establish ‘hive’ relations (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:244; Lasch, 1979:44; Mauss, 1990:12; Sennett, 2012:69). As the chapter draws to an end it explores the ways in which the older people have innovatively created their own ‘personal[ised] communities’ in accordance with their own subjective needs, leading to the reconceptualisation of the term ‘community’ and a reconsideration of whether traditional institutions (such as the family and religion) have lost their significance under conditions of ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2012:15; Pahl, 2005:636).

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis, titled *‘Conclusion and Ways Forward’*, reiterates the main objectives of the research conducted, examines the significance of the epistemological and methodological approaches adopted and highlights the contribution this thesis has made to the fields of sociology and gerontology. Following this, the extent to which neoliberalism and the recession have affected the older people living in the deprived area of Meir North is explored and the key themes of the ethnographic data are outlined. In particular, the chapter examines themes such as isolation, exclusion and a lack of belonging to the ‘new world’, geographical inequality, the entrapment of the poor, the weakening of community ties and the fragmentation of the working class (Bauman, 2001c:35). In addition to this, the chapter denotes the ways in which the older people nostalgically draw upon their past experiences to actively resist many of the effects of neoliberalism and austerity, specifically through the creation of a ‘grey economy’ and a ‘gift’ economy’, the sustaining of socialist principles, and the development of ‘personal communities’ (Mauss, 1990:4; Pahl, 2005:636). It is within this context that the meaning of

abnormality in contemporary neoliberal society is critiqued and ways forward, specifically concerning future research projects, are considered (Foucault, 1999).

Chapter Two

An Ethnographic Examination of Older People in Meir North:

Methodology and Methods

‘...my concern is with the perceptions of individuals enmeshed in the meaning located in the place of their existence.’⁵

As has been stated throughout the thesis thus far, an ethnographic study was undertaken in Meir North to help unearth the ways in which neoliberalism and the economic recession have affected older people’s lives. It was through the employment of the ethnographic method that I could ascertain how these global forces have impacted upon the older people’s social life, at an everyday level, and determine the significance of place for their sense of ‘Being’ (Heidegger, 1962:78). In accordance with Charlesworth’s (2000:64) own aim, ‘my concern [was] with the perceptions of [older] individuals enmeshed in the meaning located in the place of their existence’. Thus, this chapter begins with an exploration of the underpinning epistemological and ontological framework of the ethnographic research, notably linked to the phenomenological tradition and other affiliated perspectives, including social constructionism and interpretivism. Following this, the focus shifts towards ‘Being-In’ Meir North in order to set the scene for the continuing analysis chapters, as information about Meir North is provided, including who comprises its social milieu, who the local inhabitants vote for within local elections (which will help explicate some of the attitudes and beliefs of the older people documented later in this thesis) and insight is provided about the local environment, specifically in relation to housing

⁵ (Charlesworth 2000:64)

type and its urban structure. Furthermore, the chapter then goes on to unravel the tightly woven methodological facets that contributed to this qualitative study, including a historical and sociological synopsis of the ethnographic methodology and a detailed discussion of its components, including the research design (case study), sampling technique (purposive/snowball) and methods (semi-structured interviews, observations and photography). It is through this examination that you as the reader will not only learn about the research process, but also about the participants who engaged in this research, what they were like, and what I observed and experienced whilst being within Meir North. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the analysis procedures, linked to thematic analysis, and an overview of the ethical issues that were encountered during the fieldwork.

‘Being-In-The-World’⁶

Phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, argue that all individuals (or ‘Dasein’s’) ‘state of Being’ is situated ‘*in-the-world*’ (italics in original), referred to as ‘Being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1962:78). The being’s body and consciousness, and the world in which they are positioned within, are deemed not as two separate entities but are coalesced and conjoined into one, as part of a ‘*unitary phenomenon*’ (italics in original), a ‘whole’ (Heidegger, 1962:78; Spurling, 1977:18). ‘Being-in’ constitutes an ‘existential state’, a state of being which is determined prior to the ‘Dasein’s’ existence (‘Being-already-alongside-the-world’) which enables familiarity with the environment and the ‘entities’ that embody it; they have knowledge and understanding of the world (they have a ‘worldhood of the world’) (Heidegger,

⁶ (Heidegger 1962:78)

1962:80-88,145). When a 'Dasein' seeks to understand their environment, the objects within it, and their own life experiences, they do this according to a 'meaningful whole'; it is a case of 'being-here aware of being-here' (Heidegger, 1962:78; Quay, 2016:489-490). There is no separation between the individual and their environment, they do not consider their self as being 'able to be 'individuated'' from the space in which they situate as their experience is one of amalgamation between their consciousness and their surroundings (Quay, 2016:490). Hence, 'being-in-the-world' precipitates that the 'Dasein's' consciousness is '*embodied*' (italics in original), it is anchored into everyday experiences and situations, and is linked inextricably to their life-world and environment (Heidegger, 1962:78; Spurling, 1977:21).

Human consciousness is imperative to cognition ('there is no cognition without consciousness') because it is here, and only here, that the individual is made of '*something*' (italics in original) (Eberle, 2015:564). All perceptions, thoughts, feelings and imaginings derive from the consciousness, and it is through these cognitive stimulations that connections are established with the world (Eberle, 2015:564). Whilst empiricists may assert that perceptions derive from 'passive recording[s] of sense-data' internalised from the individual's surroundings, as if they simply see objects and do not consider their meaning or significance (seeing and perceiving become a calculated and rationalised process), phenomenologists contend that perception is '*pre-reflective*' (italics in original) (Spurling, 1997:25-27). The traditional scientific 'dichotomy between subject and object' is rejected, as perceptions are considered an outcome of 'pre-conscious' and 'non-thematic' interrelations with the world (Spurling, 1977:25-27). Perception is dynamic and 'open', it entails constant reflection and '*interpretation*' (italics in original) of the

images that are seen, especially those that appear ambiguous and unrecognisable, in order to provide clarity and meaning (Heidegger, 1962:89; Spurling, 1977:27). However, although these perceptions bring the body and the environment closer together, they are '*temporal*' (italics in original), attached to a given period of time, shaped by historical trajectories and influenced by 'experience', and thereby the individual can never perceive the world in its entirety ('from all sides'); their perceptions are perspectival 'truths' (Spurling, 1977:28,35).

The every day realities of the 'Dasein' is also connected to others, as their nature is inherently '*social*' and their existence is 'intersubjective' ('Being-with') (Brandom, 2005:222-223; Heidegger, 1962:153). The 'Being-in-the-world' of the 'Dasein' is interconnected with other 'Dasein's' 'Being-in-the-world' leading to a dominant form of co-dependency (Heidegger, 1962:153). This notion draws attention to the seemingly antithetical relation between the individual and society because whilst the individual is considered a lone entity, it is 'in' the world' by itself (individuals have 'private world[s]'), it is simultaneously 'within-the-world' with others who share its existence and inhabit its environment (Heidegger, 1962:154; Schutz, 1940:126). There can be no 'Dasein' without the presence of others, as Heidegger (1962:155) notes, 'the world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others' (italics in original). A being's 'life-world' is not derived in isolation, but with other beings as their subjectivity is conjoined with all other subjectivities as part of their intrinsic 'intersubjective' nature (Schutz, 1940:121-125; Spurling, 1977:41). The 'open[ness]' of the individual's world enables a social mixing of norms, values and cultures, that help devise multiple 'experiences' and a shared reality, inclusive of common perceptions of 'objects' and collective understandings of social phenomena

(Schutz, 1940:135; Spurling, 1977:41). Ultimately, as a response to the creation of this community of 'Dasein's', a shared form of 'communication', inclusive of signs and symbols, has been established, enabling collective forms of articulation and a 'co-state-of-mind' (Heidegger, 1962:78; Heidegger cited by Brandom, 2005:223; Spurling, 1977:41).

Social constructionists, in accordance with the phenomenological perspective, argue, as the name implies, that society is socially constructed, that reality is 'in here' rather than 'out there' (it resides in the subjective rather than the objective) and that 'language' is essential for establishing 'subjective experiences of the world' (Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Burr, 1995:59). In particular, Berger and Luckmann state that the world becomes real via a three-way process of 'externalisation, objectivation and internalisation' (cited by Burr, 1995:10). In the first instance, the individual 'externalise[s]' their world through language (they have a conversation with another individual for example) and they establish a discourse that becomes part of the 'social realm' (Berger and Luckmann cited by Burr, 1995:10). This narrative is subsequently shared with others until the notion becomes an 'object of consciousness' ('objectivation'), it is viewed as a 'truth', and all further generations are socialised into accepting this reality as if it was 'natural' (they 'internalise it') (Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Burr, 1995:10). Social reality, or more specifically, social '*realities*', are thereby a product of human thinking and an outcome of language, referred to as a 'system of vocal signs', which is considered the 'most important sign system of human society' (Berger and Luckmann, 1971:27-37,51; Burr, 1995:48).

Moreover, social constructionists argue that ‘metaphysical’ forces, such as discourses, play a significant role in constructing an individual’s narrative of the world and their perceptions of everyday life (discourses create ‘representation[s]’ of the world) (Burr, 1995:48,62). Every discourse that saturates the structures of social reality creates an illusion that the ‘object’ created is a ‘truth’ and therein individuals come to believe that what they see, feel, think and experience, is real; it is an objective and unchangeable reality (Burr, 1995:49). However, as Foucault contends, whilst an ‘ideology’ may give the impression that it is the only ‘truth’, in fact there are multiple ‘truth[s]’ (referred to as ‘regimes of truth’) prevalent within society which help to construct ‘multiple realities’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1971:35; Foucault cited by Burr, 1995: 81-82). Like the phenomenological tradition, this perspective highlights the significance of discourse, and the ways in which individual’s create their own ‘identity’ and sense of self from their ‘social realm’ (Burr, 1995:53). This becomes of particular importance for this research because, as was highlighted in the previous chapter, society has become permeated by neoliberal and austerity discourses which have sought to transform the subjectivities of all individuals in relation to work and consumption principles (Foucault, 2008). It is these discourses which have helped to ‘shape’ and provide ‘substance’ (meaning) to the lives of individuals and have come to determine their ‘constructions of the world’ (Burr, 1995:54,59,81).

In affiliation with these approaches, Weber argues that perceptions of society are subjective (‘Verstehen’) in nature because they are constructed from ‘value-ideas’ and personal ‘value-judgments’ (Morrow and Brown, 1994:70; Weber, 2003: 107, 109). What people believe about their culture and society is derived from ‘take[n] for granted’ forms of knowledge, which imbue human behaviour with meaning and help

explicate everyday experiences (Weber cited in Schutz, 2003:139-140). All individuals are intrinsically part of a culture which is established upon common norms and values that they have helped construct through language, as is denoted by the often-quoted phrase, ‘man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’ (Weber cited by Geertz, 1973:187; Weber, 2003:109). Thus when sociologists seek to unearth the ways in which individuals behave, why they hold certain views, and what meanings they attribute to their everyday lives (what Weber refers to as the ‘subjective meaning-complex of action’), they should begin their explorative journey embedded within their culture because it is here where these ‘significance[s]’ emerge (Weber cited by Berger and Luckmann, 1971:30; Weber cited by Geertz, 1973:187).

Whilst this ontological-epistemological exploration is useful, the question is posed as to how this high-theory can be applied to the empirical research? As inferred in the previous chapter, theories of this type fail to situate the individual within their analyses (generalisations are produced concerning the entire population) and the link between the micro and the macro is lost. These philosophical contentions provide insight into what it means to be a human being within contemporary society, and demonstrate the significance of the environment and human relationships for human subjectivity, but they are conceptual and conjectural (Heidegger, 1962:78; Spurling, 1977). What is needed to create a mid-range theory is a series of questions that are aimed at the everyday existence of human beings, like older beings, and are situated within a specific context, such as Meir North. Thereby, what becomes of relevance for this research are questions such as; how have the older people learnt to ‘*be* in a world’ conditioned by the discourses of neoliberalism and austerity (Charlesworth,

2000:64; Burr, 1995:56)? What ‘perceptions’ do they have of their own entities and that of others who live within Meir North (Charlesworth, 2000:64)? Do they have a shared sense of ‘intersubjectiv[ity]’ within this place (Spurling, 1977:35)? Does their ‘Being-in-the-world’ affiliate with another resident’s ‘Being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1962:78)? What ‘meaning’ do they give to their environment and their culture (Charlesworth, 2000:64; Weber, 2003)? How do they make ‘sense of [their] world’ (Charlesworth, 2000:64)? And, what do they ‘feel’ about living within this deprived area (Charlesworth, 2000:64)? These are the questions that are of concern for this research and are the central focus of the continuing analysis chapters.

‘Being-In’ Meir North⁷

As has been explicated in the previous chapter, Meir North has experienced many ‘moment[s] of destruction’ since the late 1970s, and many of its local residents are largely poor, uneducated, unemployed and living off benefits (Brenner and Theodore 2002:365; Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017). However, in this section we will extend this exploration to include an examination of Meir North’s social milieu and voting trends, its environment, and housing make-up. It is these features which constitute the essence of Meir-North; it’s characteristics, it’s nature and sense of identity. Thus, in the first instance, attention is drawn to this area’s population, which is predominantly derived of White-British people (n=‘5,334’, ‘95.1%’ were born in the UK) (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017: 8). Although at first glance this finding may not appear as being of great significance,

⁷ (Heidegger 1962:79)

it becomes of importance when embedding it within a much broader political context. An examination of the voting trends within Meir North shows that over the last decade, many of its local inhabitants have predominantly voted for the British National Party (BNP); a Party known for its radical and largely racist ideologies.

In 2006, in the 'Weston and Meir North' area, there were '945' votes for the BNP, enabling councilor Anthony Simmonds to win the election, with Labour taking second place with '815' votes (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2018). In 2007, a similar pattern emerged, except the BNP received a higher number of votes than in 2006 (with '1,041) and the Conservative Party became more popular than Labour (it received '1,028' votes and became the second most popular party) (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2018). By 2008, support for the BNP had risen dramatically, as there was a total of 'nine BNP councilors' in Stoke-on-Trent (Community Security Trust, 2011). However in 2010, the electoral tide altered, as the Labour councilor, Ruth Rosenau, received '1,691' votes and was elected to govern this area (although the BNP still gained '1,070' votes) (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2018). Since then, particularly post 2015, the BNP have fallen out of favour with this population (and the British population more generally) and therein have completely lost their power (although there has been a sharp rise in the number of people in Meir North voting for the UK Independence Party (UKIP)) (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2018).

What these findings suggest is that around the period of the recession, the residents in Meir North largely voted for a party which deliberately targetted marginalised people within society, with policies that seemingly appeared to improve their social condition, whilst masking (although not to a high degree) deeply racist and

discriminatory policies. The BNP advocated that people born in Britain should, as a priority, have their needs met ('local people first'), especially older people, ex-servicemen and those on benefits, whilst removing all other ethnic groups from Britain as they were deemed as social parasites seeking to challenge and destroy British culture (bnp.org.uk). One of their principle aims was to 'protect' the 'unique and precious British identity from mass immigration, multi-culturalism, health 'n' safety killjoys and globalisation' (bnp.org.uk). This party dominantly believed that Britain needed to be saved from outsiders (notably any person not White and British) and it outlined a political constitution centered upon the notions of reduced immigration, Islamophobia, the upholding of British culture and defence (bnp.org.uk).

In many ways, it is not difficult to identify why people from Meir North voted for this party. To outsiders (especially the well-educated, middle class), this electoral vote may appear regressive, intolerant and largely unacceptable within a democratic country whose constitution is centered upon free rights and inclusion, but to those living in Meir North, this party appeared to address their concerns and presented a solution to their issues, i.e. joblessness, deprivation, crime and anti-social behaviour, hopelessness, marginalisation and exclusion. The more traditional parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal) were considered to have failed at helping these people with the problems that they were experiencing and therein they felt compelled to vote for a radical party, which drew from stereotypical perceptions and (false) common-sense beliefs of society (they created what Tyler (2013:3) terms 'revolting subjects' based upon 'social abjection') and appeared to proffer help and the opportunity for change. As a result of this, the area increasingly became populated by white-British people, as people from other ethnic backgrounds became viewed as outsiders (deemed objects of

‘disgust’) who did not really belong in Meir North and therefore were largely excluded from this area (Tyler, 2013:5). Thus, this political trend helps to explicate why Meir North has a population consisting of ‘5,334’ White British people and only ‘95’ people from ‘mixed/multiple ethnic groups’, ‘80’ people who are ‘Asian/Asian British’, ‘100’ people who are ‘Black/African Caribbean/Black British’ and ‘13’ people who are from ‘other ethnic group[s]’ (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017: 8). Meir North’s population is not diverse and inclusive, but largely homogeneous and exclusive, indicating issues of prejudice, disintegration and fragmentation (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017: 41).

It is also of significance to describe what the local environment looks like, in order to understand what it means to the older people to ‘be-in’ Meir North (Heidegger, 1962:79). Hence, when you enter Meir North you are faced with a central high street which consists of takeaways, hairdressers and charity shops, and at the bottom of the street there is a large, newly built, healthcare centre (this is explicated more in chapter three). Next to this, there is a housing estate which is comprised largely of houses that were built between ‘1900-1939’ (‘36.7%’) and ‘1945-1972’ (45.8%), with a few newer houses built between ‘1993-2014’ (‘8.9%’), that situate at its periphery (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017:23). The newer houses do stand out from the rest of the houses because they are constructed from a newer brick and have not been built in the same style (they are more modern) as the many semi-detached council houses (40.9%) in this area (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017: 25). The roads are quite narrow, making it difficult for cars to travel both ways, and there is little greenery; there is small strip of grass in the middle of the estate.

The area feels quite closed, as the houses are crammed in and the same visual images are portrayed from all angles, notably bricked buildings and concreted paving. It is not a visually appealing area, it is quite a dark place (filled with shadows off the buildings), that entraps the social deviant (there are high levels of anti-social behaviour within this area), the poor (it is home to some of the most deprived and financially vulnerable people in Stoke-on-Trent) and the sick ('10.6%' of people in this area suffer with 'bad/very bad' health, '18.5%' suffer with depression and '47.2%' are dependent upon 'community based social care services') (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017:58, 65). Thus, it is these factors which make Meir North such a fascinating place to study, especially when considering how far these issues are an outcome of, or have been exacerbated by, neoliberalism and the recession, which lie at the heart of this research.

Unearthing the 'Multiple Realities'⁸ of the Older People in Meir North: An Ethnographic Approach

The term ethnography is an 'Ancient Greek' term meaning 'writing on people', and originated from cultural anthropology in the '19th century' (Bray, 2008:312; Dutta, 2016:69; Neuman, 2011:423). It was Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas who first utilised this methodology to understand the lives of 'native peoples' as they believed that researchers could learn about other people's cultures, inclusive of their norms, values, beliefs and customs, via fieldwork and observational methods (Dutta, 2016:69; Neuman, 2011:422). What became of central importance for a researcher

⁸ (Berger and Luckmann 1971:35)

seeking to comprehend another's 'life-world' was that they tried to understand the 'native's point of view' by taking an active role in the culture they were studying, and 'learning to see, think [and] feel' like their participants by adopting an insider role (Eberle, 2015:566; Tedlock, 2000:457). This new methodology was subsequently adopted within a plethora of disciplines, including sociology, as sociologists began to recognise the significance of this tradition for unearthing the 'intersubjective and embodied' elements of human life (Tedlock, 2000:471). In the contemporary era, it is recognised that in order for a researcher to understand divergent social worlds they should endeavor to engage with people firsthand, and observe their actions through ethnographic methods (Tedlock, 2000:470).

In affiliation with Weber's earlier contention, Geertz (1973:5) believes that the 'webs' which people have 'spun' are essentially referring to 'culture' and therefore the aim of an ethnographer is to unearth what this means in relation to those who are 'suspended' within it via an in-depth analysis of meaning. Conducting ethnographic research is not simply about the researcher considering what methods would be most effective to undertake this quest, although this is of importance, but about how the researcher writes about their time in the field and develops their 'own construction[s] of other people's constructions' (the meanings the participants give to everyday life are socially constructed, as are the meanings the researcher gives to their participants' meanings as they form 'second...order' interpretations) (Geertz, 1973:9,15; Geertz, 1993). An ethnography entails 'thick description' wherein attention is given to details about the participants (the researcher should be able to decipher 'winks from twitches') and the 'jungle field work', inclusive of the observations, the interviews and the writing of notes, which are likely to embed an 'interworked system of

construable signs' (Geertz, 1973:6-16; Geertz, 1993). The aim of an ethnographer is therefore to unravel the meanings of culture from daily interactions and record what they find, as Geertz (1973:19) aptly notes, '*the ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; [they] write it down*' (italics in original).

Ethnographic research also often necessitates a 'naturalistic approach' whereby the researcher observes and partakes within people's realities without manipulating any of the variables or altering the natural setting (Bray, 2008:296; Williamson, 2006:83-84). Rather than the participants being treated as external objects and their lives being viewed as something 'out there' which can be examined in a laboratory or under fixed conditions, an ethnographic approach values diversity and subjectivity and recognises that social worlds are created via communication and 'daily interactions' and therein cannot be subject to scientific examination (Mason and Dale, 2011:13; Neuman, 2011:423; Wolcott, 2005:217). This methodology also captures the 'nature of society' (which is dynamic and open to perpetual modification) and the 'nature of knowledge' (that is ideological in essence, multi-perspectival and a social construct) unlike more scientific approaches (Brewer, 2000:28). Ethnographers seek not to 'distort or manage' the environments which they study, but to immerse themselves within it and observe and partake within the natural everyday interactions and events respectively (Madden, 2010:17). What this essentially means is that the researcher can get close to 'the inside', they can observe, engage with, and understand, how people 'feel, perceive [and] think' in their everyday environments and answer important 'why' questions which are often left unanswered by the scientific tradition (Brewer, 2000:26,33; Hacking, 1999:68, 81, 97). The ethnographic methodology has therefore been linked to what Ellen terms '*subjective soaking*' (italics in original), because the

researcher seeks only to assimilate their self into the social world being explored rather than trying to adhere to the obstinate principles of ‘absolute objectivity or scientific neutrality’ (Berg, 2009:191; Ellen cited by Berg, 2009:191).

Furthermore, what appears to be the contemporary buzzword in ethnographic practice is that of reflexivity; the ability of the researcher to adopt a critical and evaluative attitude towards the data collection process. To be reflexive, means to comprehend where data is derived from and how it has been shaped, whether directly or indirectly, by the researcher and their own thoughts, feelings and actions, which otherwise would go undetected (Madden, 2010:21). The ethnographer’s ‘Being-in-the world’ will have determined and shaped their research, as their consciousness is derived from their own life experiences, and therefore requires consideration during the research process (Heidegger, 1962:78). The refusal to accept the role of subjectivity in research does not mean that it does not exist, because ‘all research is subjective’, but that the ‘elephant in the corner’ is ‘ignored’ (Dey, 1993:15; Madden, 2010:23). In addition, Berg (2009:200) argues that a researcher should consider why they have chosen their topic of study because this often originates from an ‘interest in the subject matter’ derived from personal experiences, and this can influence the interpretation and analysis of the acquired data. In particular, the researcher should recognise how their own life history and identity, inclusive of their ‘cultural make-up’, their linguistic ‘code’ (i.e. ‘restricted’ or ‘elaborated’) and their personal ‘threads’ which are sewn together to create the ‘fabric’ of their personhood (like gender, ethnicity, age and class), have influenced their research (Berg, 2009:204; Bernstein, 1996:92; Bray, 2008:303; Burr, 1995:51; Neuman, 2011:432). It is these central factors that determine whether the researcher is given access to participants, to what extent they will be able

to build rapport with those involved in the study and if they will be able to understand their participants' every day realities (Berg, 2009; Burr, 1995).

It is according to these contentions that attention is turned towards my own life, my own 'Being-in-the-world' and my own subjectivity (Heidegger, 1962:78; Madden, 2010). Thus, when I was a little girl, I used to spend a lot of time with my Grandparents. I would regularly watch television (mostly the soaps), go shopping and play cards with my Nana and Granddad, and with my other set of Grandparents, my Grandma and Grandpa, I would enjoy long walks at National Trust sites, wherein we would discuss types of flowers and breeds of birds, bake cakes and play Scrabble. When we (my brothers and I) used to visit Nana and Granddad's house, they would say 'help yourself' to getting a treat out of the cupboard (they used to have a large box full of biscuits, cakes and chocolate which their grandchildren could choose from), whilst when we visited my Grandma and Grandpa there would be an array of freshly baked cakes presented neatly on a table in front of the fire. When it was dinner time, my siblings and I would sit around a table and eat my Nana's homemade chips (cooked in a fryer, they were so nice I used to cut them in half so they would last longer), or if we were at Grandma's and Grandpa's house, we would eat meat (which my Grandpa would always carve at the head of the table), Yorkshire puddings and roast vegetables, followed by more cake or ice cream. These were magical days, days that I remember with such fondness and nostalgia.

As a little girl I also spent a lot of time with my Great Aunty (my Nana's sister), including staying over at her house at weekends. I can remember how she used to say she was going to put the electric blanket on, which caused great excitement because there would be warm sheets on a cold winter's night. Then in the morning, I would go down her very steep stairs (she, like my Nana and Grandad, lived in an old terraced house) and she would be sat in her armchair, in her dressing gown, waiting. There was always a game of eye-spy before breakfast (which consisted of an egg, toast and a cup of tea), followed by a walk around the local town wherein oatcakes and meat were bought from the butchers (although a fast pace was never achieved as my Great Aunty would always say 'hello' to everybody she passed) and the day would end with a few games of Tiddlywinks and homemade chips (just like how my Nana made them). It is through recalling these memories that it becomes apparent that these older people have played a significant role in my socialisation and upbringing and have all helped me to grow into the woman that I am today. They taught me from a very young age to respect older people, to cherish their memories and stories, and to see them as an important group within society. It is these memories and experiences that have indubitably influenced my topic choice and heightened my 'interest in [this] subject matter' (Berg, 2009:200).

It is also of significance to note that my family heritage is conversely derived of two social classes, because whilst my Mother's side of the family are working class, my Father's side of the family are middle class. As such, I have had to learn to employ two divergent ways of speaking, two different languages. Whilst my Grandma and Grandpa utilised a middle class vocabulary, my Nana and Grandad preferred more colloquial and informal language (they talked with a Stoke-on-Trent accent).

Sometimes I would employ an incorrect language system, but the opposing set of grandparents would soon challenge this, for example, my Nana in particular would repeat a word that she did not agree with and would say that was the 'posh' way of speaking (the words 'book', 'cook' and 'look' often caused significant dispute) and my Grandma and Grandpa would correct my pronunciation if I spoke like my Nana and Grandad; they rejected what they believed to be poorly spoken English. This exposure to multiple ways of speaking (according to class divides) has ultimately been advantageous for this research because I have had the opportunity to learn two 'code[s]', both the 'restricted code' (typically utilised by the working class) and the 'elaborated code' (typically utilised by the middle class) and therefore could interact with the older people in Meir North without any significant issues (Berg, 2009:204; Bernstein, 1996:92). I shared their dominant 'linguistic habitus' and could 'articulate their world' (Charlesworth, 2000:132,136).

I could also relate to some of the older people's life histories because of my own experiences of living within an area that has been hit by processes of deindustrialisation, service retrenchment and community breakdown. I may not have been affected to the same extent as the older people (because my world has largely revolved around education rather than industry), but I have witnessed my own town lose its sense of pride and identity, and I have experienced, and continue to experience, the decaying of the local urban area and the working class ties that formerly existed. I have also witnessed first hand the uneven and inequitable outcomes of the neoliberal discourse and the economic recession and could use my own experiences to help understand, and relate to, the narratives of the older people within this study. For example, my home town has not declined to the same extent as the

town wherein my relatives lived when I was young, and their home town has not declined to the same extent as Meir North. Moreover, the area wherein my Grandma and Grandpa lived when I was a child, a leafy, suburban area, shows very few signs of disadvantage or decline and appears to have prospered, rather than suffered, from these macro economic forces (Charlesworth, 2000). All these areas are geographically close in proximity, but they have, as Brenner and Theodore (2002:357) note, been affected by the social and economic policies of the late 1970s in different ways, with the former (particularly Meir North) experiencing greater ‘destructive’ ‘moments’ than the latter.

In addition, it became evident during the fieldwork that many of my personal ‘threads’ that constitute the ‘fabric’ of my identity were similar to my participants (Burr, 1995:51). Although my socio-economic status technically situates between the working class and middle class, the older people believed that I was one of them, notably because I too came from Stoke-on-Trent. I spoke in a similar way to them and could relate to many of their experiences, and therein I was instantly accepted into their cohort. My gender and ethnicity also worked to my advantage because many of the participants were similarly White-British females and therefore they believed we had a shared identity (only I was younger) and would talk at length in a candid manner. My age also encouraged the older people to take me under their wing; they treated me like their own child or grandchild (although the large age gap did cause some issues as highlighted later in this chapter) and showed a genuine concern for my wellbeing. The older participants always wanted to include me in their activities, like they would with a family member, and they were keen to help with my project because they genuinely wanted me to do well with the research. The older people

became invested in me as much as I became invested in them, and as a consequence, rapport was established and friendships were developed.

Returning back to the ethnographic approach taken, a case study design was employed because according to Yin (2009:18), this type of design enables an in-depth ‘investigation [of] [a] contemporary phenomenon ...within its real-life context’, which becomes of particular significance ‘when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’; as is the case for this research. In contrast to experimental designs which ‘deliberately divorce a phenomenon from its context’ by concentrating upon only a limited number of variables, a case study design seeks to understand the complexity of social reality and how its ‘constituent parts’ are glued together to create a substantive whole (it does not extract one segment of reality without comprehending its links with other segments) (Della Porta and Keating, 2008:205; Yin, 2009:4,18). Hence, this design was utilised because it permitted an exploration into how the global forces of neoliberalism and the recession (phenomena without ‘boundaries’) have affected those in old age who reside within a place of severe deprivation, whilst also recognising the complexity of their ‘life-worlds’ (Eberle, 2015:566; Yin, 2009:18). It was through the employment of this design that important ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions could be explored, and further insight and understanding of this topic could be gained (Andrade, 2009:44; Bryman, 2008:44).

Although the findings of a case study are insightful, if they are derived from a single case they often cannot be generalised leading to the criticism that they lack ‘external validity’ (Bryman, 2008:55; Yin, 2009:15). However, if it is a ‘typical case’, it means that the data is representative of other cases like itself, and therefore should not be

viewed as a 'sample of one' (Bryman, 2008:55; Yin, 2009:48). This contention can be applied to Meir North because whilst it constitutes a single case with 'atypicalities', and the place is of central importance (the research is 'idiographic' and 'intrinsic' rather than 'nomothetic' and 'instrumental'), it is not completely distinctive because it has experienced a series of 'destructive' 'moments' like many other areas within Britain (especially northern-industrialised areas such as Hull, Glasgow and Manchester on a national scale, and Burslem, Longton and Hanley on a local scale) (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:357; Bryman, 2008:53-56; Stake, 2000:437-439). Meir North has become a space of 'advanced marginality' and inequality like many other places across the country and therefore the findings from the ethnographic research can be cross-applied to a broader array of cases (Wacquant, 2008:234).

Before the ethnographic research could be undertaken, consideration had to be given to who would be included within the study. As is commonly known within the social sciences, random forms of sampling are often considered the 'gold standard'; a technique that all researchers should seek to utilise (Bryman, 2008:179; Neuman, 2011:242). Conversely, I sought to investigate a cohort who are considered vulnerable (because of their potential health and social needs, and vulnerability to manipulation and risk) and therefore a non-probability sampling technique was employed, notably purposive-snowball sampling. This technique necessitated that I identify a few initial participants who would then help to nominate other people, including their friends, neighbours and family members (May, 2001:132). Although this sampling technique permits access to participants, particularly the hard to reach like the older people who live within Meir North, it can lead to a skewed sample because it is often derived of people with the same gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and age, and specific

‘voices and opinions of others’ (notably those who are not included within the network) are omitted from the research (May, 2001:132; Neuman, 2011:243). However, as Neuman (2011:241) notes, qualitative researchers ‘rarely sample to gather a small set of cases that is [a] mathematically accurate reproduction of the entire population’. There is no expectation to claim that the place or people being studied represent a ‘world in a teacup’, only that the few participants within the study ‘shine light into’ (rather than comprehensively explicate) a particular social phenomenon (Geertz, 1973:23; Neuman, 2011:241). The number of participants and how they are interconnected is of importance, but it does not invalidate the research because it is their ‘relevance to the research topic’ that really matters, rather than ‘their representativeness’ (Neuman, 2011:241).

Thereby, the questions which arose in the initial stages of the research were; who was to be included within the ethnographic study and how was access to be gained? Before entering the field, it was proposed that approximately 20 participants would be included, with an even split between men and women and a diverse range of ages, including ‘third’ (aged between 55 and 79 years old) and ‘fourth’ (aged 80 years and over) aged people (Vincent et al, 2006:9). I believed this would enable a fair and inclusive analysis of the social phenomena under investigation. The ethnicity of the participants was also considered, however as highlighted earlier, Meir North is a predominantly white-British area and thereby I knew prior to this research that it was unlikely that other ethnic groups would be included, or if they were, that they would be disproportionately represented. Conversely, whilst these ideals were theorised in practice they were very difficult to achieve because the first gatekeeper, who I had previously met during my Masters research, and the second gatekeeper who I had

formed a close relationship with a few weeks into the study, suggested largely women who were white-British. In addition to this, whilst I did have access to the '*Friendship Group*' and '*Luncheon Club*' cohorts, these largely comprised of white-British women with only a few exceptions (no men attended '*Friendship Group*', but a few did attend '*Luncheon Club*') and many were widows, single or divorced. When I specifically asked both the key gatekeepers if they knew of any men who could partake in the research, the first suggested a few of her neighbours and the second proposed her husband, but because they did not know of many other people in the area, they could not think of anybody else to include and the same response was attained from the other members of the group. Hence, the decision was made to continue to interview as many older people as possible, regardless of gender, with the belief that any perspective is valuable and provides an original insight into the social context under investigation.

Thus in total, the sample consisted of 22 participants, including 17 women and 5 men, all of whom had a white-British nationality. These participants varied in age from 60 to 95 years old, had divergent statuses (11 were married, 2 were single, 6 were widows and 3 were divorced), and their former occupations (they are all now retired) were largely of a lower socio-economic status (including a free hand paintress and pattern gilder, bus driver, cleaner, joiner, lithographer, shop assistants and pottery workers)⁹. The following table (Table 1) summarises the biographical information of

⁹ All participants were asked to complete personal information sheets prior to their interview, which extracted data concerning their age, gender, nationality, marital status and former or current occupation. This information was then compiled and used to summarise the demographics of the participant population (please see the appendix for a copy of this form).

the older people who partook within this study (please see the Appendix (Table 2) for a summary of the personal characteristics of the older participants):

Table 1: Participant Information

Name	Age	Nationality	Marital Status	Former Occupation
Alice	77	British	Married	Canteen Manageress
Alma	95	British	Widow	Hairdresser
Betty	72	British	Widow	Pottery Worker
David	77	British	Married	Joiner
Dennis	79	British	Married	Bus Driver
Dorothy	73	British	Divorced	Bar Staff
Flo	83	British	Married	Free hand paintress and pattern guilder
Flora	72	British	Married	Pottery Worker
Harry	72	British	Married	Driver
Jenny	79	British	Widow	Lithographer
Lilly	72	British	Married	Shop Assistant
Marjorie	65	British	Single	Local Government Officer/Licensed Lay Minister (CoE)
Martha	69	British	Widow	Shop Assistant in fruit shop
Molly	60	British	Divorced	Payroll Clerk/Admin Clerk
Olive	79	British	Widow	Administration
Patricia	67	British	Divorced	Cook/Cleaner
Pearl	72	British	Widow	Teacher
Poppy	70	British	Married	Housewife
Robert	71	British	Married	Electrical instructor
Ronald	88	British	Married	Engineering
Sylvia	65	British	Married	Freelance writer
Wilma	75	British	Single	Sales Assistant/Canteen Worker

Whilst recognising that the sample is unrepresentative because of the inequitable number of male and female participants and the exclusion of other ethnic groups, the sample did include a broad range of ages, and the working class, which has helped to provide meaningful insight into the social phenomena being explored. In addition, it would have been advantageous to include the ‘voices and opinions’ of those who did not attend these groups and/or were not known to the gatekeepers or the other members, but gaining access was very difficult (other than knocking on people’s doors, which poses ethical and safety issues, there were very few other opportunities to speak to older people) (May, 2001:132; Neuman, 2011:243). In spite of these issues however, the sample is still considered valuable because the participants included provided a significant amount of very interesting and informative data, and they have enabled the central objectives of this qualitative project to be fulfilled, i.e. they ‘[shone] light into’ the complexities of their daily realities shaped by neoliberalism and the economic recession (Neuman, 2011:241).

Once consideration had been given to the sample, attention was turned to the ethnographic methods, specifically to that of semi-structured interviews which were conducted with the older people in Meir North. The participants were asked a series of questions linked to their experiences of living within this area, their social networks, environment and health, their attitudes towards the receiving of welfare benefits and how the recession had impacted upon their lives (please see the Appendix for a copy of the interview guide). As previously noted, 22 participants were interviewed, with each interview lasting between 90 and 150 minutes, and the data was recorded using a Dictaphone. The majority of the interviews were with a single participant, although there were four group interviews, three consisting of

married couples and one that included three friends. The utilisation of both these types of interview was beneficial because whilst the single interviews unraveled knowledge which had been previously socially constructed (within the individual's culture), the group interviews indicated how knowledge was socially constructed, demonstrating how married couples and friends 'arrive[d] at, or alter[ed]' their views according to prevalent 'interactionary clues' (Berg, 2009:165). It was particularly during the group interviews that I could visually see and feel the ties between the older people, including the fondness, care and love that they felt for each other, and could unearth their 'intersubjective' ('Being-with') natures (Heidegger, 1962:153; Spurling, 1977:41).

Furthermore, this type of interview was advantageous because temporal restrictions could be removed, as I could learn about the participant's 'subjectivity' both in the present moment (the 'here and now') and also during periods of time which I was not there; enabling cross-comparisons between the older people's experiences of living within Meir North today, and those within the past (Berger and Luckmann, 1971:52). I could also engage in a process of 'linguistic signification' with the participants which was vital for understanding how discourses have helped to shape their everyday lives, establishing a close relationship (notably due to the 'face-to-face' nature of the interactions), developing rapport, and enabling a collection of open and in-depth responses to be gained (Berger and Luckmann, 1971:52). Finally, it was through the employment of this type of interview that informative 'text[s]' could be produced which signalled the outcomes of the 'internalisation' process (via the language utilised by the participant) and ultimately denoted what meanings had been attributed to the older people's everyday lives (Burr, 1995:10,51,91).

The semi-structured interviews also allowed for probing, wherein I could ask the participants for further information concerning a specific point they had made in order to achieve greater clarity and depth. In addition, the open nature of this type of interview enabled the participants to discuss broader issues that they felt were of importance and relevance without restriction, and this proved to be very effective (Bray, 2008:310). For example, many of the older people took the opportunity to discuss the consumer habits of younger people, including their family members, and how these were fundamentally divergent to their own thrifty practices. Furthermore, the accounts given by Alma and Harry (see chapter four) concerning their experiences with crime were not anticipated but they were incredibly insightful and powerful. Without being asked, they retold their stories as if they were in their homes again during the periods in which they were robbed, and recounted what they saw, what they felt, where they were in the house, what the burglars took and so on, creating a picture that could be visually seen and felt (they provided a very clear and candid account of their 'state of Being') (Heidegger, 1962:78). I was deeply saddened, angry and frustrated by these accounts, not only because of the severity of the consequences (it is beyond belief that somebody would steal such items), but also because of Alma's and Harry's vulnerability to harm. In particular, Alma was the oldest participant in the study (aged 95), she could barely walk, she was deaf and her body was very fragile and frail and therefore her narrative reinforced the cruelty and callousness of the crime committed. If a more rigid approach had been taken, these types of accounts, which are memorable and deeply moving, would never have been unearthed.

Hence, the utilisation of semi-structured interviews was of benefit for this research because they enabled me, as the researcher, to discuss with the older participants issues related to the environment and living within Meir North, the welfare system, and their wellbeing, and to reveal their beliefs, values and thoughts about these topics, which is essential for a phenomenological study (Eberle, 2015:564). It was during the interviews that I could establish the meanings attached to the older people's perspectives, and understand how they perceived and interpreted the world around them (Heidegger, 1962:89; Spurling, 1977:27). The language used during these interviews not only highlighted the attitudes of the older people and their feelings towards specific issues, but also it helped elucidate the origins of these perspectives, i.e. I gained understanding of how their perspectival 'truths' had been constructed (Spurling, 1977: 28,35). Moreover, the older people's narratives gave insight into their life-trajectories and their experiences of living within Meir North, especially over an extended period of time, and therein I could identify concerns associated with change and transformation, notably since the late 1970s and the implementation of neoliberal policies.

Thus overall, during this study working class people were given the opportunity to 'articulate their own experience' and express their thoughts, feelings and concerns about living within Meir North under conditions of neoliberalism and austerity (Charlesworth, 2000:145). Although this is a traditional and expected outcome of semi-structured interviews, it is of particular importance for those included within this study because this cohort are often 'ignored' and made to 'live their lives [in] quiet despair' (Charlesworth, 2000:145-147). As was highlighted in the previous chapter, focus upon the working class has increasingly fallen out of favour with academics,

with research concerned with this group being considered ‘embarrassing and shameful’ (Charlesworth, 2000:14; Tyler, 2008:20). The employment of the semi-structured interview method was therefore favourable because it revoked this trend, as these working class people were given the opportunity to ascertain ‘their sense of who and what they are’ and were given a ‘voice’; a ‘voice’ which has almost been silenced in the field of sociology (Charlesworth, 2000:146).

To complement the interview data, participant observations were undertaken. The incorporation of participant observations within the research permitted the opportunity to engage with the participants, both on a one-to-one-basis and as part of a collective cohort, and to see, first hand, how they interacted with others and collaboratively constructed relationships (Heidegger, 1962). As was noted earlier in this chapter, phenomenologists believe that all ‘Dasein[‘s]’ are interconnected, as their nature is ‘social’ and ‘intersubjective’ (Brandom 2005:222-223; Heidegger, 1962:153). In order to unearth this, I needed to interact with the ‘Dasein[‘s]’ (the older people), have conversations with them (using common forms of ‘communication’), engage in their activities, become one of their group and ultimately document what I saw, heard and felt (Heidegger, 1962:145; Heidegger cited by Brandom, 2005:223). The undertaking of participant observations, alongside interviews as part of a broader ethnographic methodology, unearthed what it meant to the participants to ‘Be-in-the-world’ and the significance of being co-dependent within a ‘*with-world*’ (with others in Meir North) (Heidegger, 1962:153,155). As Heidegger (1962:155) proclaims, ‘Being-in is *Being-with* Others’, and therein it was of importance that I became part of my participants’ world, that I observed their

behaviours and social interactions, and uncovered their inter-related nature through undertaking participant observations.

Participant observation is divergent to structured observation because it deters the ethnographer away from simply ‘staring’ at their participants like external objects and drawing conclusions about their behaviour without giving them a voice to explicate their own actions (Madden, 2010:97-99). Whilst positivists may encourage such objectivity, preferring an ‘*a priori*’ approach rather ‘*a posteriori*’ (denouncing the significance of experience), this type of pure observation leads to a ‘coercive power’ over participants as they are judged and appraised without consideration of their feelings or motives (their ‘Being’ is not considered) (Bray, 2008:299; Heidegger, 1962:78; Madden, 2010:97-99; May, 2001:148). The conjoining of observation with participation helps to deconstruct this hierarchy of power, as the ethnographer can reflexively postulate what they see on the outside, when they look into the social setting, with what they see and understand on the inside, when they are in the social setting, and derive cross-comparative data that encompasses both perspectives (Madden, 2010; May, 2001).

Moreover, as Bray (2008:300) notes, this approach is also ‘intrinsically sensitive to the subtlety and complexity of human social life’, because the researcher can embed their own entity in the same social field as their participants, engage in communicative relationships, and react to facial and bodily expressions (rather than attempting to ‘fit [their] findings into purpose-built categories’ which are rigid and meaningless in design and fail to account for individual heterogeneity). Therefore, my aim was to ‘immerse [myself] in the social world’ to which my participants belonged,

to try to comprehend their behaviour and unearth the meanings they attach to their culture, community and environment (May, 2001:149). Whilst this type of data is considered 'soft' by quantitative researchers (because the researcher disconnects their own self from their participants), for qualitative researchers, especially those who affiliate with phenomenological and interpretivist perspectives, this is essential for gaining 'deep knowledge' and understanding of people's social worlds (Bray, 2008:298, 300; Della Porta and Keating, 2008:31).

I did not want to merely watch people and objectivise their actions, but sought to engage with much more challenging practices, notably linked to immersion and embodiment (Madden, 2010:98). What these terms both infer is that I sought to 'get close' to my participants by embedding myself within their culture and trying to understand how they think about, and view, their world (Emerson et al, 2011:1-2). According to Emerson et al (2011:3), the notion of 'getting close' is central to any ethnographic study as the ethnographer can immerse themselves into other people's worlds and try to discern their everyday life experiences and values. This is undertaken on two levels. In the first instance the ethnographer observes or 'gaze[s]' at their participants and their actions to comprehend how they contribute to their life-narratives, and secondly, they gain privileged access into the participants' worlds through engaging in interactions and local events in order to become more familiar with their local discourse and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1993:2; Madden, 2010:99). It is through this participation that 'intersubjective embodied understandings' are formed, as both the ethnographer and the participants interact, engage in conversation and share their experiences of being within the field (Madden, 2010:98). This immersion is not an uncomplicated process as it requires a process of 'resocialisation', whereby

the ethnographer has to learn what it is to become a ‘member’ of the world which they are exploring, they have to ‘adapt to a local area and culture’ and constantly try to analyse the meanings and moral codes of those who inhabit such a space (Bray, 2008:298; Emerson et al, 2011:3).

It was during the ethnographic research that I tried to become a ‘member’ of the older people’s lifeworlds in Meir North (Emerson et al, 2011:3). I met the older people at the local community centre, and engaged in many activities with them, including knitting (or attempting to anyway), cooking classes, quizzes, creative art classes and many other activities. The older people would gossip and chat whilst they engaged with these activities, and it was during these sessions that I developed inter-personal relationships with them, trust and friendship. I would enjoy a cup of tea with the older people, alongside a piece of cake baked by Wilma, and talk about what they had done that week, where they had been, who they had seen, and what they generally thought of the area. I looked forward to seeing them and they enjoyed seeing me every week. I also helped out in the kitchen, an area which was typically closed to only the chosen few (as determined by Wilma, the leader of the group, who only allowed a few of her favourite people to run the kitchen) and got to know some of the quieter members of the group. I washed and dried many dishes, emptied many plates and cleaned many tables, just so I could get to know all the older people who attended ‘*Luncheon Group*’ and ‘*Friendship Group*’. Often the older women who I helped out in the kitchen, such as Flo, were quite shy, and therefore this gave me the opportunity to get to know them more, on a one-to-one basis, and to develop rapport with them – many laughs and jokes were had in that kitchen.

In addition to this, I also walked with Wilma to her house (in the local area), and got to know more about her and how Meir North had changed along the way. She often carried many bags of shopping and had a trolley because she provided all the food for the members of '*Luncheon Club*' and '*Friendship Group*'. I would help her with these and as we walked, we talked. Wilma told me that she did not have a car, and therefore she made a trip to the supermarket to get the food needed for the other members of the groups two or three times a week. Even though she was one of the oldest members, she would make these journeys every week because she liked to help others. When I pointed out that that was a very kind gesture, she did not see it as kindness, as she believed that anyone else would do the same and she enjoyed it (she did not perceive her contribution to be of significance – although every person I spoke to thought very highly of her and nobody else would give their time in the way that she did). I also travelled on the bus with Betty quite frequently. She was a very funny lady, she was always telling jokes to the other members of the group. She was quite small, but had a huge personality. However, on the bus, a different side of Betty was shown, a more vulnerable side, which was often masked by humour and sarcasm in group interactions. Whilst Betty did laugh and joke, behind closed doors she was actually very lonely because she had never had children and she was a widow. She travelled once a week to the next town (because Meir North did not have the facilities she needed) to collect her groceries, visit the bank and the hairdressers, and most importantly, to see other people, and interact with them. She felt so isolated and lonely that she travelled on the bus just to meet others, and to feel a sense of inclusion. Hence, it was only through conducting participant observations that I could unearth this information, that I could get to know quieter members of the group, that I could understand the lives of those who gave the most to the local community, and

that I could really get to discover just how lonely some of the local, older residents were in Meir North.

Conversely, this process was complex because even when I felt that I was fully immersed within the field, that I could perceive ‘events and meanings’ in a similar way to those around me, my inclusivity was never as ‘natural’ as those who were traditional members because there was always an element of externality due to a feeling of ‘strange[ness]’ (Emerson et al, 2011:3-5; May, 2001:157). Whilst my class, gender and ethnicity were the same as many of the participants, there was a significant difference in our ages and this produced divergent ‘world-views’ and ‘sense[s] of reality’ (Charlesworth, 2000:132-133). As will become evident later in this thesis, a great paradox emerged within the findings because the older people were very critical of younger people, and did not understand their way of life, a life which I, as a woman in my late twenties, also share. Part of the issue here, is that whilst my roots are embedded in a working class culture, I (as well as many other younger people) have not experienced the exact same conditions as those in old age due to alternative trends in education, work, consumption, debt etcetera, and therefore intergenerational disparities and tensions arose. The skill of reflexivity thereby became particularly pertinent because, in essence, I had to try to understand the behaviours and perspectives of the older participants whilst being at least 30 years their junior, possessing a divergent ‘Being-in-the-world’ and being part of a cohort to whom they frequently directed criticism; this was not an easy task (Heidegger, 1962:78).

In relation to the observations that were undertaken, in the initial stages I considered what I should 'see' and 'not see' and where my 'gaze' should be aimed (Madden, 2010:96). It became apparent that observing was not just a 'passive act', but was determined by what I deemed significant and potentially useful for my research (Madden, 2010:97). According to Madden (2010:101), a 'systematic eye' is usually adopted wherein observations are 'bracket[ed] off' according to specific requisites, such as 'structural' and 'behavioural elements'. May (2001:160) affiliates with this perspective, contending that 'to take notes on anything and everything which happens is not only impossible, but also undesirable' and therein observations need to be, even if only partially, structured. However, before these 'elements' are noted, it is worth signposting that caution was paid to this act of 'bracketing off' because the most advantageous aspect of undertaking this methodological practice is to view the unknown, to witness forms of behaviour that challenge preconceptions, perplex the observer and lead inductively to new forms of thought and theory (Madden, 2010:97,101). As is noted by Harvey and Knox (2011:109), 'for what really matters to us [ethnographers] are the things we know we cannot know in advance'. Hence, Bray's (2008:303,313) theory of 'sensibilising concepts' became invaluable for this process, because I did not go into the field with a rigid theoretical framework or 'definitive concepts' that required verification, but allowed the data to naturally lead the analysis. Thereby, the 'bracketed off' observations outlined below were merely tentative, they were not inflexibly defined and they were not constructed on the assumption that I already 'kn[e]w what [was] important', and just simply had to find the data to support my contentions (Madden, 2010:101; May, 2011:148);

'Structural' observations¹⁰ (italics in original) – Once within Meir North, observations were made of the local area, including the community centre and the houses, green spaces and the local town, inclusive of shops, the healthcare centre, takeaways, boarded up properties and the roads (and the traffic).

'Behavioural' observations¹¹ (italics in original) – In the first instance, the behaviours of the participants were noted, notably during their interviews and during the community activities to gain an understanding of how they felt (i.e. whether participants were happy and content, or sad, anxious, angry, frustrated and so forth), how they interacted with others, and to what extent they appeared to be part of a community (i.e. how did the members interact? Did they give each other hugs or were they more formal and distant, such as only saying 'hello'? Did they appear friendly, inclusive of showing a caring attitude towards others? Did they laugh with each other? Did they share stories about their families and friends? Was there a sense of mutual respect and solidarity?).

Furthermore, the language of the participants was also observed to identify whether the tenets of the neoliberal discourse had infiltrated into their consciousness's, and had helped to create common norms, values and perspectives. In particular, focus was turned to any

¹⁰ (Madden 2010:101)

¹¹ (Madden 2010:101)

comments which referred to self-responsibility, identity, work and consumption. In addition to this, conversations or comments concerning the local area or the local people were noted, alongside broader political, economic and social issues, linked to employment, crime, the state of the environment and so forth. Finally, conversations were had with the participants in order to ascertain what they did during their spare time, and who they had seen over the previous week, including family, friends and neighbours.

To capture these observations and '*inscribe*' social discourse, I '*wr[ote] [it] down*' (italics in original), as Geertz (1973:19) suggested, in a timely fashion to avoid 'early sensitivities' to unfolding events being lost (Cited in Emerson et al, 2011:17,19). It was during the writing up of the field notes that I became closer to my data because I had the time and space to understand what I had witnessed and experienced, I could consider aspects which I felt uncertain about, and new theoretical questions could be raised as part of a process of 'reflexive rationalisation' (Harvey and Knox, 2011:112; May, 2001:154). It was through the writing down of these notes that an 'intense relationship' arose between myself, the world in which I was immersed and the recordings, encouraging reflection upon my 'way[s] of seeing' the world and how interpretations were generated from my 'interior' self (Madden, 2010:117-120). I was given privileged access into the older people's social 'realities', wherein, piece by piece, I came to understand what it was like to live within this disadvantaged place under conditions of austerity and inequality (Berger and Luckmann, 1971:35). The production of field notes served as a form of 'data generation' that helped to contextualise and consolidate the data gathered during the interviews and to

inductively (rather than deductively) establish new theoretical postulations (Mason and Dale, 2011:20).

A common criticism to be directed towards note taking is that it can undermine the 'naturalness' of the setting (Madden, 2010:128). If participants know that they are being observed and their actions are being recorded, they may alter their behaviour, interactions with others and/or language, referred to as adverse 'reactive affects' or the 'Hawthorne Effect' (Berg, 2009:207; Emerson et al, 2011:4). I would therefore become 'an independent variable in the study' because my presence had the potential to influence the actions of my participants and ultimately impact upon the findings (Bray, 2008:304). However, whilst recognising this prospective weakness, there are three points to consider. Firstly the ability to control one's actions (as a form of what Goffman (1959) calls 'impression management') is never long-lasting as it could be argued that acts of resistance arise from the 'conscious' rather than the 'unconscious', the superficial part of the brain wherein change tends to be only temporary until a return back to the 'natural' state (Foucault, 2008; Holloway and Jefferson, 2008:309,315). Therefore, it is unlikely that the participant's demeanor was inauthentic for the entire research period (they are likely to have forgotten why I was there). Secondly, I became part of the group over time and thereby as Stoddart notes, there was an '*erosion of visibility by time*' (italics in original) (cited by Berg, 2009:208). Whilst at the beginning the participants would have been acutely aware of my presence because I was new and looked different to the other members (as previously noted, they were considerably older in age), as time passed, I just became viewed as another member of '*Friendship Group*' and '*Luncheon Club*' and therein the participants acted naturally and I captured the authentic nature of the observed

scenes (Berg, 2009:207). Lastly, whilst the participants within this study did know that they were being observed prior to the event itself, unrepresentative behaviours were deterred or at least minimised through the careful use of note-taking i.e. by ensuring that the notebook and pen were never brought out in front of the participants and all notes were made after the event. For example, I often began to record notes on the bus on the way home from Meir North, and subsequently completed the notes at home on the same day that the observations were undertaken. Therein, observations and participation in group activities were prioritised, followed by the creation of notes in order to deter as far as possible what Madden (2010:128) calls ‘exaggerated ethnographic characters’.

Although semi-structured interviews and participant observations, inclusive of fieldnotes, were useful, all these types of methods produced a similar written narrative of how neoliberalism and the economic recession have affected older people’s lives in Meir North. This is not necessarily disadvantageous as the data collected was rich and meaningful, but as Pink (2007:1) and Madden (2010:106) note, the photographic method can extend these written texts because it presents another way of ‘seeing’ and enables a visual interpretation of space, the environment, and physical objects like no other method and is therefore a central part of ‘being ethnographic’. Researchers who utilise the photographic method are considered ‘*bricoleurs*’ (italics in original) because they connect, like a ‘skilled craftsman’, data with the social setting in which it was derived in order to create a new theory (they essentially ‘assembl[e] bits and pieces into a whole’) (Neuman, 2011:177,425). Moreover, photographs are considered a powerful resource because a reader can get lost within an image, they can ‘step into the picture’ and try to understand what it is like for those people who

reside there, referred to as a 'safe form of ethnographic travel' (Madden, 2010:106-108). The reader can be transported from their current setting to the one depicted in the photograph(s) and can see for themselves that the place described is the one that exists, thereby encouraging a sense of 'real[ness]' (Madden, 2010:109). Thus, one of the principle aims of utilising the photographic method is for the reader to engage in an insightful and meaningful ethnographic adventure.

Photography is also of importance for understanding the relationship between the individual (the 'Dasein') and their environment (Heidegger, 1962:78). Although the interviews and the participant observations unearthed verbal narratives of what it was like to live in Meir North, and what the older people thought about their local environment, including the local town, they could not provide a visual account like photography. By taking photographs of the local area, I could situate my own body within the same space as the older people, reflect upon being there, and consider the connection between the older people's narratives and the environment in which they were produced (Heidegger, 1962). As phenomenologists contend, the individual cannot be separated from the environment, they are entwined, and therein their viewpoints, perceptions, and attitudes are intrinsically connected to the space in which they are embedded (Heidegger, 1962:80-88,145). Rather than perceiving these different forms of data as unrelated, they were, within this study, viewed as inextricably inter-connected, as the photographs helped uncover the meanings (the signs and symbols) entrenched in the older people's verbal responses and embodied in their behaviours and interactions (Heidegger, 1962).

In spite of these advantages, numerous scholars such as Harper (1988), Harrison (2002), Madden (2010) and Pink (2013), have argued that the use of photography in sociological studies has largely been undeveloped because sociologists prioritise the written word over the visual and leave imagery to disciplines which are well versed in employing this method, notably anthropology, medicine and cultural studies. As Pink (2012:8) states, even in the '1970s and 1980s', the employment of the photographic method was 'still highly contested and often marginalised'. Sociologists tend to see the world through a lens of text rather than pictures, which can lead to the critical belief that they 'behave as though they were sightless' (Chaplain cited by Harrison, 2002:856). Whilst this criticism may be an over exaggeration, as some sociologists (including those aforementioned and others such as Banks (2007), and MacDougall (1997)), have tried to challenge the 'hegemony of text' through the employment and representation of photography, especially since Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's groundbreaking *Balinese Character (1942)*, there remains much scope for development in this area and this study seeks to contribute to this growing field of research (Harper, 1988:58; Madden, 2010:107). The visual is not considered a secondary alternative, but an important methodological element with significant *sociological* value due to its ability to enhance our understanding of the complex social world to which we all belong (Harper, 1988:58; Madden, 2010:107).

Hence, during my time spent in Meir North, a plethora of photographs were taken depicting the local area, inclusive of the local town, and objects that the older people had made such as knitted teddy bears, knitted clothing, and a wooden car. These images were to 'value add' to the other forms of data collected, specifically the textual descriptions (Madden, 2010:108). It was through the creation of these images

that the findings were authenticated because they reaffirmed the key points (i.e. the older participants stated that the local town consisted largely of hairdressers, takeaways and boarded up shops, and the photographs visually supported these descriptions) and gave ‘authority’ to the claims made due to me actually ‘being there’ (Madden, 2010:108). Furthermore, in relation to the photographs taken whilst walking *‘through and in’* (italics in original) Meir North, a deeper level of knowledge and understanding was gained of the area because I could embed myself within the locality and experience it like a local resident (Pink, 2013:82). Whilst the photos depict motionless pictures of buildings and the environment, they are useful because I can think back to my journey through the area and recall what I saw (an area in decline), what I felt (an overwhelming feeling of alienation) and what I experienced (such as traffic and fumes) which is not encapsulated in the images (Pink, 2013:82). These supplementary forms of information have been conveyed to the reader in the analysis chapters in both written and visual form, to enable them to empathetically comprehend not only what it was like for me, as the researcher, to be in Meir North, but also, and most significantly, what it is like for the older people to live within this area which has experienced considerable economic and social decline (Pink, 2013:86).

When referring to the ‘real[ness]’ of the image this is not to imply that the photographs are an objective form of factual evidence; that the image displayed is an exact representation of reality and exists without refutation (Madden, 2010:109). It is alternately referring to the ways in which this ‘real[ness]’ is socially constructed according to who is taking and interpreting the photographs (Madden, 2010:109). Whilst positivists may proclaim that photographic imagery is an ‘object’ of study that

portrays an outside reality, notably an external reality to the ethnographer's entity, phenomenologists and interpretivists antithetically contend that knowledge is derived from within the ethnographers' consciousness and the images are shaped by the 'positionality of the researcher' (Durkheim, 1964; Pink, 2003:189). Therefore, the images depicted were not neutrally determined because I saw 'things' in relation to my own discipline, and recorded only what I believed to be of significance (Madden, 2010:112). Although this approach could attract criticism because the data is deemed subjective and the researcher is granted an inequitable amount of power, Berg (2009:325) notes:

'It is the very fact that these documents do reflect the subjective views and perceptions of their creators that makes them useful as data in a case study. It is precisely through this subjectivity that these documents provide information and insight about the subject that might not be captured through some other more pedestrian data-collection technique.'

I also continued to adhere to the principle and practice of 'reflexivity' which had been upheld during the interviews and participant observations (Pink, 2003:189). I reflexively appraised the 'internal 'meanings' (the narrative) of the photographs and considered how and when they were constructed (Pink, 2003:189; 2007:186). In particular, I adopted both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' position and viewed the environment through my own eyes *and* the eyes of those who lived within Meir North, specifically using the information gained from the interviews and the conversations I had with the participants as a guide (Madden, 2010:111). I understood

that a plethora of meanings could have been attained from the images received and many perceptions derived according to the 'stage of [the] ethnographic research' (Pink, 2007:68). As Pink (2013:75) aptly states, the meanings of photographs can alter because it 'depend[s] on who is looking, and when they are looking' because the longer the researcher is within the field, the more they are likely to shift from their own interpretations to that of their participant's due to forming a greater understanding of the significance of the depicted image(s) (Pink, 2013:75).

To help show this process of 'reflexivity', attention is turned to the following photographs (see Figures 2 and 3) which depict the community centre wherein the older people met for both '*Luncheon Club*' and '*Friendship Group*' (Pink, 2003:189). When I first arrived at Meir North and took this photo, the centre just looked like an old house which appeared to have been renovated in some ways, such as the application of a silver sign on the right hand side of the building, but it did not appear as anything spectacular. It was not an attractive building and it did not appear to have had much investment (the changes made appeared superficial, like the silver sign was there merely to detract attention away from the decaying framework of the building). Upon entering, I considered the building to be run down, to be cold and to lack character because it had only basic facilities, including a small kitchen with rudimentary appliances, such as a cooker and a microwave, a bathroom (which looked like a hospital bathroom suite) and a large room with metal tables and chairs and unadorned decoration (there was cream paint on all the walls and what appeared to be a stained carpet); it was all very clinical and uniform in content and design. There were also bars in front of the windows in order to protect the building from unwanted intruders, leading to feelings of apprehension and vulnerability. This community

centre did not feel like a nice place to be, I did not feel safe and secure. When I first walked in, I wanted to walk straight back out. My consciousness instantly reacted to what it saw and experienced and encouraged my body to run away. This was my first reflection, my first mental note about the place.

Figure 2: Meir North's community centre



Figure 3: The unadorned interior decoration of the community centre



However, during my time within Meir North, notably spent with the older people within the community centre, it became evident that this was so much more than a lifeless building. The older people relied heavily upon this space because without it they would not see each other and for them, there would be no sense of community. The older people did not care that the chairs were hard and largely uncomfortable, or that the tables had only a minimalistic design or that all the walls were cream, what mattered to them was that the building provided a place for their friends to come and have a chat with them, to engage in fun activities and enjoy social occasions. When the older people sat down to eat their lunch, they were not thinking about where they were eating, or what they were eating off, they only cared for the people to whom they were sharing the space with (their friends), and suddenly I saw the building in a

very different way. This dark and dreary place became viewed as a friendly and welcoming place. The décor had not changed, but I now recognised the symbolic meanings which were attached to it by the older people, and the possibilities that it permitted, such as allowing friendships to develop and feelings of loneliness to be deterred.

The sentiments attached to this building are truly epitomised by the following photographs (Figures 4 and 5), because the older residents had a party to celebrate having access to this building for five years. They blew up balloons, put banners on the walls and on the tables, Wilma made a large decorative cake and party food for all the guests, and during the celebration the older people reminisced about what they had done during their five years within the building. The party was like that given to a relative, the thought, preparation, love and sentiment that went into it showed just how much they cherished the building and the pride they felt for having been able to utilise its facilities for this period of time. This ultimately reinforced just how special this building was for the older people, it was a warm place, a place of laughter and happiness, and most of all, a place of community wherein they could be surrounded by likeminded people, their friends, who significantly enriched their lives. When reflecting upon my own thoughts about this place it became evident that I had prejudged this building according to my own perceptions and '*interpretation[s]*' (italics in original) of the images that I saw (I do not normally engage in activities in such spaces) and had attributed meaning according to my own experiences and life-world (Heidegger, 1962:89). My relation with this environment was not the same as the older people and therefore had I not undertaken this study, and engaged with the participants in the way that I did, then these significant meanings would never have

been discovered (Spurling, 1977:28,35). My 'Being-In' this community centre was not initially the same as the older people's 'Being-In', but I subsequently came to understand their 'Being-In', highlighting the advantageous nature of the ethnographic methodology (Heidegger, 1962:79).

Figure 4: A birthday cake made to celebrate five years of using the community centre



Figure 5: A party to celebrate the use of the community centre



Thematic Analysis and Innovative ‘Way[s] of seeing’¹²

To help unearth the key findings within the data, thematic analysis was undertaken. According to Boyatzis (1998:1), this type of analysis presents an innovative ‘way of seeing’ because it enables the researcher to identify an ‘important moment’ (referring to the process of ‘seeing’) and to subsequently ‘encod[e] it’ because they ‘see it as something’. The discovery of a theme is linked to ‘*seeing*’, whilst the coding of this is classified as ‘*seeing as*’ (italics in original) (Boyatzis, 1998:4). It was during this analytical process that I took both an objective and a subjective approach towards the

¹² (Boyatzis, 1998:1)

data, because whilst I stepped back from my findings in order to allow key themes to arise, especially ones which I had not anticipated, I also determined the nature and content of the themes utilising my own frame of reference (from my own state of 'Being-in-the-world'), which another researcher may not have identified utilising the same data (Boyatzis, 1998:3; Heidegger, 1962:78). Furthermore, thematic analysis allowed me to retain both a 'close' ('insider') and 'distan[t]' ('outsider') position during the analysis process because I could systematically and 'rapid[ly] access [my] data' and code the texts, whilst keeping my distance through abstract and higher-level interpretation practices (Bazeley, 2007:8).

Thus, in relation to the ethnographic research undertaken in Meir North, a significant amount of data was gathered and in the initial stages it was difficult to ascertain what the key themes were and if and how they linked together; it was hard to 'see' anything due to the 'fuzz[iness]' of the findings (Boyatzis, 1998:1,4,5). However, this form of analysis was advantageous because not only did it permit patterns to be identified in the data (it de-fuzzed the data), but it also recognised that there were 'multiple versions of reality' within society and therein it could deal with the complexity of the findings that emerged from this qualitative study (Boyatzis, 1998:1-5; Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016:33). To begin this process, all the field notes were typed up and the interviews (inclusive of the joint and single interviews) were transcribed, which took a significant amount of time because, as May (2001:137) asserts, 'a one-hour tape can take eight or nine hours to transcribe fully' and all of the interviews lasted longer than this outlined period. The transcribing of the interview data allowed me to get close to my participants because by re-listening to their voices, I could re-visualise

their expressions and re-live their emotions, enabling further consideration of the 'significances' that had arisen from their 'conscious[ness]s' (Charlesworth, 2000:26).

Following on from this, the data was uploaded onto NVivo software in order to conduct coding practices and a 'more rigorous analysis' (Bazeley, 2007:3). In the first instance, all the imported data was read, line-by-line, and grouped according to themes which arose. This process was undertaken quite liberally, as a term (node) was used to summarise a highlighted passage, such as 'making, fixing, growing items', 'nostalgia', 'negative stereotypes of the young', 'limited job opportunities', 'crime', 'isolation', 'loneliness', 'community ties', 'family support', 'friendship' etcetera (Bazeley, 2007). In total, 111 nodes were produced. Following this, the nodes and the information collected within them, were further analysed to try to establish over-arching themes (referred to as sets) which would constitute the key themes for the analysis chapters (Bazeley, 2007). This took time, and required a lot of deliberation and thinking as I needed to understand what the common thematic threads were that connected all of the nodes (Bazeley, 2007). Over time (requiring constant reflection), I managed to identify that the overall themes of the data were 'fragmentation', 'consumerism' and 'community', which were then utilised to establish the foundations of each analysis chapter.

It is worth noting here however, that whilst some researchers may break their data up by coding a word or a sentence (they fracture their data), I coded by paragraph in order to ensure that the meaning and 'richness' of the findings were not undermined (Neuman, 2011:512). The coding of 'chunks' of data was also of use for the writing-up stage, because I had access to detailed responses that could be placed into the

appropriate chapters, and did not have to contend with broken text (Neuman, 2011:510). By undertaking this analytical process and not fragmenting the data, I became further embedded in the every day lives of the older people because I could sense their frustrations and anger, and feel their fears concerning the changes to Meir North and their everyday lives (Charlesworth, 2000:26). The coding of data constituted far more than the undertaking of a qualitative form of analysis, a mere process, as it enabled me, as the researcher, to postulate the ‘problems of the people’ and to relive and re-experience the feelings and emotions that they expressed (Charlesworth, 2000:26). This process (which necessitated the ‘mobilising [of] feelings [within] myself’) has ultimately led to the older people’s narratives and feelings being presented ‘linguistically’ (vital for understanding their state of Being) and being portrayed in a honourable manner (Charlesworth, 2000:26).

Ultimately, thematic analysis was employed to make the data more manageable, to identify key themes, inclusive of themes which had not been considered before this process had been conducted (such as crime), and to ‘play with ideas’ in an imaginative and innovative way (Marshall cited by Bazeley, 2007:9). These central themes will become evident throughout the remainder of this thesis, as in the next chapter (chapter three) there will be an analysis of the theme of *fragmentation*, notably class fragmentation, and how this has affected the identity and daily lives of the older people in Meir North. Chapter four will focus on the theme of *consumerism* and the divergences between younger and older people in relation to the consumption of commodities and attitudes towards debt. Finally, chapter five will examine the theme of *community* and the ways in which neoliberalism, specifically its concentration upon individualism and egocentricity, has affected older people’s ties

with their families, friends and neighbours. It is through the reading of these chapters that it will become apparent just how beneficial thematic analysis was for creatively identifying ‘way[s] of seeing’, and effectively unearthing the complexities of the older people’s social ‘realities’ (Boyatzis, 1998:1; Berger and Luckmann, 1971:35).

Ethics and Morality

Before concluding, the issue of ethics is considered because, as Richardson and McMullen (2007:1115) note, ‘nobody involved in researching ‘the social’ can avoid confronting ethical issues’. Adhering to ethical codes infers that the researcher has behaved in a moral way because they have made decisions about their participants ‘on the ground and in [their] heart’ that embody both ‘integrity and legitimacy’ (May, 2001:46; Soobrayan, 2003:122). Ethical issues should not just be considered during the research process but deliberated whilst the research is being developed, so that the very design is embedded with a dominant ‘code of ethics’ (Neuman, 2011:143). In accordance with this principle, in the initial stages of the research design I sought ethical approval from Keele University’s Ethical Review Panel. This was gained due to the research proposal inferring that an ‘ethical attitude’ would be shown towards the older participants and ethical practices would be rigorously upheld (Josselson, 2007:537). In addition to this, during the very early stages of the research, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check was undertaken to safeguard the older participants within the study, especially as the ethics committee considered them to be a particularly vulnerable cohort. Once these preliminary checks and procedures had been undertaken, permission was given to enter the field and begin the ethnographic

research. It was from this moment that I adopted Stake's (2000:447) guiding and informative principle:

‘qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict.’

Although there were no major risks involved in this research, one of the greatest challenges of working with the older people was ensuring that they did not hurt themselves, including tripping over objects in the room where the interviews were undertaken, making sure that appropriate chairs were provided so that their bodies were not put under any physical strain (some of the older people could not get up from low level chairs), that the room was warm enough (the community house was not frequently used and therefore often the heating had not been turned on for days) and that they did not fall up or down the steps as they entered the community centre. To help combat these issues, before the interviews were conducted the allocated interview room was examined for any potential risks, and this often necessitated the moving of items, such as boxes and books, the checking of chairs to ensure they were of an adequate height, the turning on of the radiator, and I stood at the entrance of the community centre to greet the older people and to provide assistance if any was needed to gain access into the building. Due to these precautions, I upheld my ‘ethical obligation[s]’ to the participants as they were treated with respect and dignity, and they were not exposed to any form of risk or harm (Berg, 2009:60).

All names of the participants were made anonymous to protect them from being identified. However, it should be noted that there still remains the possibility of identification because the research was conducted in one place, utilising purposive sampling, and therein friends and family of the participants may be able to recognise their narratives. As is noted by Richardson and McMullen (2007:1117), ‘meaning and significance of information depends on what is already known by those receiving it’ and therefore ‘simply...removing or changing names’ does not make the data completely anonymous. Thus, the identification of participants is largely unavoidable due to the nature of the research, and whilst it would have been desirable to have been able to proclaim complete anonymity and ‘disguise’ the participants, this would have been an ‘unrealistic guarantee of confidentiality’ (British Sociological Association (BSA), 2017; Corbin and Morse, 2003; Josselson, 2007). Hence, to overcome this ethical problematic, participants were informed of their potential identification and a critical and cautious approach was taken during the writing-up process, including the use of pseudonyms for *all* names, inclusive of participants and their friends, family members, neighbours and associates who they personally named within the interviews or during the observations (Bryman, 2008; Josselson, 2007:537).

It will also be observed that there has been no attempt to disguise the name of the place where the research was undertaken. Significant consideration was given to this issue, as there appears to be a noticeable trend in the social sciences to refrain away from mentioning a specific place, i.e. scholars prefer to state where the area is in the country, such as a ‘northern’ or ‘southern’ town or region, or according to the city to which it belongs, such as ‘Manchester’, ‘Liverpool’ or ‘Newcastle-Upon-Tyne’. In particular, Neuman (2011:152) and Wiles (2013:51) both draw attention to this issue,

and contend that some researchers use a ‘fictitious...location’ or ‘pseudonyms’ for the place they have studied in order to completely hide its identity. Thus, instead of directly referring to the area of Meir North, I could have stated that the fieldwork was conducted in North-West England, North Staffordshire or in Stoke-on-Trent, or even utilised a fictitious name.

However, the decision was made to directly refer to the place for a plethora of reasons. Firstly, many scholars who discuss this issue have acknowledged the futility of this practice when photographs have been used in the research, as is the case for this study, because the identity of the area is immediately unmasked (Christians, 2000:139; Wiles, 2013). Secondly, during the interviews many of the participants directly referred to how the area had declined, which is likely to be recognisable to those living within, and outside of, Meir North and therefore anonymity could not be completely assured even if the name of the area was not specifically noted (Wiles, 2013:46). Finally, there is disputation here, because if I were to remove all the information that directly referred to the place, such as photographs, specific quotes and other identifying evidence, significant issues would arise such as the deliberate manipulation of findings, inconsistency between what was unearthed whilst in the field and what was presented to the reader and the distancing of myself from what I had studied (Neuman, 2011:152). Hence, the ward name has been incorporated into this research with the intention to overcome these complexities and to present an authentic and meaningful representation of this place and its people.

Informed consent, referred to by Berg (2009:87) as meaning the ‘knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation’, was also gained. Those who participated within the study were provided with an information sheet which explicated the research aims, why they were chosen to engage with the project, what the research involved, inclusive of the methods that were being employed (interviews, observations) and their temporality, what role they would play in the research process, that there were no risks attached to participation and how the data would be stored (Corbin and Morse, 2003:349). Furthermore, all participants were requested to complete two consent forms. The first form asked participants to sign upon the agreement that they understood what was expected of them in accordance with the information provided, they knew they could withdraw at any point from the research, all collected data would be made anonymous (as far as possible) and tape recordings (for the interviews) and handwritten notes (during the participant observations) would be undertaken. The second consent form sought permission for quotes to be used within the thesis, both verbatim and in shortened form (see the Appendix for a copy of these forms). All informants were therefore given useful and explanatory information and the ‘important ideal’ of ‘voluntary participation’, based upon knowledge and choice, was upheld (as advocated by the principlist tradition) (Berg, 2009:78,89; BSA, 2017; Wiles, 2013:14).

However, it is worth mentioning here that the older people did struggle with these formal processes. In the first instance, many of them felt a little overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork to complete and by the signing of the consent forms due to arthritic conditions and/or the alien feeling of using a pen. In order to help combat

some of these issues, during the interviews the participant(s) were asked if they wanted a cup of tea or coffee, which was made in the community centre's kitchen by myself or Wilma (a key gatekeeper), so that they would relax and feel comfortable and would not feel like the process was unduly formal or strenuous. Following this, every participant was reassured that there was no rush, so they did not feel like they had to go along with the interview without really understanding its implications. The information sheets were read to the participants to help with their comprehension of the project, and points were further elaborated utilising language that was more familiar to them (due to the sharing of a common dialect this was a relatively simple process). At regular intervals the participants were asked if they had any questions and once the information sheet had been explained, the participants were asked if they understood what the research entailed. This process alone took about 20-25 minutes and therefore extra time was allocated for each interview, and no more than two interviews were undertaken on one day due to the imposed time restraints (the community centre needed to be locked by a resident after the clubs had ended).

This procedure was also followed for the gaining of consent for the participant observations, as when I first arrived at the community centre and met the older people, I introduced myself, explained why I was there, provided the context for the project, and asked the members whether they would want to participate in the study. An information sheet was given to every person who attended and this was read out to the group, and again, discussed in a more accustomed language, before consent forms were distributed. It is of importance to note here that it was difficult to inform every individual who attended '*Luncheon Club*' and '*Friendship Group*' that they were part of a study because some only attended once or twice during the research period and

no appropriate moment arose to inform them, i.e. they would be having a conversation with their friends, or eating lunch, or playing bingo, etcetera. Thus, only the key informants, notably the members who attended every week, were informed, and for those who did not know about this research, no key quotes were taken and no identifying data was recorded, only general notes about their behaviour as a group, i.e. that the group members were very friendly, they were a tight-knit group, they enjoyed the group activities and so forth. Furthermore, upon reflection, if another study of this type were to be conducted, alternative types of consent, such as gaining verbal consent using a recording device, would be considered as this would have overcome some of the difficulties experienced.

Finally, attention is turned to one final ethical issue which continued to remain active throughout the research; the inequitable power relationship between myself as the researcher and those who were researched, summarised as a 'politics of power' (Soobrayan, 2003:111). In particular, Miles et al (2014:60) refer to the 'gift' relationship between a researcher and their participants, as the latter give their 'time, insight, and privacy' in order for the former to collate data, create theories and ultimately acquire qualifications. This is true in relation to this research, because whilst the participants showed great dedication to this project and provided informative data, they did not receive anything in return, as they were not paid for their time (this was deemed unethical, as the participants lived within a deprived area and therefore this may have appeared as a form of bribery) and they did not benefit substantially from their participation in the research (although many said they enjoyed the experience) (Miles et al, 2014:60). This 'gift' was given by the participants to me, as the researcher, with no expectations to receive anything back and once owned I

could, as with any ‘gift’, do what I liked with it (I could, like Berg (2009:79) notes, ‘manipulate’ it, although this was not the case), indicating the power dimension in this relationship (Miles et al, 2014:60). Ultimately, the ‘gift’ was respected, it was shown gratitude and it will be forever cherished, but it was received without reciprocation; it was in essence an unfair exchange which even the most ethical of researchers cannot ignore or overcome.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has explored the ethnographic research that was undertaken to unearth the impact of neoliberalism and the economic recession upon deprived older people living within Meir North. As has been highlighted, the phenomenological tradition provides the foundations for this research, alongside inter-connected branches of philosophy, including interpretivism and social constructionism. The basic epistemological/ontological teachings of these perspectives are that every individual’s (‘Dasein’s’) ‘state of Being’ (inclusive of their physical entity and consciousness) is situated ‘in-the-world’, referred to by Heidegger (1962:78) as ‘Being-in-the-world’. In order to understand the world in which they live, we as sociologists and researchers need to draw from their perceptions, which are ‘*temporal*’ (italics in original) and ‘*social*’ (italics in original), and construct a detailed and ‘meaningful whole’ (Brandom, 2005:222; Quay, 2016:489; Spurling, 1977:28).

To elucidate what it was to ‘Be-in-the-world’, especially for those living within Meir North, a detailed analysis was conducted of the local area, the social milieu and the environment (Heidegger, 1962:78). This examination identified not only that this area was predominantly a space for the marginalised (the poor, the uneducated, the unemployed, benefit claimants), but also that it harbored deeply racist and prejudiced ideas about ethnic minority groups, i.e. anybody not White-British. Around the period of the recent recession, many of the local residents within this area voted for the British National Party (BNP), a party that staunchly advocates the needs of ‘local people’ (born in Britain) first, over others, such as ethnic minority groups (bnp.org.uk). When faced with a deteriorating environment, inclusive of boarded up shops, few green spaces and significant social housing (a symbol of social failure), alongside a heightened sense of fear and insecurity due to crime and rising levels of ill health, many of the people in this area came to believe that the only way out of this destitution was through voting for a Party that proclaimed to know the answer to this perplexing and challenging reality – lower immigration and increase defence against the demise of traditional British culture (bnp.org.uk). Hence, for many local residents ‘Being-in’ Meir North meant voting for a political party that offered a series of radical policies which seemed to help the poor bolster their own status (recognise that they were worth more than deprivation and inequality) and provide a logical solution to the issues experienced (even if this actually involved scapegoating and processes of ‘Othering’) (Tyler 2013:27).

The ethnographic approach enabled me, as the researcher, to unearth what it was like for the older people to live within Meir North since the onset of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and the recent economic crisis (Brewer, 2000:25). I tried to understand

their ‘life-world[s]’ through adopting an insider role, taking their ‘point of view’, and attempting to ‘see, think [and] feel’ like they did; I attempted to unravel the ‘webs’ which they had ‘spun’ (Geertz, 1973:5-16; Schutz, 1940:125; Tedlock, 2000:457). In particular, I undertook a process of ‘*subjective soaking*’ (italics in original), wherein like water seeping into a sponge, I seeped into the social reality which I was exploring and studied its nature from the ‘inside’ out (Ellen cited by Berg, 2009:191). As part of this ethnographic journey, I was ‘reflexive’ and recognised that my perspectives were shaped by ‘value-relevance[s]’ that were derived by my own culture (Madden, 2010; Weber, 2003:114). I recognised that my consciousness was embedded within a specific context and there was an interconnection with other human entities; my ‘Being-in’ was also a ‘Being-with Others’ (Heidegger, 1962:155). I thereby considered how my own subjectivity and ‘Being-in-the-world’ had impacted upon the nature and form of this research (Heidegger, 1962:78).

The ethnographic methodology adopted a case study design to enable an in-depth exploration of the social phenomena being explored, and to allow meaningful ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions to be answered (Yin, 2009: 20, 42). This type of design granted the opportunity for high theory to be applied to social life, embedded in a real-life place context, which is one of the central objectives of this thesis. Moreover, the methods undertaken as part of this ethnographic research including semi-structured interviews, participant observations and photography, helped to ‘shine [a very bright] light into’ the effects of neoliberalism and the recession (Geertz, 1973:23; Neuman, 2011:241). The semi-structured interviews unearthed the attitudes of the older people, particularly concerning their local environment, consumerism and debt, their relationships with others, including their friends, family and neighbours, and their

wellbeing, which will be revealed later in this thesis. The different types of interview (with single and multiple participants) also permitted valuable insight into how knowledge is socially constructed within society (knowledge that was made prior to the interview) and how it is ‘arrive[d] at, or alter[ed]’ according to social influences (how knowledge changes during social interactions and becomes ‘intersubjective’) (Berg, 2009:165; Schutz, 1940:125). Ultimately, it was through conducting these interviews that the typically ‘ignored’ working class were given a ‘voice’ to ‘articulate their experiences’ and I could comprehend their everyday realities (Charlesworth, 2000:145-146; Tyler, 2008:20).

In addition, the participant observations permitted the opportunity for me, as the researcher, to reflexively consider what I saw on the outside, as I looked into the social setting, with what I saw on the inside, when I was within Meir North, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of this place and its people (May, 2001). Once I had ‘immerse[d] [myself] in the social world’, I undertook the complex process of embodiment as I got ‘close’ to my participants, I observed their actions, and I engaged in interactions with them, enabling ‘intersubjective embodied understandings’ to be formed and a positive ‘resocialisation’ process to be undertaken (wherein I learnt how to be a ‘member’ of another culture) (Bray, 2008:298; Emerson et al, 2011:3; Madden, 2010:98-99; May, 2001:149). Whilst at times this process was difficult because even though I was immersed within this new setting there was a perpetual feeling of ‘strange[ness]’ (notably because of the age differences between myself and the participants, and our divergent life-trajectories), I still sustained a high level of reflexivity and reflectivity which meant that I could stand back from my own

positioning and understand the older peoples perspectives which had been constructed from their own 'Being-in-the world' (Heidegger, 1962:78; May, 2013:42).

Conversely, whilst the data collected from these methods was useful, they all produced the same kind of data (they all presented written accounts of how neoliberalism and the economic recession have affected the lives of the older people in Meir North), and therein the method of photography was also incorporated. The utilisation of photography was considered beneficial because it allowed for an alternative way of 'seeing' and provided the opportunity for divergent interpretations of data, which is considered essential for "being' ethnographic' (Pink, 2007:1; Madden, 2010:11). It was through the use of imagery that a more meaningful account was produced of the phenomena being studied, because various elements (like written and oral narratives, observations and fieldnotes) could be accumulated into a singular image creating a more coherent 'whole' (Neuman, 2011:177, 425). The images taken reaffirmed and validated the other forms of data, they added 'authority' to my perceptions, they provided 'real[ness]' and most significantly, they reinforced my 'being there' (Madden, 2010:108-109,112; Pink, 2003:189).

Furthermore, thematic analysis encouraged an innovative 'way of seeing' the data, in both an objective (as I stepped back from my data) and subjective (I interpreted the data according to my own perspective) manner, allowing for distance and closeness to be achieved simultaneously (Boyatzis, 1998:1,8). In the initial stages of data analysis it was difficult to 'see' what the key themes were, however due to the openness of this analysis technique and its ability to cope with 'multiple versions of reality', themes began to arise (Boyatzis, 1998:1-5; Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016:33). The

utilisation of coding practices, inclusive of the coding of ‘chunks’ of data, not only ensured that the findings did not become fragmented but also that they retained their richness and meaningfulness (Neuman, 2011:510). It was through this process that I could recall memories of being in the field and of engaging with the older people, and I could remember reactions (my own and the older people’s) to specific situations and questions, and key themes could be identified, such as ‘fragmentation’, ‘consumerism’ and ‘community’, that subsequently came to shape the remaining chapters with this thesis (Charlesworth, 2000:26).

Finally, underpinning this ethnographic research was a dominant ethical and moral framework that served to safeguard and protect the older people who partook within this study. I sought to make decisions about the older people ‘on the ground and in [my] heart’ and ensure their protection from any form of harm, alongside showing respect and sustaining their dignity (May, 2001:46; Soobrayan, 2003:122). One of the most perplexing ethical issues to arise during this research process was the unequal relationship between myself, as the researcher, and the researched (the deprived and marginalised older people). Although I recognised that the older people were giving a very precious ‘gift’ to me, inclusive of their beliefs and values (a part of their self), I knew I could not reciprocate; it was an inequitable relationship (Miles et al, 2014:60). However, it is because of this altruistic ‘gift’, which was given with such kindness, that I have been able to unravel the older people’s ‘perceptions’ of the world, identify how they make ‘sense of [their] world’, and ultimately ascertain what it means to ‘be in a world’ conditioned by neoliberalism and austerity which constitutes one of the central aims of this research (Burr, 1995:56; Charlesworth, 2000:64; Miles et al, 2014:60; Weber, 2003).

Chapter Three

The Antagonistic and Divisive Nature of Neoliberalism:

Conflict, Discord and Fragmentation

'It is a matter of morality...you should always earn what, you know, you should always try your best and earn something for what you get. I mean, it's like a fundamental thing; it's like nature really'. [Flo]

In order to understand how neoliberalism and the recession have affected the lives of older people, notably those living within Meir North, this chapter seeks to explore the tenet of employment, which lies at the crux of these global processes. As was highlighted in the introductory chapter, dominant discourses linked to the economy and work have been disseminated throughout society since the late 1970s, and the aim of this chapter is to unearth how they have helped to shape the older people's knowledge and understanding of their world (their 'worldhood of the world') and the people with whom they share this world with; their state of 'Being-in' (Heidegger, 1962:79). In particular, this chapter focuses upon the older people's attitudes towards employment, specifically benefit claimants who challenge societal expectations of resilience and self-dependency (Foucault, 2008). Following this, the life trajectories of the older people are compared with that of younger people to help explicate their divergent views and experiences, and the theme of nostalgia becomes of significance as the former try to comprehend contemporary society through a nostalgic lens. Finally, the chapter concludes with an exploration of how the 'class war', initiated by Thatcher's conservative government, has systematically fragmented the working class

and embedded feelings of apathy, hopelessness and despair deep into its collective consciousness (O.Jones, 2012:194).

The Undeserving, Iniquitous and Immoral ‘Undesirables’

According to the participants within this ethnographic study, the social milieu of Meir North has fundamentally altered over the last few decades due to the local council’s initiative to transform this area into a ‘dump[ing]’ ground [Sylvia] for ‘undesirable’ people [Harry and Robert] who have been ‘thrown’ out of various places across North Staffordshire because of their anti-social behaviour [Sylvia]. As Sylvia notes:

‘At one point there was a lot of erm...erm...young people that had got nowhere, you know that had been thrown out of home, they ha[d] got nowhere to go and they put them in the flats...you have got quite a few living in the flats up there. They have lived in Fenton, they have thrown them out of the houses in Fenton, they’ve been to Bentilee, they have thrown them out of Bentilee and they have come to the Meir.’

The belief that these people have been ‘thrown’ from one place to another and have subsequently been ‘dumped’ into ‘the Meir’ [Sylvia] encourages stereotypical preconceptions as the older generation theorise that these new residents must possess destructive, immoral and discourteous behavioural traits, such as being ‘loud, bad mannered’ and capable of causing ‘absolute chaos’ [Harry]. These assumptions are not derived from a well-informed and evidence-based discourse, but from commonsense understandings (embedded with ‘value-ideas’ and ‘value-judgments’)

of the world, wherein bad behaviour and iniquity appear as logical causes for the expulsion and transition of this cohort (Weber, 2003: 107, 109). The acceptance of this view enables the older residents to philosophise that the shifting of these entities is part of a broader plan of human governance, as Harry states:

Harry: In the council's wisdom, they started to draft other families into the area, erm...how can I put it? I think they were shifting the undesirable tenants, that's when the anti-social behaviour started. You see the council's idea was then, they knew, they knew that people in Meir were nice, law abiding...well most of them, people, so they thought 'right, we will get these odd families, plonk them in the middle of the good families and it might rub off. It didn't work.

Harry's use of language, notably the terminology of 'undesirables' and 'odd' helps to effectively create boundaries between himself and what he infers to be 'good' and 'nice families' (which he is part) and, by logical inference, the bad and the dangerous who have been coerced to live within Meir North. These people are perceived to be 'odd' because they supposedly demonstrate 'anti-social behaviour'; they effectively defy common etiquette, norms and values [Harry]. Harry is displeased with the 'council's idea' to try to mix divergent social groups together in order to reform people who possess 'undesirable' characteristics, as he considers the plan a failure, 'it didn't work'. Conversely, antipathy towards the new residents is not uncommon, as many of the other participants were also critical of their immoral behaviour, including their lack of work ethic and dependency on benefits. The older people believe that all subjects should govern their lives around the rationale that if you 'put nowt in, you

get nowt out' [Wilma], an ethos which they adhere to and value, and seek others to follow. As Flo aptly summarises:

It is a matter of morality...you should always earn what, you know, you should always try your best and earn something for what you get. I mean, it's like a fundamental thing; it's like nature really. I mean you don't expect nature to keep providing if you destroy nature, do you really? I mean, it is just common sense but some people can't see that can they? They just get used to everything being there for them, and they will always expect it, they always will.

It is clear that Flo, like Wilma, understands this way of life to be both rational (it involves an equitable relation between the individual and the state i.e. you put something in, you get something out) and 'natural' (because if human beings continually take from the welfare state without replenishment (as is the case in the natural world), it will collapse). The act of working is considered pivotal to the right of benefits because only those who have contributed to the system are considered deserving of welfare support, with a few notable exceptions such as the 'really disabled' [Flo, Molly], the 'sick' [Marjorie], those living with a 'health problem' [Molly] and those who work part time due to a family member being ill [David], as these are considered 'genuine case[s]' [Molly]. In addition, all the participants were asked the question of 'Do you think there are responsibilities or obligations attached to the receiving of welfare benefits, specifically those linked to health and employment benefits and why do you think this?' Whilst this question did not specifically refer to benefits that were provided by the state for older people (it was an

open question), many of the participants immediately defended their own positioning and the receiving of a pension and a free bus pass. They took this opportunity to reinforce the view that they are deserving recipients of welfare, and that they are moral people, with a hardworking ethic and good values:

Martha: I feel what I am getting is what I have paid in. You know. I do disagree with anybody who is drawing money that has never paid in. I do disagree with it because, I mean, why should we pay in all those years and they get the same as us. I have always paid a full stamp with regard to being able to live comfortably in my old age, which is what I am doing. So, I don't feel as though the state are giving me anything because I have paid it in. That's how I feel.

Marjorie: Erm...well I mean if you have paid into your pension or like, I paid into my local government pension as well, you have worked X number of years, then I would say you have an entitlement because you have done something to earn it, you have been productive.

Joint Interview:

David: As far as our pensions are concerned we have always worked. Yeah, erm...we haven't frittered our money, er...we have looked after our money. We have looked after our kids, the house and what have you, so...and we have paid in over a good number of years, so really that is our pay back, our pension is our pay back.

Alice: The bus pass, I don't feel guilty.

David: No, neither do I.

Alice: I always get on the bus and look at all the grey hairs and think 'this bus is running for nothing today on this trip', because they are all grey hairs and then I will say to myself 'yeah, but I have paid my bus fare when I was young'. You know and I did then because I worked and I did use the bus then and I sit there okay then.

These older people feel no sense of shame in receiving benefits because they have worked hard all their lives, 'pa[id] in all those years' [Martha], been responsible with their money (they haven't 'frittered' it away) and spent their earnings wisely on their 'kids', their 'house' [David] and on supporting the public transport system [Alice]. Now that this cohort have reached retirement age they consider themselves to be deserving claimants of welfare, whether this be in the form of state pensions and/or free bus passes because they have contributed, and fulfilled, their duty to the state. By contrast, people who do not work and unjustly seek benefits become targets of social disapproval and criticism because they oppose the contemporary logic of reaping what you earn; they simply take without giving back. The following comments highlight the older participants' dissatisfaction with those who are unemployed:

Robert: You see where we live, they are all coming past our house and going to the school and you see them. I mean some women have got about three children and they are having more and you look at them and you think 'they are only in their 20s you know', and then a lot of their husbands

are with them, so it is obviously not working, they are on benefits or something you know.

Sylvia: I mean I can't believe these young people, you watch them go, when I go out of a morning, and none of them go to work because it's the world they live in, they shouldn't go to work. As long as they have got enough money to do this, that and the other, why do you go to work?

Olive: I do know that some people live on benefits and have lived on benefits I suppose most of their life. Erm...and sometimes like I get...not exactly cross, but you know I think to myself 'goodness me', you know. There's a lot of us that have worked all our life and paid for everything, paid our National Health etcetera and even now, whatever we want we still have to pay for, you know, and you get these others that have never done a damn days' work in their life and they get everything for free. It does sometimes make you very angry. I mean okay, I know some people as I say, I know all cases are different, but I mean I've worked practically all my life, I had about four years off that was about all, and since then I have worked and even if you are getting a pension these days, you know, you are taxed on it. I think to myself sometimes 'the tax I must have paid probably keeps a family in idleness', you know...and when your family have always worked as well. I mean you know, never been off sick, well unless they have been really ill etcetera, erm and they have paid their way, you know it's, it is a bit disheartening sometimes, it is a bit disheartening.

Thereby, it is evident that a discourse of immorality pervades the thinking of these older people, as they all demonstrate disapproval of ‘young’ people who are in their ‘20s’ and are dependent upon state welfare. Roberts’ comments affiliate with Smith’s (1987:112) recollection of sitting on a train in Ontario and her presumption that she was watching a ‘family of Indians...standing together on a spur above a river watching the train go by’, because he, like Smith, imposes meaning onto these objects of observation without granting them a voice (an action which Smith (1987) later criticised). Smith’s (1987) interpretation of this visual image is embedded within her own personal frame of reference and subjectivity, like Robert’s interpretation of these families going to and from school. Robert confidently asserts that the women must be the mothers of the children, the men with them must be their husbands, the young people must be their children and both parents must not work because they take and collect their children to and from school at times when most employed people would be at work, and thereby the benefit system is ‘obviously not working’. Robert has rationalised the situation through creating a narrative that accords with what he observes and thereby does not question his condemning attitude, such as whether the parents may work in the evening, or what relation the two adults may have (they may be brother and sister, or friends) or whether they could be walking their friends’ children to school. Like the “Indians” in Smith’s account, these people have been attributed a relation to one another whilst they, as objects of critique, have been not been granted a voice to explicate their positioning; they have become merely silent bystanders of disdain.

Moreover, Sylvia similarly draws from a commonsense narrative believing that unemployment has become a way of life for young people, as they appear to deter away from working like an unwanted disease with the understanding that state benefits will be provided unconditionally. Olive's response extends Sylvia's critique, as she utilises particularly strong language ('goodness me' and 'never done a damn days' work') to signify her annoyance and frustration that those who do not work seem to 'get everything for free'. When she recalls her own experiences and how many years she was in employment for ('practically all [her] life'), she becomes 'very angry' that there are people who live in 'idleness', who refrain from working although being physically well, and who see it as their right to use state services, such as the National Health Service, despite not contributing to its functioning. The thought that there are indolent people in receipt of hardworking tax payers money affects Olive's wellbeing as she ultimately feels 'disheartened'. Similar contentions were derived from a conversation between a married couple during their joint interview:

Dennis: I think it is too easy for them to get benefits; they don't have to do anything to get it. There is a lady who works here from the council and I was talking to her the other day, and there is a lady who lives at the bottom of the street, we call her the Von Trapp, she has got eight children...

Lilly: Number nine is on the way.

Dennis: Number nine is on the way and she said that 'she came over and had a right go at me over benefits'. She [said] she [was] losing '525 pounds a week'...losing!

Lilly: Because they have started to cap.

Dennis: Apparently, they cap 500 pounds per house. She said ‘we have worked it out and I am going to lose 27,000 pounds a year in benefits’.

Dennis’s and Lilly’s narratives signify a multitude of feelings, including bewilderment, as the woman already has eight children and is expecting her ninth, and anger because she cannot afford to pay for her children and instead relies upon the state to sustain their livelihoods. The tone in which Dennis said ‘losing’ within the interview implied complete disbelief that anybody could receive such substantial benefits off the state, especially as this amount rivals, and in many cases exceeds, the pay of a working person. This married couple, like the other participants identified earlier, value a form of morality which precipitates that people must work and take responsibility for their own actions, and therein disapprove of this woman’s lack of economic drive and dependency upon benefits. In particular, it is of significance that these older people refer to this family who live ‘at the bottom of the street’ as the ‘Von Trapp’ family (taken from the film *The Sound of Music*). The application of this name signifies ‘expulsion’ because, as Menninghaus (2003:11) contends, ‘disgust and laughter’ are ‘complementary ways of admitting an alterity’ (Tyler, 2008:23). Dennis and Lilly are essentially mocking this woman for having so many children and not being able to independently provide for them, and consequently ‘fix’ her, and her family, as an ‘object of comedy’ (Tyler, 2008:23). It is through this act of mockery that these older people essentially construct boundaries between their own entities and this immoral welfare recipient (they have created “them” and “us” categorisations)

and elevate their own social status; Dennis and Lilly do not believe they belong in the same class as the 'Von Trapp' family, they believe they hold a 'superior class position' (Tyler, 2008:23).

Furthermore, the unwillingness of young benefit claimants to give back to the community in any way causes great contempt. Whilst working is considered the most valued way to earn benefits, as Wilma notes it is about what you 'put in', the older people recognise that not all people will choose this way to give back to society and thereby believe that they should, at the very least, repay society's generosity through helping others in the local community:

Flo: I think it has gone a bit too far to change things....I mean even if they just tried to do a bit, you know, there is plenty of jobs cleaning places up and helping old people with their gardens or things that they can't do themselves you know.

Marjorie: I think they should be encouraged to strive more and do things. I mean I can't see the point in getting benefits...if it [is] going up in smoke, going up your nose, going inside you, rotting your gut, for what? What are the joys of that? You could be doing something to help somebody. Why not help somebody in the community.

Dorothy: I do think there are things that they could put some of these young ones in as regards tidying the area up or doing an old persons garden or doing something to earn their benefits, you know. I don't know what they do

these days, but whatever, yes I think they should earn a bit more,...like er...voluntary work, anything, should be doing something, yeah, they should. I feel that anyhow, I don't think they should just be handed all this...some of them do seem to have an easy life and I think they should earn, do a bit more voluntary work or whatever else there is to do and earn the money.

Martha: They are giving people what they deserve but they are also giving people what they don't deserve and they ought to be made to work for it, in one way or another. If there isn't work, then do old people's gardens, do old people's painting outside, fencing and that. You earn the money, I am dead against it.

Hence, these narratives signify that the older people believe that many 'undeserv[ing]' people are receiving benefits [Martha], especially because the financial help provided is considered as 'go[ing] up in smoke, go[ing] up [their] nose, [going] inside [them] [and] rot[ting] [their] gut' (implying that the money received off the state is being spent on drugs) [Marjorie]. Furthermore, it also frustrates this older cohort that those who do not deserve benefits also do not give back to the 'community' [Marjorie] through 'cleaning places up', 'helping old people with their garden[s]' and undertaking 'voluntary work' [Flo, Dorothy, Martha]. As Dorothy and Martha note, those on benefits should 'earn their benefits', they should be 'made to work for [them]' and if they cannot, then they are 'dead against' them receiving any benefits from the state. According to Tyler (2013:10,165), derogatory preconceptions of welfare recipients, like those held by the older participants, help to 'legitimise

‘tough’ economic measures’ such as the retracting of state benefits, and provide ‘consent’ for the ‘punishment [of] the poor’. Those people who appear to take from the state without giving anything back to society are cast as ‘*revolting subjects*’, because they disgustingly believe that society owes them something without personalised contributions (like the ‘Von Trapp’ family [Dennis and Lilly]) and do not show any form of morality (Tyler, 2013:3). As such, the actions of benefit claimants come under increasing scrutiny and boundaries are firmly drawn between the good citizen (one who works and provides for their own self) and the ‘Other’ (the dependent and self-centred welfare claimant) (Tyler, 2013:27).

The question which arises from these narratives is why do the older people believe benefits have to be earned? The answer lies in the way their ‘state of Being’ has been constructed (Heidegger, 1962:78). As was noted in the second chapter, every individual’s ‘state of Being’ is positioned ‘*in-the-world*’ and their entity is constructed out of their everyday experiences (Heidegger, 1962:78). In relation to the older people, their ‘state of Being’ has been significantly shaped by the neoliberal discourse for over 30 years, causing their consciousness’s to be brimful with notions concerning the detrimental consequences of welfare dependency for societal and economic advancement (Heidegger, 1962:78). This cohort believe with every atom of their being that a ‘Big State’ is a hindrance to market growth and self-responsibility, as individuals like the ‘Von Trapp’ family [Dennis and Lilly] and the ‘undesirable[s]’ [Harry and Robert] would seek benefits rather than work, and therefore a ‘Big Society’ is required, embedding an individualised morality at its core (Bone, 2012: 2-3). These older people accord with David Cameron’s belief that the ‘Big State’ is to blame for the contemporary ‘economic ills’ in the UK, including the national debt

issue and the installation of inappropriate and inefficient attitudes towards work, and therefore it has to be overturned by a society that places emphasis upon self-discipline and individual accountability (Bone, 2012:3).

The older people accord with the political right's belief that individuals should adopt 'technologies of the self' and overcome personal adversities such as poverty, unemployment and/or ill-health through privatised strategies (Foucault cited in Lemke, 2002:2). Rather than perceiving the construction of the 'Big Society' as an attempt by governments post 1979 to 'abdicate from [their] responsibilities', they alternatively accord with the seemingly logical formula of self-help, especially during times of austerity (Bone, 2012:5,11). The older people buy into the new 'austerity moralism', imposed by neoliberal governments and global institutions, that portrays those on benefits as 'taking advantage' of those who work hard and deliberately undermining the stability of society through challenging 'traditional values' (Forkert, 2014:43). This new form of 'moralism' has helped to introduce a discourse of 'social anxiety', and reinforced the older people's beliefs that all individuals should look after their own self and deter hardships in order to prevent societal collapse; failure to do this is considered a 'personalised [and] naturalised' fault of the individual (what Bourdieu refers to as 'sociodicy') (Bourdieu cited by Atkinson, 2010: 2.5; Forkert, 2014:43). The role of the state is therefore no longer deemed to be to protect citizens from insecurity as social policies are considered socially regressive, but to grant them the autonomy and freedom (through work) to personally and efficiently create 'individual utopias' centered around the notions of personal sovereignty, self-regulation and reflexivity (Giroux, 2008:112; O'Byrne and Hensby, 2011:36,38).

In relation to Ong's (2006:6) theory of the 'disarticulat[ion] and rearticulat[ion]' of citizenship, the older people evidently accord with the neoliberal belief that benefits should be aligned with market forces and the ability of the individual to contribute in a meaningful and profitable way to both the national and global economy. The self-governing and self-responsible are deemed as worthy and 'preferred citizens', whilst those people without conceived 'competence or potential' are 'noncitizens', they are non-beings unworthy of status, entitlements and social rights (Ong, 2006:6-21). The older people have used this discourse to create divisive dichotomies between the deserving and the undeserving recipient of welfare, with only those who are excluded from the labour market through no fault of their own being given authentication to receive state help, such as the 'disabled' [Flo, Molly], the 'sick' [Marjorie], those with a 'health problem' [Molly] and/or those living with somebody with a long-term illness [David]. Those who 'put nowt in, [and] get [a lot] out' [Wilma], and do not have a just cause for welfare dependency, are considered as being undeserving because they have not utilised their 'competence [and] potential' to self-govern their own actions (Ong, 2006:6,15,16). These undeserving claimants are ultimately perceived as holding views that benefits are a right rather than something to be earned, and this vehemently opposes the older people's sense of morality and 'state of Being' (Heidegger, 1962:78).

It could also be argued that the 'undesirables' [Harry and Robert] are perceived by the older participants as being 'moral monster[s]' of society (Foucault, 1999:81). These individuals are considered as having broken the 'natural' moral code of society, and as demonstrating unnatural characteristics, such as self-dependency, a lack of discipline and un-reflexivity, and therein are considered 'abnormal' (Foucault,

1999:91). *Choosing* to be unemployed and relying upon benefits are believed to be irrational and '[un]intelligible' decisions (linked to madness), just like undertaking mindless crimes such as theft and burglary, as there is no 'natural' justification for such abuse(s) (a discourse which Flo directly states) (Foucault, 1999:81,113,114; Schirato et al, 2012:96). As a result of the amalgamation between unemployment and 'bio-criminality', those who do not work without a legitimate reason and 'draw money [but have] never paid in' [Martha] are consequently perceived as being deserving of punishment, like any other criminal, in the form of lowered benefits, stigma (the attributing of the label 'undesirables' is part of this, as this term has throughout history carried negative connotations of a pariah group [Harry and Robert]) and social exclusion (Foucault, 1999:81,113-115; Schirato et al, 2012:96). It is only through this retributive system that the un-natural tendencies of the 'abnormal' [the 'undesirables'] can be reduced and the sickness of others by this social 'disease' can be prevented (Foucault, 1999:91).

Conversely, whilst the older participants believe that people 'should always try [their] best [to] earn something for what [they] get', and that this is a 'matter of morality' [Flo], Giroux (2009b:33) argues that such thinking is part of a much wider power paradigm wherein the wealthy seek to start a 'war of all against all' with the utilisation of the neoliberal discourse. The elite, or more specifically the 'vampires', use their power to influence the minds of the social body through the bombardment of messages, largely disseminated through the media, to reinforce the tenets of self-responsibility and self-earned wages as an obligation of 'social citizenship' (Giroux, 2009b:33,35). All those who adhere to these derived principles, such as the employed, are deemed worthy of living because the 'vampires' can extract their lifeblood (profit)

from their entities and ‘feed off [their] souls’ (Giroux, 2009b:31). Whereas all those who do not contribute to society, like the unemployed, are considered as mere refuse, as ‘fodder for the human waste-disposable industry’ that can be left to die (Giroux, 2009a:29).

This theory affiliates with Foucault’s (2008) notion of ‘biopolitics’, whereby individuals believe they have the freedom to act and think according to their own individual desires, drives and instincts, when in reality those with power and knowledge govern their behaviour and thoughts in accordance with the neoliberal ideology. However, rather than this discourse being infiltrated into human cognition by institutions through a top-down approach, Foucault (1999) proclaims that it becomes part of the social consciousness through a bottom-up approach, notably through social interactions on the ground. The notions of working hard and being independent are therefore embedded within everyday language and are employed to help found a paradigm of normative behaviour (Foucault 1999). Thus, both Giroux (2009b) and Foucault (1999) highlight how the powerful within society utilise their position to shape the thinking of the common body and strategically manipulate who is included within, and who is excluded from, society. The older people’s narratives accord with this, as they signify that they perceive themselves to be morally superior to younger unemployed people due to their former contributions to the economy. These older people thereby initiate a verbal attack on these lifeless non-beings with the conviction that their beliefs and actions are both cogent and ‘natural’ [Flo] (Giroux, 2009b:32).

Worlds Apart: Divergent Life Trajectories and Intergenerational Conflict

The antagonism between the older participants and unemployed younger people becomes even more evident when comparisons between these two cohorts are outlined. Many of the older participants reflected upon their own lives and the adversity they had to overcome in their youth, wherein only restrictive protections were offered by the state:

Dorothy: I have never been on the dole in my life, ever. I have always worked you know, but I do think like when we finished work to have children, you didn't get all these benefits to say 'in six months time', or whatever it is, 'you can go back to work', when you finished you finished, end of story, you know, you just had your child allowance and that was it. You didn't get all this...what they have now, didn't get your rent paid for; you didn't get anything like that. You just had to make the most of it. If you were on your own well it was your family that paid and that was it, you didn't get all the help that they get now, nothing.

Flora: ...things have changed a lot regard[ing] the giving of money. I mean when I was left with two young children, it was what they called national assistance then, I was only twenty-two, and when I asked for them to come out and see me, they said 'how old are you?' and I said 'twenty-two' and they said 'well you are young enough to go out to work aren't you?' You know, that is what we got.

Ronald: Well from my point of looking at it, there's too many benefits paid. When I was young there was no such thing as benefits, if your parents didn't go to work you got nothing. So why on earth are they just paying people now to have big families, to do nothing? They are putting them in houses; they are paying all their rent and everything for them just for doing nothing. In my day and age, when I was brought up, you got nothing at all, you had got to go out and work and if you couldn't pay your rent you were kicked out and you had to go and just sleep rough, there was no such thing as benefits whatsoever, you couldn't go anywhere, no social services, nothing. And that's how it was. I can remember...I come home from school when I started school at five, I [went] in the pantry, nothing, not a thing, you used to be as hungry as anything. I mean today they have got these food banks and they say they are starving; they don't know what starving is like. I used to be that hungry, I used to get some bread, put some sugar over it, then pour tea over it and have that. You would have to have that for your tea, we had got nothing. People don't know what it is like to be without food.

These recalled memories of suffering and hardship deter feelings of sympathy for those who are contemporarily receiving benefits as they do not truly 'know what it is like to be without food' [Ronald] or to bring up children as a single parent without support [Flora and Dorothy]. When Dorothy, Flora and Ronald desperately needed help because they had children to support and/or had no money, the state turned its back on their requests and they were left in a desperate situation wherein their survival, and that of their family's, relied upon their own self-sufficiency and ability

to find alternative solutions. This reality however is not believed to be experienced by younger people today because whilst they may be unemployed [Robert, Sylvia, Olive] or have children to feed, like the 'Von Trapp family' [Dennis and Lilly], the state proffers help in the form of benefits and 'food banks' [Ronald] and thereby they are not left in a state of destitution like the older people were in the past. As a result of these reflections, those in old age feel a sense of injustice (and perhaps even envy), as they perceive that younger people are currently receiving more than they did when they were young, signifying an inter-generational form of prejudice, and therein feelings of empathy and compassion are systematically removed.

Moreover, what becomes apparent from these viewpoints concerning benefits and the welfare system are that the older people view the current world through a nostalgic lens. Drawing from the ideas presented in the introductory chapter, it could be argued that whilst the older people struggled when they were younger, they still believe this way of life should be experienced and replicated by all generations because this is considered the correct way of living; it is a paradigm for all ethically principled people to follow. The older people do not understand this seemingly new way of life because it does not accord with their own past wherein they had to work and survive, and therein they have created a 'defence mechanism', notably in the form of a right-wing discourse, to help protect against this unknown and ambiguous world which threatens uncertainty and insecurity (Boym cited by Bauman, 2017:3). The older people 're-invest [their hopes] into the vaguely remembered past' because this was a period wherein people had the right kind of beliefs and they understood the value of being self-reliant and self-responsible (they worked even when they were 'left with two young children' for instance [Flora]) (Bauman, 2017:6). It is in the past that the

older people find comfort, as they can re-affirm their own identity and appreciate that they, unlike the young today, are survivors with a deeply embedded moral core.

Conversely, whilst the narratives and actions of these older people accord with the neoliberal schema and the ideology of 'bio-criminality', they do fail to appreciate the difficulties that the young are contemporarily experiencing, particularly in relation to the withdrawal of employment opportunities within recession hit Britain (Foucault, 1999:113-114; Schirato et al, 2012:96). The young unemployed people within Meir North may be considered lazy and immoral, but the stringent austerity measures imposed on all countries by the IMF and the World Bank as part of the 'shock doctrine' have significantly undermined employment opportunities, leading to a systematic reliance upon state welfare (Klein, 2008:140). These older people do not understand this reality because they themselves have not been placed into this situation and therein have no comprehension of the 'life-worlds' of these young people (Spurling, 1977:9). As Frith (1984:60) notes, the unsympathetic attitudes shown towards the young is likely to stem from a lack of understanding because in the past, specifically in the '1950s and 1960s', many working class people could leave 'school at 15', go 'straight to work', typically within factories, down mines and on iron-ore extraction sites and 'earn relatively good money'. This contention is applicable to the older people within this study as the following passages indicate:

Flo: I mean when I was young you could get a job on any factory, pot bank or anywhere...you could finish at one place and start another the next day, if you were experienced you know.... It was a good trade and [you made] good money really then, you know.

Martha: I mean I worked at the Meir, it was my first job, a place called Wally Wembley. I used to do Saturday mornings whilst I was at school in my last year and then as soon as I finished school on the Friday, on the Monday I started work at the Wally Wembley, which was like a little supermarket up there on the Meir and there was a fish shop up the Meir, that was my brother's first job, he worked there for a good while, at the fish shop up there, yeah. Then I heard that they were getting a lot more money on the Potteries, so I gave that up after about twelve months and went to work on the Potteries for quite a while....Oh yes...when I was fifteen, you could walk out of one job on a Friday and into another job on the Monday on a Potbank, easy, it wasn't a problem. I mean I was working on one pot bank and er...I went down during my dinner hour, got a job, finished up there and started there the following week, that's what you could do then because there was a lot of work on the potteries.

Patricia: When I left school, I went straight into a job and I worked until I was sixty years of age.

David: When I was young, well, you could walk out of one job on the Friday and walk into another one on Monday.

Ronald: I mean I started work when I was fourteen, retired when I was seventy, never had a day on the dole...I have always worked you see.

Robert: I mean when I left school you could, I mean I stayed in the same job for three years before I went into the army and err...people could leave one job and get another one the next day.

Dennis: You know I have never been out of work...when we left school there was a job...I have worked since I was sixteen and I finished at sixty-five.

This generation not only had the opportunity to take up a job for life and benefit from job security and stable wages, but they could also shift from one job to another within days in accordance with their own interests and aspirations for wealth, largely due to the prosperity of the pottery industry. In addition, by referring back to the narratives of Dorothy, Flora and Ronald, it becomes clear that whilst times were hard, particularly for Flora who ‘was left with two young children’ and Ronald who ‘used to be as hungry as anything’, there was at least work for these people and their families to undertake that could, whether at that current moment or in their future (when their children had grown up), help improve their lives¹³. It is due to this enforcement of work and the experience of hardship and adversity that these older people have come to affiliate with the neoliberal, and increasingly right-wing philosophy, that dependency represents a ‘weakness of character’ (Pykett, 2014:3). The older people believe they survived in much tougher times than the young and therefore there is no excuse for the latter not to give back to society through work or, at the very minimum, voluntary work and the helping of others.

¹³ For example, Dorothy commented that she had ‘always worked’ and Ronald stated that he ‘had to go out and work’, implying employment opportunities were available.

However, the world has changed. The combination of de-industrialisation policies and the recent economic recession have caused mass unemployment and all people, regardless of class, to feel a sense of deficiency and insecurity as they are left fighting for a small number of vacant jobs as part of a war on unemployment (Durkheim, 1984:303). As Wacquant (2008:241) aptly synopsis, life has become about ‘survival and relentless contest’; only the fittest and more able will survive. Conversely, this ‘fierce’ contest is not fought with the same strength as working class people lack the power (knowledge and understanding) and weapons (qualifications and skills) to succeed in such a battle (Durkheim, 1984:292). In contemporary society, employers are increasingly pushing for ‘machines’ who they can invest in and demonstrate an aptitude in communication and technology, leading many skilled working class people who are untrained in such areas (like those in Meir North) to fall further and further backwards into trenches of hopelessness and despair (Durkheim, 1984:292; Foucault, 2008:224-226). Even when these people try to go over the top, they cannot get up and out of this dangerous position without putting their dignity and selfhood on the line, and often such endeavors prove futile because their attributes are weaker than those of middle class and more technically minded opponents; as was noted previously, they are ‘use-less subject[s]’ who do not have a ‘value’ within contemporary society (Bauman, 2003:123; Skeggs, 2004:62). As a result of this constant battle, and often the lack of employment that follows, many working class people believe they have failed to adhere to the societal aspiration of ‘individual perfection’ and consequently feel a sense of failure (Durkheim, 1984:307).

To further exacerbate this already disadvantageous economic positioning, the young in Meir North have also had to contend with the detrimental consequences of inequitable urban development (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Across a series of days, at divergent times, I explored the local town in order to acquire a more representative and diverse image of this place and attain a greater understanding of what it was like to 'Be-in' this area (Heidegger, 1962:79). However, what resulted was a feeling of homogeneity and monotony, as every time I entered the town I was exposed to the same type of sights and sounds, and experienced the same feelings of estrangement and indifference. The reasoning behind these sensory and personal experiences is that the amount of traffic that filtered through the town was extensive, as cars and lorries were tail-to-tail moving slowly forward with no end in sight. These vehicles filtered off the new roundabout, near to the A50, and were going *through* rather than into this area. The constant feeling of tall lorries peering over my very entity, the noise of the engines being revved and the fumes that filtered out of the exhausts irritated my senses and triggered a feeling of insignificance; I felt like I was an object with no formidable presence. It was like the cars and trucks belonged, it was their territory, but I did not. I did not feel that the local town was a warm, inviting and safe place to be, but noisy, congested and hazardous; it was somewhere I wanted to escape from, not assimilate into [Figure 6].

Figure 6: Meir North's local town



Once across the road I took a moment to absorb the surroundings; it was like looking at a painting and analysing each segment of the canvas for meaning and significance. The feeling of uniformity was further endorsed, as wherever I put my own body and whichever way I looked the image that was projected back was the same, it comprised of charity shops, hairdressers and takeaways (which accorded with the older people's views of this area [Sylvia, Betty, Jenny, Flora]). If I looked down the street to my left, or up the street to my right, there were closed shops, boarded up properties and metal shutters [Figures 7 and 8]. It became evident why even the least mobile people in this area, notably the older people within this study, had stated that they could 'not shop' here, because there really is 'nothing to go for' [Betty, Sylvia, Robert]. Furthermore, these observations provided a rationale as to why this town was deteriorating so

rapidly, because if residents who have largely ‘aged in place’ feel a sense of detachment, then it is likely that those who are new to the area like the ‘undesirables’ and/or younger people will also share this sentiment and thereby take their business somewhere else, leaving Meir North’s town to sharply decline and lose its identity (Smith, 2006:32). This area has consequently become a decaying and hollowed out space, wherein only the immobile and the left behind reside.

Figure 7: Takeaways in Meir North’s town



Figure 8: Metal shutters and closed shops



It is also of interest to note that this decline in the local town has caused many of the older people to feel ‘depressed’ because it used to be ‘really lovely’ and now it is unsightly, lacks any form of purpose, and is ‘boring’ [Sylvia, Wilma, Robert]. It is because of this deterioration that the older people nostalgically ‘long for [the] place’ that used to exist, during a divergent era (Boym 2001:xv). Meir North has largely become a ‘waste’ land and this is now negatively impacting upon the ‘sensory experience[s]’ of those who inhabit its space, particularly for those people (like the older people) who have known an alternative, who have seen its transformation and therein possess a ‘matrix of memory’ which sharply contrasts prosperity with deterioration (Casey 2000, cited by Edensor, 2005:834; Edensor, 2005:311). Whilst the decaying of Meir North’s infrastructure has been ‘discrete’ as it has happened

over an extended period of time, its current deterioration is stark and its lack of character, loss of life and sense of abandonment are felt intensely (Edensor, 2005:311). This area has become a 'ruin' and therein conjures up nostalgic feelings among those old enough to have known, and can remember, a different and more prosperous reality (Edensor, 2005:311).

Furthermore, it is observations such as these that most clearly indicate why there is high unemployment within Meir North. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, this area used to be vibrant, possessing many economic and social enterprises that attracted people from all social classes, but these have been closed down due to the de-industrialisation policies of the 1950s onwards and the detrimental consequences of the recent economic recession (although the economic recession in the 1950s also contributed to this area's decline) (Cartlidge, 2005). It is because of this demise that many young people in this area cannot find work, a factor that the older people tend to overlook in their analyses of the 'undesirables' [Robert, Harry]. The older people imply that the unemployed in their area *choose* not to seek work, that they are inept and indolent, but in reality it is likely that they simply cannot find work and therein have no choice but to depend on welfare. This is not their fault, but the fault of divisive neoliberal policies, linked to what Giroux (2007:309) refers to as the 'biopolitics of disposability', that have deliberately enforced 'destructive' forces upon Meir North in an attempt to undermine its chances of winning at the 'game' of urban competition and confine the poor who pose a threat to the global order (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:357; Peck, 2014:398).

However, it is also worth explicating that the economic trends experienced by these young people are not unique, as economic structural inequalities are also evident on a national scale. The older participants were asked a series of questions concerning employment, including whether their family members worked in the area, and whether there were good work opportunities within Meir North. The narratives provided by this cohort indicated that their own children and grandchildren, who largely live outside of this area, have, over the last few years, experienced redundancy and unemployment:

Sylvia: Well no, I mean he [son] was made redundant somewhere a few years ago and they were quite agitated whether he would get another job, but he had to get some qualifications, so he got as many qualifications as he could, you know, forklift driving, first aid, anything he could get so that he could get this job. He isn't a high flyer and [son's partner] works up at the hospital, she works flexible hours up at the hospital, so he was concerned when he was made redundant, you know, what to do.

Harry: Erm...one [son] works at ASDA distribution, my eldest, he only thinks it's till Christmas, but hopefully he will get with another company. My son that worked at B&Q is working at Dunelm distribution. He says there might be a chance of a full time position but he won't know...he says they take so many on from each batch they have...all them that have got permanent jobs now started with

the agency, so I just said ‘keep going’, you know, ‘if you get it, it’s a bonus, if not you will find work elsewhere’.

Molly:... her [daughter’s] partner...he is lovely, I just wish he would get a job, but there you go....He can’t get a job, he was made redundant last March, he can’t get one, he has applied everywhere.

Martha: I mean he [Grandson] is 28, erm... his first job was at JCB...and then they hit a bad patch and he was made redundant. I mean he was living with his Mum at the time so he was all right, he had got a roof over his head ...then JCB got on its feet again and they asked him back, so he went back and then he got a job offer at the top of Sandyford Hill again with more money, better prospects.

As is denoted by these narratives, it is not just the young people in Meir North that cannot find employment, but also young people more generally across the country. The older people within this study accord with the neoliberal discourse which ‘recycle[’s] divisive vocabularies of virtue and waste, deserving and underserving’ and helps to ‘intensify the stigmas attached to worklessness and receipt of welfare’, despite such notions being founded upon a false form of common knowledge (Jensen, 2014:4-5). What appears to be the truth, i.e. that young unemployed people in Meir North are apathetic ‘undesirables’ [Robert, Harry], is in fact an un-truth, based upon common misconceptions of benefit claimants. In reality, Thatcher affiliated with a ‘trickle-down’ doctrine whereby the wealth from invested in areas was supposed to filter down to the poorer surrounding areas as part of a ‘regeneration’ programme, but

the projected outcomes of this strategic plan have not materialised (Minton, 2009:5). Whilst capital was invested into certain areas, it has become entrapped within these areas only, causing many people, notably the working class, to ‘rub right up against’ it yet be entirely ‘ignore[d]’, creating ‘a segregated and disconnected patchwork’ across the country (Minton, 2009:8). The older people’s children and grandchildren, who all appear to have working class jobs (such as ‘forklift driving’ [Sylvia] or at ‘B&Q’, ‘Dunelm’ [Harry] and ‘JCB’ [Martha]) are experiencing the same injustices of neoliberal policies as the ‘undesirables’ [Robert and Harry], indicating that there are many spaces of ‘advanced marginality’ around the country and that unemployment is not a pathological illness, but a politically contrived outcome of inequitable economic policies (Minton, 2009:9; Wacquant, 2008:234).

Beatty and Fothergill (2015, 2011) further support this point through an analysis of economic trends across the United Kingdom, inclusive of the number of benefit claimants in receipt of ‘Job Seekers Allowance’. Their study highlights the importance of geography in employment trends, as the south of Britain has fared much better than northern ‘industrial areas’, including Wales, Scotland and Northern England which possess ‘weaker local economies’ (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015:165,176). In the past these areas had thriving industrial sectors, but since the ‘1980s and early 1990s’ there have been significant job cuts due to the retraction of this form of work, causing there to be a disparity between the number of people who could work and the jobs available (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015:167). In particular, Stoke-on-Trent, inclusive of Meir North, is referenced as being in the ‘top 20 districts’ in the UK for benefit claimants due to its poor economic infrastructure and lack of employment opportunities (Beatty and Fothergill, 2011:403). With such a

restricted number of jobs, those with limited skills and basic qualifications are unlikely to find employment; in a neoliberal world of competition only the strongest (the most skilled and highly qualified) survive (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015:170). As a result of this, many working class people are forced to rely on unemployment benefits which have been constantly under attack since the late 1970s by both Conservative and Labour governments.

In addition, those currently receiving unemployment benefits have to undergo constant surveillance measures because they are forced to attend ‘work-focused interviews’ in order to prevent their benefits from being revoked, and the benefits which they do receive are minimal due to the ‘roll[ing] back’ of the welfare state (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015:173,177; Peck, 2013:719). ‘Neoliberal workfarism’ has led to many unemployed people becoming objects of the state’s gaze, as their behaviour (they must be seen to be applying for any job) and their status (to ensure that they qualify for state support) are constantly monitored (MacLeavy, 2016:252-256; Peck, 2013:719). Thus it is not the case, as the older people imply, that the many young, unemployed people within Meir North are choosing not to work because all those who are dependent on state benefits are forced to look for employment and are effectively being punished for their deviancy (MacLeavy, 2016). Finding work in Britain is increasingly difficult, especially in ‘weaker local economies’ (as evidenced by the case of Meir North) which harbour most of the unemployed (‘around a third of the entire UK population’) and do not have the capacity to grant jobs to the unemployed masses (Beatty and Fothergill, 2011:414). National economic priorities and strategies have caused many areas, particularly in the north, to have a large number of benefit claimants and according to Beatty and Fothergill (2011:401), this

pattern of worklessness is unlikely to change to more 'acceptable levels by '2020'. Hence, being unemployed, whether in Meir North or in other parts of the UK, is now a normative part of everyday life for many young people; a reality which is largely alien and incomprehensible to those in old age who are living in the nostalgic past.

Standing (2011:1,5) and Strauss and Fudge (2014:1) extend this contention by arguing that the shift to neoliberalism and the emphasis placed upon competitiveness, economic flexibility, and individualisation, has undermined job security for *all* people, causing a constant state of precariousness. The transference to a flexible labour market has fundamentally reshaped what it means to be a worker in the twenty-first century because this new ideological doctrine enables employers to reconfigure how many workers they require according to demand, alter their positions within the workplace and change the rates of pay in affiliation with their own agenda, leading many people to experience job insecurity (Standing, 2011:6). The narratives of the older people within this study accord with this because it is clear that many of their relatives, particularly their children and grandchildren, are currently living in a state of precariousness and uncertainty (Standing, 2011; Strauss and Fudge, 2014). Common themes to emerge are redundancy [Sylvia, Martha], flexibility [Sylvia, Harry], dependency upon agencies [Harry] and inaccessibility to employment [Molly], indicating that the prospect of attaining a permanent job has become severely limited.

Therefore, these young people cannot simply ‘walk out of one job on the Friday and walk into another one on Monday’ [David] because the opportunities that were once available have been systematically removed, particularly after the recession as employers are having to squeeze their budgets and minimise their workforces. For these young people there is no promise of a job after leaving school, college or even university. Moreover, even if a job is identified within the current market they have to consider both its impact upon their status (i.e. would a low paid ‘cleaning’ job [Flo] hinder their chances of gaining a more permanent and better paid job in the future? Would voluntary work in the community, such as ‘helping old people with their gardens’ [Flo, Dorothy, Martha], further reduce their status and prevent career development?) and the number of people likely to have applied for the same job (hundreds of people now all seek the same opportunity). This consequently leads to fierce competition and feelings of failure for all but a few.

Conversely, even people who are able to gain employment experience insecurity because joblessness is always a possibility due to the neoliberal prioritisation of economic re-growth and sufficiency (Giroux, 2009a:105). Workers are expected to work longer and longer hours in pressurised circumstances with no extra pay; they are required to ‘give more but ask for less’ (Giroux 2009a:105). The youth of today are also brought up with the knowledge and understanding that at any moment their job can be removed without warning, their wages can be stopped without explication, they can be sent home within seconds and replaced within minutes. The world in which these younger subjects inhabit is therefore very different to the one in which the older people were part; there is no sense of optimism and there are fewer economic prospects. Hence, ‘flexible capitalism’ has caused many working class younger people to experience a ‘corrosion of character’, including a loss of ‘self-

esteem', because they struggle to find work which offers a good salary and protective securities (requisites affiliated with many former working class jobs) (Sennett, 1998:9; Stiglitz, 2010:188). Thus as Standing (2011:1) aptly notes, the young have no choice but to become 'socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society'.

In addition to this, the shift from 'first modernity' to 'second modernity' has ensured that risk, specifically individualised risk, has become a part of everyday life for the young, especially for young working class people (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:1,206). In the past, people's lives were bounded together by social institutions and there was a dominant sense of security due to collective responsibility (provided by society, friends and family), a philosophy of 'full employment' and a series of state protectionisms (as the older peoples' accounts denote) (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:206). However, the transference to 'second modernity' has led to the creation of a '*catastrophic* society', wherein everybody and everything is vulnerable to insecurity and the only way to protect oneself from detrimental effects is through the adoption of individualised protection strategies (Beck, 1992:24; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:2,206). In order to survive in today's 'runaway world', individuals must act quickly, they must always be 'the author of his or her own life' and be efficacious in action (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:3,23). According to the rules of 'reflexive modernisation', individuals are expected to be 'self-conscious' of their own actions and behave in a self-appraising manner i.e. they are obligated to consider the best possible action(s) for potential hazards or misfortunes they may experience in the present moment or in the future (Giddens, 1991:52; Lash and Wynee, 1992:3). Therefore, as Beck (2000:164) aptly notes, individuals are

contemporarily to 'lead a life of [their] own'; a 'desire' so embedded within their cognition they know of no other alternative, it has become inescapable.

Whilst individualised risk suggests that all subjects are completely free to combat misfortune and danger, they are not, as individuals have to also contend with complexities which are imposed from external forces, notably other (often more powerful) people and institutional forces (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:2). Individuals are not free in the sense that they have an 'unfettered logic of action, juggling in a virtually empty space', nor are they completely governed by their own 'subjectivity'; they have to balance the social with the personal (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:2). One of the most dominant external forces which subjects must contend with is the market economy, as they are not in control of this enterprise but are dependent upon it due to the need to fulfill their citizenship obligations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:203). All decisions and behaviours have become aligned with economic facets and the sustainment of employment in order to enhance global prosperity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:203).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001:211-212) argue that this tie between structural and subjective interests is part of the 'precarious freedoms' that all subjects are entitled to within modern day society. Choices have to be made not only to protect individual entities but also to protect others; all individuals need to 'think of oneself' whilst simultaneously 'living for the other' as part of an 'altruistic individualism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:211-212). The notion that no individual is truly free contradicts Durkheim's (1984:304) concept of 'anomie', because risk theorists assert that no subject is completely 'unregulated to the point of lawlessness' or

normlessness, as their actions are partly framed by structures and institutions within society and their own personal qualities, educational qualifications and skills (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:7). Thus, we are not living in an ‘evil [period] of missing boundaries’, but a period wherein the boundaries have been reshaped to enable a greater oscillation between freedom and control (Durkheim cited by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:7).

In affiliation with risk theorists, Evans and Reid (2014) argue that risk is not an accidental byproduct of neoliberalism but a deliberate outcome of a contrived ideology that seeks to mask inequality. Subjects have been reconfigured since the late 1970s to internalise the belief that the only security they have in life is that one day they will die, everything else comes with insecurities and risks (Evans and Reid, 2014). The exposure to danger is not framed in a disadvantageous way, as people’s consciousnesses have become moulded to see vulnerability and uncertainty as positive, as something which they can use to help develop their skills to ‘absorb perturbations’, to ‘evolve’ and ultimately to remain intact (Evans and Reid, 2014:61,40). Neoliberalism has created a new ‘mantra’, advocating that we ‘must all learn to become more resilient’ and be able to ‘adapt and bounce back’ in order to be a respectable and rational human being and to sustain the existence of society as a whole (Evans and Reid, 2014:xi,xii,58). Risk is constructed as a natural facet of everyday life, as if it is a vital part of both the subject’s and society’s development (Evans and Reid, 2014). To even try to escape danger and procure security is considered as deviant, as abnormal, because it challenges the ‘fundamental laws of life’ and the ‘natural order of things’, alongside what it means to be a neoliberal subject or citizen in a globalised world (Evans and Reid, 2014:xii,65).

The newly devised subjectivities of subjects, and the passivity to risk and vulnerability, is part of a political praxis which serves to hide the ‘abuses of power’ that prevail within society (Evans and Reid, 2014:xv). Drawing from Foucault’s (1999) and Giroux’s (2009b:31) theories, Evans and Reid (2014) proclaim that those with power and knowledge (the ‘vampires’) utilise vulnerability as a weapon of control against the less fortunate to deter attention away from their actions and alternatively towards the self, in terms of self-reflection and self-management. To ensure the gaze of the living dead is diverted away from the perpetrators of misfortune and inequality, their souls are manipulated to ensure that safety is never considered viable or even a wanted possibility (Evans and Reid, 2014:41; Giroux, 2009b). The only feeling these non-living entities are entitled to experience is that of being safer, not safe in the purest of forms (Evans and Reid, 2014). These lifeless subjects are made to think that in order to be successful they need to be resilient and adaptive to dangers and threats which could harm their bodies at any time, and that such thinking is normative as it is a ‘universal attribute’ (Evans and Reid, 2014:xii,41).

The ‘vampires’ benefit from this ideology of resilience because it validates their authority and ‘violence’, and provides justification for the inequalities in the global marketplace because the general populace is made to believe that there is no alternative, this ‘political imaginary’ is the only possible paradigm (Evans and Reid, 2014:xiv;41; Giroux, 2009b:31). The institutions within society which have adapted to this new ideological discourse gain from this new mentality, particularly the state, because the emphasis upon individualisation and competition deters the need for social help and collectivism as individuals seek to overcome crises and catastrophes

through their own ‘technologies of the self’ (Evans and Reid, 2014; Foucault cited in Lemke, 2002:2). The ‘evacuati[on] [of] the social’ therefore enables increased profits, as rather than wealth being taken from the social monetary fund and given to the most needful, it is instead saved due to risk being solved through private means, enabling wealth to be spent in alternative ways such as through further investment in the economy (Evans and Reid, 2014:44-45). Thereby, whilst the Enlightenment and the shift towards science and reason may have suggested a transference to greater security, the ‘vampires’ of neoliberalism have systematically and purposefully overturned this for their own advancement, leading to a ‘sickness of reason’ and the conceptualisation of risks as ‘private goods’ that require adaptation, and most importantly, resilience (Evans and Reid, 2014:38,42; Giroux, 2009b:31).

Chandler (2014:1,14) accords with Evans and Reid (2014), asserting that ‘resilience-thinking’ has become one of the central beliefs of ‘post-liberal governance’. Politicians, environmentalists and educators, alongside central organisations such as the security services, encourage ‘resilience-thinking’ as part of an individualisation strategy wherein dangers are considered a private issue that are to be resolved by the lone individual (Chandler, 2014:1,2; Chandler, 2012). There has been a shift from a ‘top-down’ approach wherein the state actively sought to help its citizens through welfare payments and benefits, to a ‘bottom-up’ approach whereby citizens are expected to take responsibility for their own choices and seek solutions to the difficulties they experience through entrepreneurial actions (Chandler, 2014:2,3; Chandler, 2012). Dangers and threats to the human populace are viewed as being ‘deeply social’, as being constructed through daily discourses and interactions by people on the ground, rather than a consequence of higher forces (Chandler, 2014:4).

The advocating of self-responsibility has become particularly prominent in areas which the government and economic-financial organisations (the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO)) find problematic, such as poverty, which continues to affect many people across the world (Chandler, 2014:3). Problems that used to be considered political are now viewed as ‘personal problems’ that need to be overcome by autonomous and freethinking subjects (Chandler, 2014:163).

An adaptation process has also occurred whereby the boundary between the subject and the object has been removed because the subject is no longer expected to rely purely upon their ‘inner resources’, such as inner strength or courage, but on their capability to alter and be dynamic in the face of impending threats (Chandler, 2014:7). The individual is not expected to ‘cope with external shocks and setbacks’ but to actively overcome them through self-management practices and individualised actions (Chandler, 2014:6). Resilience requires adaptation, as the individual cannot foresee the future and cannot completely prevent all dangers and thereby they have to be ready at any given moment to deter harm to their entity (Chandler, 2014:7). Despite resilience being an “‘inner’ attribute’, it is reliant upon the objective world to shape and determine its nature and thereby a complex interrelation exists between the internal subjective self and objective externalities (Chandler, 2014:7). All subjects have to adapt to their outside environments whilst at the same time reshaping the world in which they reside, it is a mutually beneficial relationship (Chandler, 2014:7).

The alterations made to the human consciousness concerning risk and misfortune have fundamentally reconstituted the meaning of failure, as although in the past it was considered something to be ashamed of as it signified an unsuccessful outcome, today, it is deemed as a starting point for future improvement and growth (Chandler, 2014:3). Sympathy may have been given to those who failed in past decades as they were viewed as the poor and the destitute who had been ‘knocked off course’ by external factors that were outside of their scope of reasoning and action, but today these people are viewed as genuine failures because they have not been reflexive and ‘deal[t] with life’s problems’ (as is indicated by the older people’s narratives) (Chandler, 2014:3). The neoliberal discourse disseminates the belief that not everybody will achieve their full potential in life and all people will experience failure at some point, but the most appropriate response to these detrimental consequences is to ‘bounce back [when] things go wrong’ (Chandler, 2014:3,4; Evans and Reid, 2014). Failure in itself is not considered a failing, as this can happen to anybody at any time, but not being reflexive and adaptive to failure is deemed insufficient and signifies a true failing (Chandler, 2014:4-5). Moreover, all people are made to believe that this elementary form of failure is advantageous, as it will enable them to develop and comprehend their own selfhood, unlike success which only pushes the person forward without reflective thought (Chandler, 2014:5). Hence, normality has been redefined around the tenets of resiliency and adaptability, as all individuals are expected to learn how to ‘fail better’ than in the past (Chandler, 2014:5,12).

These theories of resilience challenge Foucault's idea of 'technologies of the self' because from the late 1970s until 2008 and the economic crisis, all neoliberal subjects were expected to utilise their entrepreneurial skills to deter any form of failure; failing at anything was considered to be a personal fault, an objectionable attribute (Foucault cited in Lemke, 2002:2,12). Conversely, Evans and Reid's (2014:44-45) and Chandler's (2014) arguments present a divergent argument, indicating that since the recession in particular, failure has been redefined as it is no longer about completely deterring risk (as this is now impossible due to the openness of the market, the death of the social and the stagnancy of the global economy), but accepting risk and failure as customary and unavoidable tenets of contemporary living. Nobody can escape failure because it is embedded within the very fabric of society, all they can do is proactively utilise their skills and knowledge to overcome disadvantageous occurrences and learn from their own mistakes (Evans and Reid, 2014:44,45). This modification could help explain why the older people within this study do not view their unemployed relatives and the 'undesirables' [Harry and Robert] in the same way, as apart from the obvious subjective attachment to the former group which perhaps impedes their judgement, there is also the notion that their family members are making an effort to improve their situation, unlike the 'undesirables' [Harry and Robert]. For example, Sylvia states that her son tried to attain a job through gaining more qualifications ('he had to get some qualifications, so he got as many qualifications as he could'), Harry's son has sought work through an 'agency' which will 'hopefully' lead him to attaining a 'permanent job' and Molly's daughter's partner has 'applied everywhere' for a job, indicating that these younger people are 'adapt[ing]' to unemployment, 'bounc[ing] back' to adversity, and ultimately 'evolv[ing]' back into valued citizens (Evans and Reid, 2014:xi,xii,58,61).

This view is of course not based upon fact because the older people have utilised their observations and daily experiences to construct dichotomous groups; a group that seemingly chooses to live off benefits without any motivation to reverse the hardships experienced (the ‘undesirables’) and a group who demonstrates resilience through actively seeking ways to overcome ‘personal problem[s]’ (their relatives) (Chandler, 2014:163). Like the rationale as to who should be entitled to benefits and who should not, this logic is black and white and does not consider broader trends and processes, but it does purposefully (in accordance with the aims of neoliberalism) enable the older people to vent their agitation towards the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert] who have become scapegoats for the ills of society (Ong, 2006). Rather than attention being turned towards the actions of the powerful and knowledgeable who are responsible for the economic recession and the downturn in employment, it is alternatively given to the unemployed younger people within Meir North who are perceived as lacking the ‘universal attribute[s]’ that are required for survival, notably a resilient attitude towards risk and the skills to ‘fail better’ like the older people’s relatives (Chandler, 2014:5,12; Evans and Reid, 2014: xii,41; Foucault 1999).

Thereby, although the older people within this study have come to share the same ‘guiding vision of the state’ as neoliberals, they have not considered how individualism, de-industrialisation and the effects of the recent recession have affected younger people (Bone, 2009:3; Klein cited by Bone, 2012: 9). Whilst the older people have been fortunate enough to work all their lives and have benefitted from post-war economic security, the very nature of neoliberal economics means that this is an unlikely outcome for the young today who are having to ‘cope’ with insecurity and the disadvantageous consequences of ‘self-reliance’ policies (Bone,

2012: 9). The older people within this study have benefitted from secure and stable employment, unlike younger generations who are currently being coerced into jobs despite there being a significant shortfall in job vacancies, and simultaneously being exposed to the detrimental effects of state retraction (Bone, 2012). Many younger people have therefore become the victims of a brutal economic and social enterprise that entraps them into an ever-ending cycle of unfulfilled promises and aspirations (Bone, 2012). This trend is also likely to continue because according to Bone (2012:10), this is not a ‘temporary blip but part of a broader shift towards increasing levels of economic inactivity’; the young are therefore unlikely to ever experience the same economic conditions as those who are currently in old age because this right has been fundamentally revoked.

The ‘intergenerational equity’ debate also provides a useful insight into why the older people in Meir North possess these views of unemployed younger people and why they cannot empathise with their current situation (Leach et al, 2013:104; Macnicol, 2015:136). The life experiences of the ‘baby boomers’ (born ‘in the late 1940s and the early 1950s’) have been cross-compared with younger people and a question has been posed as to whether the former group are in fact a ‘selfish generation’ (Leach et al, 2013;104; Macnicol, 2015:139; Willetts, 2010). Many of the older people who partook within this research were ‘baby boomers’, including Betty, Flora, Harry, Lilly, Marjorie, Martha, Patricia, Pearl, Poppy, Robert and Sylvia, meaning the debate concerning inequitable resource allocation is of particular relevance (Leach et al, 2013,104). At the crux of this debate is the notion that the older generation (specifically the ‘baby boomers’) grew up in a ‘kinder society’ than the one which

exists today (it offered greater protective policies ¹⁴) leading to a new demand that resources should be redistributed from the old to the young to enable a ‘fair[er]’ system of allocation (Beckett, 2010:194; Leach et al, 2013:104; Macnicol, 2015:136). As Macnicol (2015:136) notes, ‘intergeneration[al] equity’ is a ‘symptom of the neoliberalisation of old age’ and therefore has re-emerged at the forefront of political and public thinking. In a neoliberal world, no individual, regardless of past contributions, is given the right to welfare benefits (whatever shape these may take) meaning greater critical attention has been given to those in old age and whether they deserve the state provisions they have received throughout their lifetimes.

The belief that ‘baby boomers’ have lived a more prosperous and enriched life as compared with younger people is evident in the narratives of the older people living within Meir North (Leach et al, 2013:104). Although some of the participants spoke of hardships in their childhoods and early twenties [Dorothy, Flora and Ronald], the majority referred to experiencing positive economic and social conditions, including being able to work from ‘16 to 65’ [Flo, Martha, Patricia, David, Robert, Dennis], receiving ‘pensions’ [Martha, Marjorie, David and Alice], having a ‘free bus pass’ [Alice and David] and owning their own home in later life [Robert and Lilly]. In contrast, younger people in today’s uncertain world, especially those living in the UK who are experiencing the double burden of austerity and Brexit (the exit of the UK from the European Union), are not given the same assurances as those currently in old age. This cohort are unlikely to experience employment security within their lifetimes, they cannot be certain that a state pension will be offered when they reach retirement (they cannot even be certain about what age they will be allowed to retire),

¹⁴ Such as the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, the ‘1946 National Insurance Act’ and the ‘National Assistance Act’ 1948 (Beckett, 2010:4).

they do not know if they will be provided with benefits such as a free bus pass, and the prospect of being able to afford their own home is swiftly diminishing (Higgs and Gilleard, 2010:1443). Hence, the current financial and social milieu suggests that 'Grey Capitalism' has been dismantled and the young have become a 'lost generation'; reinforcing the view that those in old age have been, and continue to be, treated unfairly when compared with the young and thereby constitute a new 'problem generation' (Higgs and Gilleard, 2006:221; Leach et al, 2013:105; Macnicol, 2015:139).

However, as Macnicol (2015:140) notes, whilst older people are increasingly blamed for the economic downturn in the UK, the 'real culprit has been the economic forces unleashed by thirty-five years of neoliberalism'. Blame and resentment cannot be attributed to older people for the poor economic and social conditions experienced by younger people because these are consequences of policies that have been passed by consecutive governments since the late 1970s, which consistently prioritise markets over human welfare. Older people, like younger people, are the victims of neoliberalism because they are stigmatised in the same way, i.e. an older person receiving a state pension and benefitting from a free bus pass and 'winter fuel payment' is considered as being the same as a younger person who receives housing and unemployment benefits, because they are all dependent on the state (Macnicol, 2015:139-140). Neoliberal policies do not discriminate in their discrimination. Furthermore, any policy implementation concerning the redistribution of resources would severely hinder older women in particular, because they are traditionally more dependent on state welfare (they have reduced state pensions, limited private pensions and are more prone to ill-health in old age) (Macnicol, 2015:161).

In addition, it is also too deterministic to blame all ‘boomers’ for the detrimental conditions of the young as if they all ‘share [an] identity’ (Leach et al, 2013:105). Leach et al (2013:106) and Macnicol (2015:140,163-164) both indicate that ‘differentiation’ is essential for understanding the ‘boomer generation’ as not all older people within this category have the same financial and housing capital. There are significant differences between the ‘top 10% of households’ and the ‘bottom 10%’ because those in the top bracket have greater disposable income than those in the bottom bracket and often possess their own home, whilst those in the bottom bracket struggle to have even their basic needs met (Leach et al, 2013:107). These contentions resonate with the older people in this study because whilst they have benefited from consistent employment opportunities and do largely own their own homes, they are still living within a deprived area and are poorer than middle and upper class families. Most of the participants are also female, meaning they are more likely to have received less state benefits than their male counterparts (especially in terms of the state pension) and therefore do not have surplus resources which could be given to younger people (Macnicol, 2015:161). Sweeping generalisations concerning the ‘baby boomers’ fail to recognise that ‘income and wealth divisions’ are existent within this cohort as there are still many older people who are ‘income poor’ in retirement and thereby potential similarities (rather than disparities) between the young and the old are discernable (Leach et al, 2013:104,107; Macnicol, 2015:140,163-164).

Conversely, those who should be blamed, notably those with wealth (as Marxists proclaim), power and knowledge (a Foucauldian contention) are overlooked because of a ‘new age-based identity politics’ which promotes ‘generations at war’ (Macnicol, 2015:141). The former consensus that older people are ‘our future selves’, and the

recognition that they have paid into the social system through work and taxes and therein deserve to receive state funded pensions, has increasingly been undermined by a 'new generational contract' (Macnicol, 2015:143,146). This 'contract' is derived from neoliberal tenets, specifically individualisation and privatisation, wherein the individual is expected to rely upon private (rather than state funded) pensions and their savings (Macnicol, 2015:143,146). The longer this discriminating 'boomer blaming' discourse is allowed to prevail, the greater the likelihood that older people will be scapegoated for issues which they have not caused and more social backing will be given to the conservative governments' discriminatory retirement policies, including the raising of the retirement age, low saving rates and reduced living conditions (which ultimately affects younger generations) (Bristow, 2015:6). Moreover, whilst the older generation continue to blame the younger generation, and the younger generation continue to blame the older generation, the real issues such as economic and social inequality are being ignored, allowing the deeply inequitable policies of neoliberalism to flourish and the former collectivist nature of the welfare state to be 'eroded' (Macnicol, 2015:141).

Liquid, Solid, Gas¹⁵: The Distilling of the Working Class

The analysis thus far indicates that neoliberalism and the recent economic recession have caused inter-generational conflict between younger and older people due to the construction of divergent cultural systems. However, it is of importance to explicate that this conflict is part of a much broader fracture, which has occurred since the late 1970s in the working class, causing the erosion of common norms, values and social

¹⁵ (Bauman, 2012)

solidarity. Bauman's (2012: 1,2,15) theory provides insight into the dismantling of the working class, as this suggests that all people have moved from a 'solid modernity' wherein 'atoms' were closely 'bond[ed]' by structures, to a 'liquid modernity' wherein the 'atoms' are no longer bound together in a definable shape with clear 'dimensions' and boundaries, but are in contrast, flexible and fluid. Whilst 'solids' in the former modernity had a permanent shape over time, in the new modernity epoch the 'solids' are subject to change because the 'fluids' seep and soak into their form, producing either a new shape established from a unique 'mould' (almost unrecognisable from the original) or total destruction (a solid becomes a liquid) (Bauman, 2012:2,7). Under these conditions wherein there has been a constant permeation of 'fluids', nearly all but a few 'solids' have been left to 'melt' (Bauman, 2012:2,3).

At first this theory may appear abstract, but what Bauman (2012:2-8) is referring to is the ways in which economic policies, such as 'deregulation, liberalisation [and] flexibilisation' have caused 'atoms' to separate, and former class 'solids' (such as the construction of clear 'reference groups') to melt. In particular, whilst in the past class was determined by tradition and heritage, it has today become a tenet which the individual must earn; there has been a shift from class being a 'given' into class becoming a 'task' (Bauman, 2012:7). The individual is now responsible for which socio-economic group they become part of, and this has increasingly become determined by how hard they work, how high their aspirations are and how quickly they can move up in the (supposed) meritocratic system (Bauman, 2001b:124; Bauman, 2012:7). Hence, class is no longer considered as a 'wanted or unwanted gift' that is given without obligations or responsibilities, but is something that is earned

through hardwork and skill (Bauman, 2001b:124). This distilling of class categories has led to the belief that class has become a 'zombie category' which is 'dead but still alive', as whilst the notion of working class has not been completely eroded, it has lost its original meaning because people now have to '*become*' (italics in original) a class (Bauman, 2001b:124; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002 cited by May, 2013:30).

When cross-applying Bauman's theory (2012:2) to the findings of the ethnographic study, it could be argued that the older people grew up in a period of 'solid modernity' wherein class status was clearly defined according to the occupation of the person and their residency. Those who held manual, low-skilled jobs were considered working class (like the 'lads' in Willis' study *Learning to Labour* (1977)), whilst those who possessed professional jobs were middle class, and those who accumulated or were born with significant wealth, constituted the upper class. This class hierarchy was established by 'atoms' which were closely 'bond[ed]', meaning the class structure was based upon 'solid' foundations and there was a strong sense of 'stability' (there were no concerns that the structure would be liquefied) (Bauman, 2012:1-3). Class was not a 'task', it was established by tradition and heritage and people did not have to '*become*' (italics in original) a class, as they were born with it (Bauman, 2001b:124; Bauman, 2012:7). It is because of these 'solid' formations that the older people possess a strong sense of class identity, because this is all that they have known; their entity has been submerged within it and their class 'mould' has not been manipulated (Bauman, 2012:2,7).

However, in antithesis, younger people in Meir North, particularly those without a job, have experienced a decomposition of class, meaning that it is no longer affixed to their entity (Bauman, 2012:1,2). In a neoliberal world every 'solid' has been undermined by a 'liquid' policy causing a lack of identity and perpetual insecurity (Bauman, 2012:1,2). The young have been abruptly 'disembedded' from former class structures with the removal of traditional working class jobs, and have not been helped to 're-embed' in the new social hierarchy (Bauman, 2001b:124). In contemporary society, younger people have to find their own class identity (which is no longer perceived as a 'fact of nature') with the utilisation of their own skills and 'self-determination' despite the disadvantageous conditions which have been analysed within this chapter, including job precariousness, risk and insecurity (Bauman, 2001b:124; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Standing, 2011).

Furthermore, even if these individuals did find a class identity, it is swiftly ripped away from them as everything which is 'solid' becomes 'liquid' leading to a permanent status of 'disembeddment' (Bauman, 2001b:125; Bauman, 2012:1-2). Younger people will never possess a 'solid' identity, they will only possess an '*identification*' (italics in original) which is open to constant change and will never be complete (Bauman, 2001b:129; Bauman, 2012:2). The older people do not recognise the differences between the period in which their identity was constructed (during a period of 'solid modernity') and that of the younger people within their area (during a period of 'liquid modernity') and as such, the actions of this cohort appear deplorable and are perceived as not truly representing the working class (they do not work and they do not demonstrate the characteristics of a true working class person) (Bauman, 2012:15). In reality however, it is not that young unemployed people are not part of

the working class, but that the meaning of this social classification has changed. Although in the past the notion of working class signified that the individual worked for life, like many of the older people in this study, in today's society it can be inferred that a working class person will work, but they will also experience unemployment due to the retraction of industrial jobs and the enforcement of severe austerity measures.

This shift in modernity has caused both the older and the younger people in Meir North to ultimately create a divergent 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984:165). Whereas in the past, the older people lived alongside other subjects who shared the same lifestyle as them, such as those who similarly worked in the Potteries or for one of the major industries, and had similar norms and values, today they share a residence with people who appear to challenge the very meaning of being working class (Bourdieu, 2013:296). The older participants are firmly placed into a social category, the old working class, whilst the young, especially young, unemployed people, are placed into another more transient ('liquid') category, which opposes the former neatly ordered social hierarchy ('structured structure') (Bauman, 2012:1; Bourdieu, 1984:166; Bourdieu, 2013:296). The older people utilise the principles of their own 'habitus' to analyse the 'habitus' of the young without consideration of the new conditions, leading to the perception that unemployment is a deviant lifestyle choice rather than an outcome of restrictive neoliberal policies (Bourdieu, 1984:167). The differences between these cohorts, specifically in terms of their modes of existence, has led the older people to assert their 'authority' (referred to as 'symbolic capital') over the young according to the rationale that they are of a lower social status, leading to the formation of two 'habitus-systems of generative schemes' (Bourdieu, 1984:166;

Bourdieu, 2013:297). This systematic division of the local people into “us” (the working class) and “them” (the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert]) categorisations, (referred to by Bourdieu (1984:168) as a ‘sign system’), ultimately helps the older people to re-affirm their identity (as they know they are not like the young in their area) and comprehend their ‘social world’ (as their ‘perception[s]’ of social reality and the people who inhabit its space are more methodically arranged) (Bourdieu, 1984:166-167).

The fracturing of the working class is also exacerbated by the creation of a new class, the ‘precariat’ (Standing, 2011:1,7). The ‘precariat’ does not fit into the traditional class arrangement, i.e. the upper, middle and working classes, due to their unique and highly unstable positioning within society (Standing 2011:6). To be part of the ‘precariat’ is to be powerless, inferior and desperate, to have little wealth, no status (a ‘truncated status’) and no hope (Standing, 2011:6, 8,9,12). The ‘precariat’ may work, but the jobs that they possess tend to be temporary or part-time, wherein the pay is low, there are few opportunities for social advancement and the probability of exploitation is high (Standing, 2011:14.15). These individuals are not classified as the traditional working class because they are not permitted permanent, stable job opportunities and they do not have highly regarded statuses (Standing, 2011:6). Instead, the ‘precariat’ situates outside of these traditional class classifications because they possess, as the name suggests, a ‘precarious existence’ wherein insecurity and ‘unfreedoms’ are part of their everyday lives (Standing, 2011:1,6.7; Strauss and Fudge, 2014:3). It is due to these changes and the insecurities of modern day living that the ‘precariat’ have become a cohort of ‘denizen[s]’ because they do not have the same rights, opportunities and freedoms as citizens (Standing,

2011:1,14). This class of non-subjects have had their rights ‘disarticulat[ed]’ because they no longer hold a valuable position with society, and there is nothing they can do to change this inferior positioning due to the dismantling of trade unions under the premise that any form of rebellious action would hinder economic growth (Ong, 2006:6; Standing, 2011:5). The ‘precariat’ therefore has to accept their status as a second-class citizen without refute, as this is just part of the conditions of ‘second modernity’ (Bauman, 2012:15; Standing, 2011).

The precarious status of many younger people today, especially in former working class areas like Meir North, is not the result of personal deficiencies but an outcome of a ‘class war’ that Thatcher began in the late 1970s (O.Jones, 2012:194). Thatcher began this ‘war’ with the intent to destroy the working class through systematically undermining their union power, and eradicating their jobs (especially in industries such as iron, coal, steel and in Stoke-on-Trent, pottery production) (O.Jones, 2012:194). Whilst in the past being part of the working class brought a sense of pride as its members worked, tended to have ‘jobs-for-life’ (as denoted by the older participants within this study) and shared a common community centred ‘around the workplace’, in contemporary society it is perceived as a social weakness as the individual has failed to move up the social ladder via their entrepreneurial skill (O.Jones, 2012:259). The new working class symbolise stagnation and social rigidity because they are stuck at the bottom of the social pyramid and refute the meritocratic principle of mobility. As Jones (2012:204,249) highlights, there is currently a ‘Victorian, patronising attitude towards working people’ as they are perceived as being ‘idle, bigoted, uncouth and dirty’ and those ‘at the very bottom...have been effectively dehumanised’. Due to this reclassification of the

working class, this socio-economic cohort are no longer held together via a common form of solidarity (it too has been turned into a 'liquid') and the old 'respectable working class (which the older people represent) has, according to Heffer, 'almost died out' (Bauman, 2012:1; cited by O.Jones 2012:185).

The notion that Thatcher initiated a 'war' against the working class is further supported by Skeggs (1997; 2004:62) who denotes the ways in which class has been 'refigured and reworked' since the late 1970s (O.Jones 2012:194). The neoliberal discourse has helped to re-construct a new meaning of class in accordance with its own ideological doctrine and economic agenda. In the same way that this political praxis has helped shape people's views on what is 'moral' and 'immoral', as is evidenced by the older people's beliefs of the legitimate (moral) and illegitimate (immoral) beneficiary of welfare, it has also (re)constructed a representation of the working class (Skeggs, 2004:80). Increasingly, since Thatcher's government, a divide has occurred between the middle class and the working class, as whilst the former are considered 'subject[s] of value' because they take responsibility for their own actions and elevate their social position through effective 'risk-taking', the latter are deemed 'value-less' subjects because they refrain from utilising their entrepreneurial skills, do not show self-control and continue to live a life in poverty (Skeggs, 2004:84-88). The aim of all neoliberal citizens is to procure wealth through self-actions, to deter adversity and to experience social mobility (upwards) through the social hierarchy. However, the working class defy this logic as they appear to be stagnant; they have failed to move up the social ladder as Jones (2012:259) suggested, because they are too afraid and too unequipped to embrace its heights; their culture is simply 'not optimis[able]' (Skeggs, 2004:88). Due to their poor positioning in 'pathological

culture’, this socio-economic group is consequently considered a ‘dangerous’ and undisciplined cohort who cannot improve their lives; they are stuck in a cycle of dependency and thereby experience discrimination, prejudice and exclusion (Skeggs, 2004:80-99).

This division between the classes is no accidental by-product of neoliberal governance because it is central to its very functioning. The derogatory representation of the working class is used as a weapon to re-assert the authority and the dominance of the middle-class (true neoliberal citizens), especially within a ‘liquid’ era of transition and uncertainty (Bauman, 2012:1; Skeggs, 2004). The middle-class’s position has been undermined by the economic and social changes of neoliberal policies, their dominance is no longer based on secure foundations, and therefore to re-assert their position they deliberately outline the differences between their own entities and that of the working class (Skeggs, 2004:117). Seemingly ‘objective social positions’ are created, when in reality such positions are based on subjective and fragile categorisations in order to hide how close both these classes are in relation to experiencing risks, and to re-instate the ‘value’ of middle class culture (Skeggs, 1997:94; Skeggs, 2004:118). Differences between the two classes are made explicit, as whilst misfortune and bad luck are to blame for the adversities experienced by middle class people, personal failure is to blame for that of the working class’s, with no recognition given to structural inequalities (Skeggs, 2004:87). This representation of the working class becomes solidified through the utilisation of language, as those with power verbally disseminate these views throughout society to ensure that they become viewed as a truth (Skeggs, 2004:80). The working class and their culture have consequently become regarded as worthless, as ‘having nothing to offer’, and thereby

have been marginalised to the periphery of society like any other form of 'waste' (Skeggs, 2004:87-99). The middle class are the winners of this 'class struggle'; they have won the 'war' (O.Jones, 2012:194; Skeggs, 2004:117).

The eradication of the former working class is also evidenced by the breakdown in the 'division of labour' within society due to two specific processes: deindustrialisation and the recent economic recession (Durkheim, 1984:291,307). The overturning of the manufacturing sector in the 'modern metropolis' in favour of a service sector in the expanding 'postmetropolis' has caused job specifications to become more specialised (Durkheim, 1984; Soja, 2000:5). Pre-1970, working class people had a wide variety of jobs to choose from as they could undertake manual and semi-skilled work according to their abilities and family traditions, and experienced a strong sense of solidarity within their culture (Durkheim, 1984). Conversely, in contemporary society these opportunities have been revoked, as traditional working class jobs no longer exist, causing many working class people to either accept 'low-paid, low-quality casual work', which is viewed as something to be grateful for, or become unemployed and be reliant upon benefits (which is socially condemned by society) (Foucault, 2008:147,221-232; MacGregor, 2005:144). Hence, to adopt the Functionalist biological analogy, the working class used to be the heart of society, they were essential for ensuring the survival of the economy (Durkheim, 1984). However, neoliberalism has undermined their purpose leading them to become more like the appendix of the human body; they are still prevalent, they have not completely been eradicated (as evidenced by the older people), but they have no real purpose and are not essential for growth or survival (Durkheim, 1984). Society would continue to exist if they were removed from the social body.

This dismantling of the traditional working class could help explicate issues of crime and deviancy within Meir North. Although no direct question was asked concerning crime, as the older people were only asked ‘Do you feel safe living here? If so why, if no, why not?’, this topic did become a central theme of the thesis:

Drug taking

Ronald: Well they just [do] drugs mostly and then their children follow on which has happened, [names a particular family], I mean their children grew up to be drug dealers and that and so on. The parents used to go to prison and that, but then they would come out, start dealing again and so on.

Pearl: ...drugs I know have reared their ugly head round about in the Meir and that seemed to get worse.

Sylvia: Well, yeah you have got your problems with your drugs, of course.

Molly: I think there is some druggies in the flats where I have to catch the buses, but erm, you know you see them coming out and the police are always there.

Harry: They caused absolute chaos some of them and then, as the, as the drugs got worse, as erm...they were getting drug dependent...that's when it started to decline.

Vandalism and Arson

Sylvia: We did have two sheds until somebody set fire to one of them...We were on holiday at the time. The fire and the police said it would have just been a dustbin fire which is quite a normal occurrence, if the fire brigade could have got up to put it out, but by the time the fire brigade got there, there was nothing left of my shed...we've made it look more like a garden again, but now it's only got a greenhouse [and] a shed. We have made it like a sunken garden and filled in where the shed was, oh it was horrendous. We spent the whole of the summer; every day that came we had to spend shifting rubbish, moving it.

Molly: A lot of people, I know they have had problems with them in the flats, setting fire to bins...somebody was saying last week, that four times in a fortnight they set the bins on fire just for the hell of it.

The beliefs that the older people possess concerning these forms of anti-social and criminal behaviour are not unfounded. According to the crime rates for '2010-2012', which have been collated from the 'Staffordshire Police' force, people within this area do experience high levels of crime and deviancy (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017:67). Although the statistics

show that between 2010 and 2012 levels of anti-social behaviour in Meir North decreased, notably from '73.9' to '63.5' ('rate per 1,000 population'), this still remains a high figure when compared with other areas in this city (2017:67). In particular, the average levels of reported anti-social behaviour in the whole of Stoke-on-Trent (including all 37 wards) was between '58.8' in 2010 and '45' in 2012, which is much lower than that identified within Meir North. Moreover, when extending this analysis to include the 'all crime' category, it becomes apparent that whilst there has also been a decrease in 'all crime[s]' in Meir North, specifically from '98.9' (2010) to '86.1' (2012), these rates of crime are still above the average for the City of Stoke-on-Trent ('92.3' in 2010 and '75.1' in 2012) (2017:67). Hence, the perceptions, beliefs and fears that the older people have of criminal and deviant behaviour within their area are not illusionary, but based upon reality; a reality which ultimately causes them to feel apprehensive and insecure.

Although no assertions can be made as to the rationale behind these forms of behaviour, especially as younger people were not part of the ethnographic sample, there are some interesting arguments, presented by a plethora of academic scholars, which could be used to help theorise why these forms of deviancy exist, particularly in areas such as Meir North. Heffer, for example, states that acts of criminality, such as those described by the older people, could further signify the consequences of the 'class war' and the shrinking of the former 'respectable working class' (cited by O.Jones, 2012:185; O.Jones, 2012:194). Neoliberalism and its concentration upon markets has caused working class culture to be dismantled and former working class leisure activities to be severely hindered (O.Jones, 2012). This is evident within Meir

North, because as has already been explicated within this thesis, this area used to include a plethora of social spaces, including a cinema, a golf club, and public houses, but today all that exists is fast food takeaways, charity shops and hairdressers (Cartlidge, 2005). This could have created a void for the younger people in this area because they have nothing to do and nowhere to interact with their friends, and therein they may commit these offences as a way to escape the everyday drudgery of their lives (O.Jones, 2012:212). Drug taking and acts of vandalism are a sign of rebellion against a world which appears not to care about the working class person anymore; no respect or value is given to this class of individual and therein no respect or value is given to the place in which they reside.

This argument is supported by Jones (2012:219), who notes that there are ‘angry young people out there who take out some of their frustrations in anti-social ways’, notably such as those in Meir North who take drugs and ‘set...the bins on fire just for the hell of it’ [Molly]. When an individual feels they have no way out, they have no access to educational or economic opportunities and feel they have been failed by society, they may turn to crime as their only venture to escape complete destitution because they have nothing to lose (Brake, 1973:35). Whilst the acts of vandalism, arson and drug taking undermine the older people’s quality of life, they are likely, in antithesis, to improve the lives of the criminals because they present an opportunity for ‘kicks’ (feelings of freedom, resistance and risk) and serve as a form of escapism (drug taking in particular can alleviate ‘pain and discomfort’ as a sense of ‘euphoria’ is momentarily experienced) (Clausen, 1961:193-223).

In affiliation with this perspective, Merton's (1938) theory of deviancy explicates crime according to structural defects and blocked opportunities (which is prevalent within Meir North), reinforcing the belief that there has been a demise in working class culture. The neoliberal discourse stipulates that all individuals can be successful as long as they follow the 'rules of the game', they utilise their talents and skills in the most effective manner and outdo all other competitors (Bourdieu, 1990:64). Whilst this ideology disseminates the view that success is democratic, this is not the case for the working class because the 'paths to achievement' have been 'block[ed]' due to the creation of a service sector, causing feelings of estrangement, hostility and marginalisation (Cohen and Short, 1961:112; Cressey, 1961:179-180; Merton, 1938:682). Individuals living within housing estates like Meir North may have the same aspirations as those living within leafy suburban areas, but their lack of capital (financial, social and cultural) blocks their opportunity to fulfill them (they are 'flawed consumers' and unwanted workers), and therein they become exposed to experiences of 'strain' (Giroux, 2009a:29; Young, 1999:11).

The feeling of 'strain' causes contempt as the individual knows there is a gap between their goals in life and the means they have access to, and therein they have to choose from various 'modes of adaptation', notably utilising legal or illegal means to achieve success depending upon the 'opportunity structure' (Cohen, 1965:6,10; Merton cited by Cressey, 1961:181). Whichever type of 'adaptation' is employed, at least the individual will not be a 'double failure' as they have reflectively identified a way to achieve some form of status and have 'bounce[d] back'; they have not accepted failure as their final fate (Chandler, 2014:3-4; Cohen, 1965:6; Cressey, 1961:181). Thus, whilst the new working class is perceived as possessing a defective pathological

state, in reality, it could be argued that it is a consequence of a *social* pathological illness which thrives upon the bacterium of inequity and causes the symptoms of apathy and failure (Merton, 1938). Crimes such as drug taking, vandalism and arson, which are particularly prevalent within areas such as Meir North, have become a way for some individuals to vent their frustrations in this increasingly exclusionary world, and to reaffirm their control and identity (Merton, 1938).

In addition to these forms of deviancy, the older participants also referred to the issue of 'gangs' within their area:

Gangs

Ronald: ...Obviously for elderly people... there's more people that will stay in than will go out on their own at night because there is more, a lot more danger possibly of them being mugged or something, you know, there is these young juveniles you know, teenagers, gangs of them.

Flo: I mean most young people are all right, but just think if there is a group of them, and if they have got these hoods up, they probably aren't threatening, but they look it. I think that is what it is...I mean, you know, I mean you hear such things now don't you, like knives, you have got knives and that, you know. I don't know if it is because you read all these things or what but err.... I don't think a lot of older people really do feel safe going out on their own at night.

Sylvia: I suppose to a certain extent I wouldn't walk through the Meir at night anymore, whereas I would ten years ago. I would walk home from church where I go at night, but I wouldn't do it now. I feel a little apprehensive now...because I am a bit nervous about a gang of youths. Perhaps I am wrong, or perhaps I am right, but I would be a little bit apprehensive about walking through the Meir at 10 o'clock at night now in case there was anybody coming out of the Chinese or that sort of thing, if there was a group of them together.... I mean if you are walking and you see something, a group on the other side of the road, you don't cross over, you protect yourself.

Molly: I don't like walking from like [Wilma's], or down [the local residential village], because it's about ten minutes from where I live. There is always groups hanging round by the shops, if I go the other way, it's like through a gully, and...I don't like going round there on my own, so I usually get a taxi, it is only, it is two pounds, but at least I know I am going to get home safe you know.

Dorothy: Not all the while, no. Not all the while, sometimes you see gangs still hanging about, you know, on the corners and okay, we have got no proof whatsoever, but they look like drug dealers you know, you do see that up and down the place still...you can feel a bit intimidated.

Flora: It is like in the day when you are walking about, you have only got to see two or three walking behind you and you get panicky thinking ‘they are getting a bit close’. I mean I have done it, and I have crossed the road rather than carry on walking. You feel unsettled because you don’t know what they are going to do.

These accounts indicate that there are fears about gangs in Meir North. The older people perceive these gangs to be ‘danger[ous]’ [Ronald] as they could ‘mug’ [Ronald] them, or they may possess ‘knives’ [Flo], and this causes considerable ill-being, including ‘apprehensi[on]’, ‘nervous[ness]’ [Sylvia], ‘intimidat[ion]’ [Dorothy], ‘panic’ and the feeling of being ‘unsettled’ [Flora]. As a way to combat these adverse effects, the older people deter away from visiting specific places within this area, i.e. Flo ‘won’t use’ the Post Office because there is ‘always a lot of druggies hanging about there’, Sylvia does not ‘go down a lot of side roads’ because they are ‘really rough’ and Molly is discouraged away from walking by the shops because ‘there [are] always groups hanging round’. These findings signify a lack of belonging to the local area because these older people have created negative connections between their own entities, that of other local residents and the local environment (their ‘*with-world*’ is comprised of people they do not like or trust) (Eberle, 2015:564; Heidegger, 1962:155). Therefore, ‘habitual time-space routines’ have been created in order to protect the older people from the risks posed by the ‘druggies’ and the ‘gangs’; they have, in essence, become ‘prisoner[s]’ of space (May, 2011:371; Rowles, 1978:22).

These narratives also indicate the significance of traditional theories of working-class delinquency because Meir North appears to have become a ‘street-corner society’, like that found within Whyte’s (1981) study (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006:132). The narratives of the older people suggest that many younger residents congregate in the streets, and this could be because they have nothing else to do, they lack the financial capital to engage in ‘lifestyles’ enjoyed by wealthier consumers, including going to the ‘cinema’ or going on ‘holiday’, and do not have access to other social spaces, and therein seek refuge with others who share this despairing reality (Brake, 1973:35; Clausen, 1961:211; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007:345). According to MacDonald and Shildrick (2007:343), the formation of gangs is not uncommon because ‘even casual observation of the estates of many British cities and towns would reveal exactly these sorts of public gatherings’, especially within ‘socially excluded neighbourhoods’ wherein young, working class (often male) excluded people are seeking ways to redefine their identity and to reformulate their own community which accords with their own needs (Hall et al 1999 cited by MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007:343).

It is due to the loss of social identity and the disadvantageous economic positioning of the working class that younger people within this socio-economic cohort may seek to derive common experiences and meanings with others in a similar position, establishing ‘sympathetic norms’ towards deviancy and illegality (Brake, 1973:36; Cohen and Short, 1961:112). The unemployed and apathetic youth, who has increasingly become marginalised and excluded from society since the late 1970s, might create an alternative ‘leisure career’ consisting of ‘leisure-time crimes’ (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007:340,347). These norms contradict those supported

by larger society, but they help these otherwise marginalised people to feel like they belong within a subculture possessing a 'shared collective life-style' which is supportive of their way of life (Brake, 1973:35-36). Crime and being part of a gang can create new '*mores*' (important rules to follow) and '*folkways*' ('less important norms') (italics in original) that help reinforce a person's sense of power, especially in a society wherein bodies are defaced and dehumanised when they demonstrate no useful qualifications or talents (Clausen, 1961:212; Cressey, 1961:137). If all members of this group share the same 'mores', then their actions become normalised because they become viewed as a rational way to deter imposed worthlessness and to 'solve the problems' which they are currently experiencing (Brake, 1973:36; Cohen and Short, 1961:108-118; Cressey, 1961: 137). As Collison (1996:428-429) notes, 'there is a level of ontological security and trust to be found on the street which obviates some of the uncertainties and insecurities of being male [or female] on the margins of civil society'.

Thus, according to these perspectives, neoliberalism and the global recession have systematically undermined the 'respectable' working class, leaving many younger people with no choice but to redesign their everyday realities and selfhoods in accordance with more accessible possibilities and opportunities, such as the joining of a 'gang', anti-social behaviour and criminality which are the side-effects of an unfair class 'war' (O.Jones, 2012:194; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007:351). This cohort's identity has been distilled to such an extent that it has been transformed not into a 'liquid' as Bauman (2012:2,3,15) originally denoted, but into a gas; they no longer know who they are, what purpose they serve or how to escape their subordinated positioning within contemporary society. It is therefore not improbable that some

working class people now feel they have no choice but to reconstruct their identity through deviant practices, including committing crimes like those explicated by the older people in Meir North, ultimately causing significant uncertainty, misery and ill-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has become evident that the neoliberal discourse, specifically its focus on the 'Big Society', individualisation and self-responsibility, has infiltrated into the older people's consciousness's and helped shape their views about social welfare and younger benefit claimants (Bone, 2012:2,3). In particular, the older people have constructed what they perceive to be a rational dichotomy between morality and immorality, based on the essential ethos that all people 'should always... earn something for what [they] get' [Flo]. This is not considered a choice, but an obligation; it is a 'fundamental thing' [Flo]. The arrival of the 'undesirables' [Harry and Robert] into this area has brought this issue to the fore, as the older people have become surrounded by people who they perceive to not only demonstrate 'anti-social behaviour[s]' (they cause absolute 'chaos') [Harry], but who also oppose their sense of morality because they do not accord with the belief that if you 'put nowt in, you get nowt out' [Wilma]. The opposing attitudes of the 'undesirables' [Harry] towards welfare has consequently caused the older people to become 'dishearten[ed]' [Olive] and to ultimately classify them as '*revolting subjects*' (Tyler, 2013:3).

Although these older people consider their views to be rational and embody deep and meaningful truths, they are in fact a byproduct of living within a neoliberal state for over thirty years. Their ‘state of Being’ has been formulated in accordance with the notion that the ‘Big State’ is to blame for the ills of society, notably the immoral behaviours of the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert] and economic downfall, and the only way to overcome this is to shift to a ‘Big Society’ established upon the principles of self-discipline and self-responsibility (Bone, 2012:2-3; Heidegger, 1962:78). As such, the older people have come to accord with the new ‘austerity moralism’ infiltrated into society by the government and global economic institutions (such as the IMF and the World Bank), that portrays those on benefits as being a threat to social order (Forkert, 2014:43). People who receive benefits are represented as being social deviants because they challenge traditional norms and values which help sustain societal equilibrium, and therein become targets of social condemnation (Forkert, 2014:43). The older people believe their views are a natural response to real-life situations within society, but they do not understand that their beliefs are purposefully constructed via a ‘social anxiety’ discourse that deliberately deters blame away from the perpetrators of this inequitable system, to its victims (Forkert, 2014:43). The older people cannot see through this discourse because their consciousness’s are embedded deeply within it, and therein they have become some of the main protagonists in its survival as they continue to sustain and profess prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs about the poor and the helpless (Forkert, 2014:43).

However, whilst the older people appear to affiliate with the ideology of self-responsibility, they fail to understand how neoliberalism and the recent economic recession have detrimentally affected the young, causing inter-generational conflict (Foucault, 2008). Whilst this older cohort grew up in a world wherein there were abundant job opportunities (from aged ‘fourteen’ to ‘seventy’ [Ronald]), the young have not been so fortunate. In particular, younger people within Meir North have become the victims of a series of detrimental policies and ‘shock doctrine’ tactics that have fundamentally reshaped the social and economic landscape of this area (Klein, 2008:140). As Wacquant (2008:241) aptly summarises, life has become about ‘survival and relentless contest’; a ‘contest’ which those with the poorest skills and the lowest levels of education (like the young in Meir North) are unlikely to win. These working class people no longer have a value for society, they are not ‘machines’ that employers want to invest in (unlike when the older people were young) and thereby have been recast as useless and hopeless entities with only the ability to fail (Foucault, 2008:222; Skeggs, 2004:62).

In addition to this, the younger people in Meir North are having to contend with the outcomes of uneven urban development (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Meir North has become a hollowed out space wherein only the immobile, such as the poor and the destitute, have come to reside, or more specifically, have become trapped. Neoliberalism and the economic recession have played a significant role in this area’s demise, as it is due to their ‘destructive’ forces that its local economy has been damaged and the local infrastructure has been left to decay (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:357; Peck, 2014:398). It is no accident that this area has lost its sense of identity, that it has no heart and is lifeless; this area took its last breath when its

‘incubator’ was turned off by the conservative government in 1979 (Peck et al, 2013:1096). As a result of this, Meir North has lost its place in the ‘game’ of urban competition and its local residents, particularly the younger residents, have had to become dependent on welfare because there are no jobs for them to undertake and there are no other means for them to improve this distressing reality (Peck et al, 2013: 1097).

Moreover, the detrimental economic conditions experienced by the younger people in Meir North are not original as many younger, working class, people across the country (the older people’s younger relatives) have also experienced being ‘made redundant’ [Sylvia, Harry, Molly and Martha] and thereby have had to try and improve their situation through ‘get[ting] some qualifications’ [Sylvia], ‘start[ing] with [an] agency’ [Harry] and ‘appl[ying]’ for jobs [Molly]. As was noted earlier, Thatcher followed an inequitable ‘trickle-down’ doctrine which was always set to fail as rather than wealth filtering down from the wealthy to the poor, it became embroiled in already prosperous areas, causing geographical and structural inequalities (Minton 2009:5) These inequalities have been particularly experienced in working class areas because they, like working class people, have become viewed as being ‘value-less’, and therein are not considered worthy of investment (Minton, 2009; Skeggs, 2004:88). Thereby, whilst the older people continue to accord with neoliberalism’s ‘divisive vocabularies of virtue and waste’, particularly because this accords with their nostalgic past and an era wherein people had to look after their own self, for many people today, unemployment, insecurity and the inability to be resilient has become a part of everyday life (Jensen, 2014:2.5).

The 'intergenerational equity' debate provides a useful explanation for the older people's, or more specifically the 'baby boomer's', beliefs of young, unemployed benefit claimants (Leach et al, 2013:104; Macnicol, 2015:136). The older people continue to condemn the actions of the young despite the world today not offering this cohort as many opportunities as they had and permeating their lives with constant insecurity. The 'baby boomers' grew up in a 'kinder society' than the one which exists today and thereby they are unsympathetic and unempathetic of the conditions experienced by younger generations (Beckett, 2010:194; Leach et al, 2013:104). However, this generation cannot be blamed for possessing these views, nor for having experienced a more secure and prosperous society than the young, because this is a 'symptom of the neoliberalisation of old age' (Macnicol 2015:136). Neoliberalism has deliberately turned the old against the young, through the creation of an ideology that portrays the young as a lazy generation who do not work and are happy to take from the state without giving anything back (Macnicol, 2015:139). Whilst this discourse is not true, it (inclusive of negative stereotyping) continues to be disseminated in order to re-direct frustration away from the passing of additional repressive welfare policies and increased levels of inequality (Leach et al, 2013:106; Macnicol, 2015:141).

Neoliberalism and the economic recession have also caused significant fractures within the working class. Policies since 1979, such as deindustrialisation, individualisation and 'flexibilisation' have lead to considerable changes being made to the 'solid' 'atoms' of the working class; they have been distilled to an unrecognisable form (Bauman, 2012:2-8). Whilst in the past being working class meant possessing a skilled job and sharing a community with people with similar norms, values and traditions (their 'atoms' were 'bond[ed]' together), in today's

society class has become a 'task' that individuals must successfully complete (Bauman, 2001b:124; Bauman, 2012:7). Rather than possessing a working class 'State-of-Being', like the older people, younger people have to '*become*' (italics in original) working class (Bauman, 2001b:124; Heidegger, 1962:78). This is a complex process because under the conditions of 'liquid' modernity the young have been forcibly removed from their traditional class culture but have not been helped to 're-embed' themselves in the new, more transitional (slippery) social structure, leading to a loss of identity and a permanent state of ambiguity (Bauman, 2001b:124,125).

As a consequence of this, two divergent 'habitus-systems' have been created, one by the older 'respectable working class' (represented by the older people) and another by the new working class (represented by the younger people) who are deemed to symbolise regression, stagnation and social immobility (Bourdieu, 1984:166; Heffer cited by O.Jones, 2012:185; Murray, 1996:108; Prideaux, 2010:295). The older people perceive the new working class to be only an imitation of the former working class because they defy and dishonor its nature and traditions (they do not work all of their lives, they are immoral and they rely upon state benefits) (Skeggs, 2004: 84-99). However, this older generation draw from their own, nostalgic experiences of the working class and therefore appraise the 'habitus' of the young working class through an outdated lens which fails to account for the detrimental consequences of neoliberalism and the economic recession (Bourdieu, 1984:167). As a result of this, the older people have created a new 'sign system' based upon "us" and "them" categorisations which not only helps to reaffirm their own identity, but also differentiates their own entities from the new *unrespectable* working class (Bourdieu, 1984:166-168; Standing, 2011:1).

The attack upon the working class, inclusive of their identity, culture, and place of residence, could also help explain why there are higher than average levels of crime and deviancy within Meir North (Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics, 2017). Many of the older people who partook within this study complained of issues linked to drug taking, vandalism, arson and gangs, which undermined their wellbeing and caused them to not only feel ‘nervous’ [Sylvia] and ‘intimidat[ed]’ [Dorothy], but also to become ‘prisoner[s]’ of space (Rowles, 1978:22). Whilst no definitive causal relationships can be established concerning why these forms of crime and deviance exist within this area, it has been theorised that this could be an outcome of younger people feeling bored (as their leisure activities have been removed), experiencing a sense of ‘strain’ (as their job opportunities have been severely limited) and being marginalised (as they have been pushed to the periphery of society) (Young, 1999:11). It is through deviant acts such as these that some younger, working class people may find a way of escaping the drudgery of their everyday lives as they can effectively ‘bounce back’ through these rebellious forms of action and reconstruct their selfhood in a world that seeks to position them as ‘use-less subject[s]’ (Chandler, 2014, 3; Skeggs, 2004:62).

Thus, the construction of a ‘new world’ since the late 1970s has fundamentally divided and fractured the working class (Bauman, 2001c:35; O.Jones, 2012). Unless this political paradigm is changed, the victims of this antagonistic and divisive discourse (*both* the young and the old) will continue to be scapegoated for the ills of society and a deep-seated form of ‘hopelessness’ will become lodged into former working class communities (O.Jones, 2012:219-220). A continued assault of this type is ultimately likely to establish a new form of modernity, a ‘gas modernity’, wherein

the working class are distilled to such an extent they no longer have any visible shape (they are neither a 'solid' or a 'liquid'), and much to the detriment of this cohort, their 'atoms' will be so severely altered that they will never be able to be revert back to their unified and solidified state (Bauman, 2012:1-2).

Chapter Four

Abnormal Abnormality:

The Resistant ‘Monsters’¹⁶ of Consumerism

‘I decided to treat myself to a cream cake the other day from Wrights, how much did it cost? A pound, and I sat there that afternoon with a cup of tea and I thought ‘now you are eating this, that’s cost you a whole pound’’. [Olive]

The aim of this chapter is to show the extent to which neoliberalism and the economic recession have impacted upon the older people living within Meir North, with particular focus being given to consumerism; the second major facet of the neoliberal ideology. Thus, the chapter begins with an examination of the older people’s subjectivities and their views concerning consumption. It is within the first main section that the generational differences between younger and older people are discerned, notably according to divergent socialisations and life-experiences, and useful cross-comparative analyses are undertaken. Following this, attention is turned to the ways in which the older people have become ‘craft consumers’ and have created their own ‘grey economy’ which affiliates with the tenets of the Arts and Craft movement in the 19th century (Campbell, 2005:23; Crawford, 1997:15). Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of the detrimental effects of living within a consumer society, especially for those who cannot attain or sustain the desired level of commodity ownership as is required of a neoliberal citizen, such as criminals, and the impact this has had upon the older people’s ‘life-world[s]’ (Spurling, 1977:9). It is here that interesting comparisons are drawn between the ‘monsters’ of consumerism,

¹⁶ (Foucault, 1999:81)

notably a criminal (who denotes a form of authorised abnormality) and a resistant older person (who represents an un-authorised form of abnormality), and it is shown why, in contrast to common perceptions, the latter are considered the most monstrous of all (Foucault, 1999:81).

Resistance, Opposition and Defiance: The Creation of Anti-Consumer

Subjectivities

As was inferred in the introductory chapter, a new ‘art of government’ has been created since Thatcher’s government, wherein individuals’ (referred to as ‘machine[s]’) subjectivities have been recreated according to the tenets of rationality, competitiveness and resilience (Foucault, 2008:27; Schirato et al, 2012:133). All individuals are contemporarily expected to demonstrate that they can make reasoned choices, that they can outdo all others and protect their own entities from misfortune and hardship (Foucault, 2008; Schirato et al, 2012). Moreover, these ‘machine[s]’ have been rewired to work (which was discussed in the previous chapter) and to consume; the more they uphold these practices the greater their value to society (Schirato et al, 2012:133). In order to be considered a ‘*homo economicus*’ (italics in original) (an economic man or woman), the individual is expected to earn capital and endlessly consume products in accordance with their ‘own interests’, or they will alternatively be considered an ‘abnormal’ ‘moral monster’ (Foucault, 1999:81; Foucault, 2008:226,271,303). However, whilst all individuals should have been influenced by this form of ‘bio-power’ and should uphold consumerist ‘technologies of the self’, the data from the ethnographic study reveals that the older people have been resistant to such alterations (Foucault, 1997:242; Peterson, 2003:189). As the

following narratives show, the older people condemn the consumption practices of the young because they believe they are irrational and superfluous. There is disdain towards younger people's throw away and wasteful attitudes towards the ownership of commodities:

Prams:

Flora: But it is like when they have children, these young ones, they have a new pram for every child and they are not cheap prams. I mean I know one who has just paid four hundred pounds for a pram.

Dorothy: It's like my Granddaughter, when she had [Great Grandson], she had the most gorgeous pram, gorgeous, turquoise with little erm...well shiny bits in it. So when he was only one...when she had [great Granddaughter], I'm saying 'oh well you have still got [great Grandson's] pram haven't you?', 'oh she is not having that', 'why?', 'it's boys'. I said 'it's turquoise, it isn't blue, it's turquoise with glitter in'. 'Oh no!' So she's had this most gorgeous red pram with a big flower and then she comes and says 'it's 200 pound cheaper than [Great Grandson's] pram'. 'Why how much is it?', '[Great Grandson's] is 600, hers is 400', you know, and I am thinking 'what a waste of money'.

Mobile Phones:

Dorothy: I don't know, I think they waste a lot of money for all that, on this business of phones; they have all got phones haven't they? I mean mine is a ten-pound Nokia, out from under the counter up Meir. I said 'have you got any cheap phones?', he said 'what do you want to do with it?', I said 'nothing, just ring out and text and that's me', you know. It does take photographs I think but you can't pass one to another phone, or whatever they do, can't do that on it. In fact [Granddaughter] will say 'don't get that out where my friends are', cus she's got these, is it a Blackberry, Blueberry?

Designer Clothes:

Joint Interview:

Jenny: And some of them have designer clothes as well.

Betty: I was going to say, they wouldn't wear cheap clothing, they have to have names on them won't it? If they haven't got names on, they won't wear them will they? They are too daft with them. Same as years ago, we were happy with an apple and orange and what do they want now, ey?!

Single Interview:

Dorothy: I have got a Grandson who is 15 in July and I said to him, 'what are you going to have for Easter? Are you having an Easter egg?', 'No

Nan I don't want an Easter egg', 'well have you got any idea?', 'I will have an outfit', 'oh will you? Oh right'. 'T-shirt and a pair of jeans', I'm thinking 'well where did I go wrong there?'...and you think to yourself 'what went wrong with a 50 pence egg?'

The older participants appear shocked and surprised at the price paid for goods and the attitudes shown towards frivolously spending money on items which are perceived as being unnecessary. Both Flora and Dorothy cannot comprehend spending '400 pounds on a pram', especially when the mother of the child already has a 'gorgeous pram' that has no technical fault to deter its usability. Having a 'pram for every child' [Flora] is not considered economical but a 'waste of money' [Dorothy] and the reasoning provided (linked to the aesthetics of the pram, i.e. the pram is the wrong colour for a girl) is deemed trivial and illogical. Whilst Dorothy's Granddaughter perceives the pram to be of good value because it is '200 pound[s] cheaper' than the pram bought for her son, to Dorothy, '400' pounds is still a very expensive price to pay for an object which serves no greater purpose than the item previously purchased. A similar attitude is held concerning mobile phones, because Dorothy places emphasis upon buying a 'cheap phone' simply to 'ring out and text' other people, she is not concerned that she cannot share photos, which greatly differs to her Granddaughter who wanted a 'Blackberry' in order to be able to take advantage of all the extra features and deter ridicule from her peers. The phone is of importance to Dorothy's Granddaughter because it serves as a symbol of her status, whereas to Dorothy it is simply a tool with a useful purpose, there is no correlation between the ownership of this gadget and her selfhood.

The need for 'designer clothes' [Jenny] 'with names on' [Betty] is an alien concept to these older people because, like with the pram and the mobile phone, they prioritise functionality over fashion. Whilst Dorothy's account was humorous, as she discussed her Grandson's wishes in a lighthearted way, she did pose the very serious question of 'what went wrong with a 50 pence egg?' It is implied that in her day, when she was younger, she would be happy with a small, cheap chocolate egg as the gesture of receiving a present outweighed the actual material object being given to her (which is supported by Betty who states that they 'were happy with an apple and orange'), but there has become a fundamental alteration in this thinking. A little chocolate egg is no longer enough, it is not grand enough in size, it is not symbolic enough in its meaning or gesture and it does not influence the child's social standing in the same way as an expensive outfit. Thereby, what is of importance for these younger people is how a product enhances their reputation and personhood and increases their social status; they do not give significant meaning to its functionality (Dorling, 2015:141). This ethos fundamentally contrasts with that of the older people living with Meir North.

What these narratives ultimately show, is that the older people are resistant to the 'new branded world' (Klein 2010:3). Klein (2010:3) argues that brands rather than products have become the major focus of corporations, especially since the 'mid-1980s', wherein focus shifted from what a company could produce, to how they could sell the items in a mass market (Klein, 2010:3). The '*image*' (italics in original) of a specific brand became of greater importance than any other facet of product consumption (Klein, 2010:4). Through aggressive and 'intrusive' forms of advertising, companies hoped to instill brands, via imagery, into the consciousness's of subjects and to connect their subjectivities and personhoods with objects (Klein, 2010:6,9,68). However, despite this transformation, the older participants within this

study have not bought into brands, they have not constructed a sense of attachment, of loyalty, to labelled objects, and they have not become docile consumers under the authority and control of production companies who seek to reap profit from these illusionary sentiments (Klein, 2010).

The older people have also resisted becoming the victims of a 'low-intensity war', wherein those entrapped in the current 'cultural apparatus' are attacked by economic forces and transformed into commodities (Giroux 2009a:29; 2012:98). The 'vampires' of consumerism seek to transform every person, young and old, into an object of profit and thereby utilise the media and advertising to entice them to buy the latest fashions and technological objects according to the rationale of increased happiness and popularity (Giroux, 2009a:33). The aim is to transform all individuals into objects of profit needing to be squeezed of its life and soul to extrapolate the greatest wealth, leading to a ubiquitous philosophy of consumerism (Giroux, 2009a). The act of consuming is not supposed to be considered voluntary, something that people can choose to adopt or disregard, because it is now a contractual rule for gaining citizenship and should be part of their selfhood (Giroux, 2009a). Neoliberal citizens should accept that their worth is linked to their ability to consume quickly, without reflection or remorse, and if they cannot fulfill this practice they are 'dispos[ed]' of and cast aside like unwanted trash (Giroux, 2009a:54). This 'war' seeks ultimately to create a 'culture of fear' and cause its victims to suffer from 'social amnesia' wherein they forget that there are alternative ways of living and the ownership of commodities does not have to dominate social life (Giroux, 2009a:29,157,179; Giroux, 2012).

However, as the accounts of the older people show, they have not been affected by this ‘war’ because they are not interested in buying goods just for the sake of improving their social standing (Giroux, 2009a:29). The way in which Dorothy asked whether the phone was a ‘Blackberry’ or a ‘Blueberry’ demonstrates that she has no real understanding of brands. Dorothy has heard her Granddaughter discussing this type of phone, but she has made no attempt to research the brand and find out more information about it; she is not a well-informed consumer which is the expectation of a contemporary neoliberal subject. The older people also have no inner drive to purchase designer, branded clothes because they do not seek to create a fashionable ‘character’ or ‘hexis’ to gain social approval, commodities do not shape who they are or influence their identity or status; they resist the neoliberal temptation to utilise their bodies as ‘expressive equipment’ (Goffman, 1959:203, 214; Jenkins, 1992:75). The ‘man [or woman] behind the mask’ is the same person in front of the mask; the social gaze does not create or impact upon their sense of ‘Being’ (Goffman, 1959:206; Heidegger 1962; 79).

The resistance that the older people show towards contemporary forms of consumerism could be explained by their socialisation, as they grew up in a different world whereby there was little money and few commodities. For example, Jenny stated that ‘*if* [they] had toys at Christmas, [her] Dad used to make dolls houses, and ports and garages for the lads, and [her] Mum used to make rag dolls’; indicating that her family did not have substantial financial capital and thereby they had to be resourceful with what they had. In addition, many of the older people spoke of enduring hardships, partly due to a lack of money and partly due to the limited nature of the economy during their own childhoods, i.e. Flo recalled visiting the butchers

when she was younger and buying ‘broken biscuits’ in ‘tins’ because they ‘were cheaper’, Jenny told of a world wherein there was ‘no central heating in [her] day’ and Betty and Jenny both spoke of having ‘no toilet paper’ as they ‘used to [have to] cut squares up with newspaper on some string’ [Betty], leaving the person with a ‘black bottom [due to] the print’ [Jenny]. Moreover, during ‘*Friendship Group*’, Flo and Wilma recalled memories of having to use gravy granules to create a tan on their legs (with a penciled line down the middle) so it looked like they were wearing tights, and how they, along with Dorothy, ‘darned’ their socks. It was in this world of scarcity that this generation, along with their parents and families, had to be thrifty and learn how to save:

Patricia: I have always been thrifty erm...I buy my clothes from second hand shops, two pound like for a coat, stuff like that...my Mum was always thrifty.

Ronald: I didn’t have a driving license until I was 48, I think, because I couldn’t afford a car. I have been driving near enough 40 years.

Lilly: Oh yes, if you don’t [save] it is just going to dwindle isn’t it? If I have got something in mind, perhaps I don’t always say anything to him [her husband], but I’d save until I know I can afford it. I won’t go out shopping and think ‘oh I can’t afford that’ and won’t have it. I will go looking at what the prices are and then I will save it.

Dorothy: I was at work a long time and you got paid for it...I bought my place so, saving every penny, and bought my own place so you know it all helped.

Flo: I mean when I was a teenager, well when I went to work, I saved up half a crown a week and bought myself a second hand bike from Highlands, it was 8 pound. It took me ages to pay it off...I used to polish it I was that proud of it.

These passages indicate that the older people have had to learn to be 'thrifty' [Patricia] throughout their lifetimes. If the participants wanted to purchase goods, such as a car [Ronald], a house [Dorothy] or a 'bike' [Flo] they saved their wages until they had the amount of money required. The object desired was not instantly purchased but saved for over a long period of time, as noted by Ronald who stated that he did not get a 'driving license until [he] was 48 because [he] couldn't afford a car' and Flo who took 'ages to pay...off' her '8 pound' bike, saving 'half a crown a week'. The hard work undertaken to get these items and the time taken (they would 'wait' to make purchases [Patricia]), meant the desire for the object grew to such an extent that once they were owned they were not taken for granted but cherished, as Flo notes, 'I used to polish it I was that proud of it'. In contrast, according to the older people's perspectives, younger people do not appear to understand the meaning of money, they spend it without thinking, they do not appreciate how hard people (such as their parents) have had to work to give them what they want and show a lack of gratitude for their purchases, i.e. they simply replace one item (such as a 'gorgeous, turquoise' pram) with another (a 'gorgeous red pram with a big flower' [Dorothy])

without hesitation. This constant buying of goods consequently causes frustration for the older people because it opposes their inner sense of morality and challenges their ethos of spending, i.e. frittering away money on items without thought or consideration appears unnatural and irresponsible.

However, it is worth noting that whilst the consumerist actions of younger people perplex the older people in Meir North, they are in fact customary within the current 'culture industry' because a form of 'instrumental reason' incites subjects to permanently consume (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3,4). In the past, 'free time' referred to temporal moments wherein the individual could undertake activities of their own choosing, but in a neoliberal world it becomes just another period requiring governance to ensure maximum output and global profit (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:4). Time is no longer our own. Instead, many subjects are driven by endless desires for, and instant gratification from, commodities, determined not by their natural desires (although they might think this) but from a new social discourse that invades their consciousness from every angle (from what they read (books, magazines, Internet websites), see (advertising) and hear (via the radio, television)) (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:4,9). Individuals believe they are consuming to fulfill their own needs and enable maximum personal gratification, but they are in fact part of a greater collective system which is governed by 'coded values' (Baudrillard, 1998:78).

These 'code[s]' are 'forced upon' neoliberal subjects as part of their citizenry duties, leading to a 'new morality' of consumerism and a belief that the experiencing of '*enjoyment*' from attaining new commodities is a societal '*obligation*' (italics in original) (Baudrillard, 1998:80-82). This ideological system therefore becomes a 'technicised form of modern consciousness' as it instills into people's minds the

ideology that they must endlessly buy products, specifically of the same brand, in order to live a successful life and this is an unquestionable duty (no thought or reflection is necessary) (Adorno, 1991:85; Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:11). Thus, even though human beings believe they have the choice to be different to others and adopt individualistic lifestyles, in practice true individualism is non-existent as they have merely become uniform parts of a system which is founded on a false sense of individualism and consumerist conformity (Adorno, 1991:85,96; Bernstein, 1991:9).

Whilst Marxists may proclaim that unconstrained capital production, untied from capitalist relations, may lead to a 'free society', Adorno believes it leads to increased domination as the very nature of anatomical forms is modified to such an extent that happiness and satisfaction are only experienced with the perpetual consumption of commodities (cited by Bernstein, 1991:3,6). This ideal requires the individual to work longer hours in order to purchase the goods they desire, leading to further exploitation, especially as their desires will perpetually change and alter as new commodities are produced (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3,6). This innovative rationality is in part an outcome of the Enlightenment and the promises of science to overcome all technological and social barriers to progress, leading to the assumption that everything is possible and at arm's reach (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3). As a result of this, many people believe that through work they can uphold a state of happiness as the capital they earn can lead to consumption practices in accordance with their own choices, but in reality the 'culture industry' merely 'disguis[e] the true nature of things' so that they become a slave to the purchasing of commodities and they 'forget [their] suffering' (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:10). The belief in freedom (an 'irrationality of enlightened reason') leads to social disintegration as

capitalist production increases and the inequalities between the rich and the poor are intensified (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:4,11). Contemporary society is therefore largely un-free and comprised of subjects who do not feel 'authentic happiness'; only a contrived sense of happiness which symbolises the death of individual cognition and emotion (Bernstein, 1991:22).

Conversely, although Adorno (1991:21) implies that the 'culture industry' removes introspection because human beings are 'dupes of mass deception', he does also recognise that individuals can cognitively oppose the buying of specific commodities, but they have to ignore these impulses and alternatively feel 'compelled' to consume all objects (even if they are unwanted) (Bernstein, 1991:12). The 'culture industry' encourages the antagonistic action of 'seeing through' items whilst simultaneously 'obeying' cultural norms (Bernstein, 1991:13). The supposed behaviours of the young in Meir North accords with this, as they understand that a 'Blackberry' phone [Dorothy] is not essential for survival anymore than labelled clothes [Jenny, Betty], but they buy these commodities anyway because they feel obliged to keep up with the latest fashions and feel a falsified need to sustain their social status within society (Bernstein, 1991:12). The ignorance of one's natural instincts which know what is, and what is not, required for survival, is an outcome of primary and secondary socialisation, particularly undertaken in families and in schools, as children are taught to take the consumerist 'ideals' of society 'seriously' (which differs sharply to the socialisation of the older people) (Adorno, 1991:62).

The 'social game' metaphor also helps to explicate consumerism within a neoliberal world (Bourdieu, 1990:70). To win, and outdo all other players, the individual must comprehend the 'logic of the game' (knowledge is power) and consume the most amount of objects utilising their economic, symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990:70). All subjects know the rules of the 'game' without rigorous rehearsal or conscious deliberation as their actions and thoughts have become 'objectively harmonised' with their culture, meaning they think and act without understanding why they think in this way or how to alter such practices (Bourdieu, 1990:70; Jenkins, 1992:70-78). Engaging with this 'game' has therefore become 'second nature' to many individuals as they have been taught the instructions throughout their lives; from the moment they were born they obtained a 'set of practical cultural competencies' helping them to establish their identity and develop the skills needed to be successful in this open competition (Jenkins, 1992:70-71). Once playing the 'game', players abide by 'certain regularities' which have been defined by an external force, as Bourdieu (1990:64-76) aptly summarises, 'in the game you can't do just anything and get away with it'. All behaviours and thoughts have been 'codified' in accordance with dominant market-driven strategies and dispersed via the media in order to maintain the 'symbolic order' of society, leading to the acceptance that reality is natural and is 'the way things are' (referred to as the 'doxic experience') (Bourdieu, 1985:28; Bourdieu, 1990:76,81; Jenkins, 1992:70,71). Everlasting consumerism is the new compulsory 'game' of the neoliberal era, all subjects are expected to play (like the young people described by the older people) and only those with the most amount of commodities will win (Bourdieu, 1990:70).

Foucault's (1997; 242) notion of 'biopower' resonates with these theories of consumption because it denotes how human cognition and anatomy have been reformulated to endlessly consume, regardless of the cost to the individual. This is not to argue that consumerism has become a new existentialist state, as Foucault (1991) believes human beings are not born with a defined human nature and are not made up of preordained 'essences' (which is why alternative forms of human nature can be created, notably by younger and older people), but that human subjectivity has become shaped around the act of consuming and owning a plethora of commodities (cited by Hacking, 2004:277,281). The nature of subjects is not derived from genetics but from those in power, specifically those with knowledge and wealth, such as the 'vampires' (to utilise Giroux's (2009b:31) terminology), who seek to extract profit from every living entity and ensure they constantly oscillate between 'technologies of the self' and 'technologies of domination', with the latter taking precedence (Bevir, 1999:6,13). For example, whilst individuals are 'agents' and can choose what they purchase (they have 'agency') and how to construct their own identity, the act of choosing is not a choice but an obligation of citizenship and the range of commodities to choose from is limited by their creators (Bevir, 1999:5-13). This form of governance becomes part of a 'normalisation' process wherein consumption becomes as natural as other human drives, such as eating, drinking and procreation, and all actions become shaped around a permanent disciplinary-sovereignty paradigm (Peterson, 2003; Schirato et al, 2012:99).

A new 'consumer society' has therefore been devised which has systematically tried to attack human subjectivity from within (notably with varying levels of success) (Bauman, 2002:183). Beginning in the nineteenth century, consumers were expected

to consume items according to their 'needs', with all purchases being aligned to biological requirements (Bauman, 2002:183). There was an expectation that people would 'delay [their] gratification' and would only purchase items that they really needed; superfluous consumption was discredited, a notion shared by many of the older people within this study (Bauman, 2002:184). However, a significant alteration was made to this 'nature of consumption' as the term 'need' was displaced by that of 'desire' due to the recognition that the consumption of commodities was not linked to the '*satisfying* [of] needs' (italics in original) but the fulfillment of personal cravings that did not rest upon justified reason (Bauman, 2002:184). The consuming individual no longer consumed according to a rationalised and biological logic but in accordance with their own wants, and no 'justification or apology' was required (Bauman, 2002:184). This new rationality implied that individuals no longer needed to adhere to the principle of deferred gratification because not only were 'desires' too overpowering for the delay of purchases, but more significantly, there was no such thing as 'gratification' because the more the individual consumed in affiliation with their 'desires', the more they wanted commodities and further 'desires' arose (Bauman, 2002:184). It was due to the uncontainable nature of 'desires' that a further 'siege' was conducted against society, specifically in the form of the displacing of 'desires' for 'wish[es]', enabling the complete freedom of what Bauman (2002:185) refers to as the 'pleasure principle'. Hence in contemporary 'consumer society', individuals, especially younger generations, can no longer decipher what is rational and irrational, a true 'wish' and a false 'wish', nor what is reality or unreality, all they know is that they must consume (Bauman, 2002:183-188).

The end result of this indoctrination is the production of what Deleuze and Guattari (1984:1) call 'desiring machines'. In the past there used to be a distinction between the human entity and nature, but since the late 1970s these two aspects have merged into a single 'machine' constantly desiring goods without an 'off' switch (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:2). These 'machines' are programmed to purchase commodities without thought, they are automated to habitually acquire commodities and their cognition is filled with memorised recordings of these processes, leading ultimately to further production (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:4). Conversely, when referring to production, this includes the 'production of productions, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain'; everything is logged into the mechanical brain and stored for future reference (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:4). The feeling of purchasing a new car is recorded, the memories of the 'machine's' last holiday is imprinted in its memory box, the sadness and frustration felt at not being able to afford the latest technological gadget is noted and subsequently are amalgamated to produce the same sentiment; one must consume more and terminate all obstacles standing in the way of their desires (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:4). 'Machines' come to crave objects and experiences like a drug addict on cocaine, once they enjoy the immediate sense of euphoria from their purchases, electric impulses of ecstasy whirl through their frameworks and hallucinatory visions of paradises of commodities are generated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:5). The individual consequently does not come to recognise the difference between need and want, as the consumerist drug blurs the boundaries between these facets, leading to the constant desire to get high via continual commodity accumulation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984). In this state of illusion, nothing appears off limits, it is all within reach of the grasping hand.

Therefore, in spite of the older people's wish to overturn this system, a 'new phase of civilisation' does now exist and a 'one-dimensional society' has been produced, inclusive of 'one-dimensional' subjects (Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xii,xx). This 'one-dimensional' reality has been developed by people within society who possess the same norms and values centred on a state of consuming and the ownership of commodities (Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002: xii, xx, xxx). This macro-economic paradigm has become so entrenched within modern day society that many individuals can no longer decipher between 'true and false needs' (or more specifically between true or false 'wish[es]), as the media and corporations strategically create these in order to increase global profits and deter revolutionary conversions (Bauman, 2002:185; Kellner, 2002:xx, xxx). Consumers believe they have the freedom to act and to choose, but often the only choice they really have is between one branded product and another (Marcuse, 2002). The acceptance of global consumerism as if a natural and essential part of everyday living threatens to undermine 'individuality' and human freedoms because many people no longer know what they truly want, nor how they truly feel, because they have no true 'instincts' or 'soul' (Marcuse, 2002:3-11). The irrational has become rational, whilst the rational is irrational, leading consequently to complete irrationalism (Kellner, 2002:xxx).

Crafty and Thrifty Three-dimensional Deviants¹⁷

This ‘new phase of civilisation’, which encompasses the creation of ‘one-dimensional’ subjects, also encourages a state of indebtedness, a ‘state of Being’ which the older people fundamentally resist (Heidegger, 1962:78; Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xii,xx):

Alma: Yes, when Father died, there was five of us left...erm...not flush, Mother wasn’t, so in a way I learnt how to shop well, if you look about you can do things. I mean to just...[buy] and not look, it isn’t our way, as regards hire purchase, no. If you have got to have second hand you can afford, yes, not get yourself in a lot of debt, I wouldn’t be able to sleep.

Patricia: Well my Mum was always thrifty, my Dad would like to spend but never went into any debt, never had any debts. When I was living with my ex-husband he was all you know ‘we can’t have that, we will have that when we can afford it’, you know. We never had a loan or never borrowed anything or never had a debt. If we hadn’t got enough money to pay for it we would wait until we had sort of thing....So I have always had to be careful where I spent.

¹⁷ (Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xi)

Dorothy: I mean listening to like a bus load of girls on a Sunday, if they want something they have a loan...but to me, if you can't pay for it you don't have it. I haven't got a credit card or anything like that, nothing, I haven't got any debt at all, only you know, your gas, your electric, your what have you. I haven't got debt as such, but I wouldn't like to have it either. I would worry myself sick...but they don't seem to bother, you know.

The older people dislike being in debt because the thought of owing somebody, somewhere, money causes ill-being as is denoted by Alma who states she 'wouldn't be able to sleep' and Dorothy who would become 'sick' with 'worry'. The guiding ethos behind their spending practices is; if they 'can't pay for it [they] don't have it' [Dorothy] and if they haven't 'got enough money to pay for it [they] would wait' [Patricia]. Even if these older people experience hardships like poverty, they still do not accrue debt as a matter of principle, they find alternative ways to deal with this either through 'wait[ing]' [Patricia] until they have the money, as exemplified by Ronald's, Flo's and Dorothy's earlier accounts, going without, or having 'second hand' [Alma] items. These older people therefore appear to possess a divergent subjectivity to many other people in society, because they are not 'desiring machines', they are not governed by egotistical drives, they do not seek immediate self-gratification and they do not consume without thought or consideration; they are 'thrifty' [Patricia] deviants who feel physically ill at the thought of being in debt (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1; Foucault, 2008).

Moreover, the older people also discussed how they adopted an ethos of ‘moderation’, specifically in terms of their food and drink habits, which opposes the central requisites of the neoliberal ideology:

Wilma: I try and eat healthily. I mean I have my treats. I mean you tell me who doesn’t? I don’t smoke, I won’t say I don’t drink because I like a glass of wine but not to be silly with it you know. To me, it is just about eating normal food... [and] everything [being] in moderation.

Ronald: Well, basically what I do, I eat good food for instance, you know, I mean I have whole meal food, bread and so on. I don’t smoke, don’t drink as you call drinking, I don’t drink beer and stuff. What I do like is just to have a drop of whiskey in my coffee... I mean we have plenty of fresh vegetables you know, and then apples...and...pears and grapes, various things like that you know...in other words you have got to live in moderation with stuff.

Alma: A drop of brandy, a little in my coffee with a teaspoon. Mother had it and she made 96. Oh chocolate is a treat, chocolate is a treat, biscuits...I have everything in moderation.

Harry: Well, I eat what I want but in moderation.

Poppy: We try to eat in moderation. We have bits of everything.

Alice: Yes, I think you should have what you want...but only in small amounts.

Olive: I decided to treat myself to a cream cake the other day from Wrights, how much did it cost? A pound, and I sat there that afternoon with a cup of tea and I thought ‘now you are eating this, that’s cost you a whole pound.

Even when leaflets are placed through the older people’s doors in order to entice them to purchase various continental and traditional English (fish and chips) dishes from a plethora of local takeaways, they still resist:

Joint Interview:

Dennis: You get about six leaflets through your door. You can have Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, you name it, they sell it.

Lilly: I don’t think we have ever had a takeaway meal have we?

Dennis: No.

Lilly: We have never ordered one.

Single Interview:

Sylvia: We don't eat a lot of takeaways and things like that...We have a lot of literature through the door [from local takeaways] and we go 'shall we have one?', 'No, no, let's just have a bowl of stew.'

These narratives highlight the self-disciplining attitudes of the older people as they restrict their consumption habits according to the rationale that they 'should have what [they] want...but only in small amounts' [Alma], such as 'a glass of wine' [Wilma], a little bit of chocolate as a 'treat' [Alma] or a 'drop of' 'brandy' or 'whiskey' in their 'coffee' [Ronald, Alma]. They also resist the temptations of companies that seek to sell them an assortment of foods, notably the takeaways that are in close proximity to their residence, preferring instead to consume a modest 'bowl of stew' [Dennis, Lilly and Sylvia]. Olive's statement in particular epitomises the reductionist way of life adopted by these older people and their preference for simple and 'moderate' pleasures, alongside their resistant attitudes towards consumerism. The way in which Olive said a 'whole pound' inferred that this was a lot of money to spend on a treat, on an item which was not needed but bought purely to fulfill a 'wish' (Bauman, 2002:185). Moreover, the fact that she then had to think 'now you are eating this', suggests that she felt guilty about buying the cake, she had to make herself believe that she did really want it, and that she had to eat it all in order to deter waste; to throw the cream cake away would have gone against her nature. Hence, these accounts demonstrate that the older people accord with a theory of 'moderation' and thereby reject the most essential principles of the neoliberal discourse, specifically that of excessive and perpetual consumption (Foucault, 2008).

What these narratives (along with the former documented narratives) signify is that the older people are ‘thrift shopp[ers]’; they do not spend frivolously on items which are not needed and like to adhere to an ethos of ‘moderation’ [Wilma, Ronald, Alma, Harry, Poppy, Alice and Olive] (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005:223). The reasoning behind this thriftiness is that of economic practicality, as the older people grew up during an era wherein they had to ‘economise’ and look after the few resources that they had and therein they have developed an effective system of money management (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005:223,224; Berg, 2015:287). These older people have adopted thrifty practices because they believe they should only purchase items that have a functional purpose (with only a few smaller treats being acceptable) and ‘avoid waste’ (as this is considered careless and inefficient) (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005: 232). Furthermore, beyond the financial reasons for being frugal, saving money rather than spending on unnecessary commodities is considered a ‘moral act’ and demonstrates that the individual can go without; they are not driven by the hedonistic need to constantly consume (Miller 1998, cited by Bardhi and Arnould, 2005:224). Thrift and moderate consumer practices therefore serve ‘as a sacrificial rite’ and are ultimately considered a symbol of the righteous and the respectable (Miller 1998, cited by Bardhi and Arnould, 2005:224).

Bramall’s (2015:183) theory of austerity and rationing could help account for the older people’s prudence and thriftiness. Many of the older people within this study grew up in ‘austerity Britain’ ‘(1939-1954)’, wherein there was rationing, a shortage of foods and often ‘very little on the table’ (Bramall, 2015:183, 184). Whilst the image of the ‘austerity larder’ (in the ‘Imperial War Museum London’) is ‘iconic’, for many people currently in old age it was a reality because they and their families could not access foods such as butter, cheese, milk, eggs, meat and sugar (with the latter two

items being rationed up until the mid-1950s) and they had to learn to not only be very resourceful with what they had, but also to avoid waste (Bramall, 2015:183, 187). Many of the older people know and understand that ‘supply systems’ are very ‘fragil[e]’, they can be working effectively one day and the next there are shortages and empty shelves (Bramall, 2015:193). It is not improbable therefore, that the older people’s attitudes towards consumption and spending originate from these much harsher times, wherein scarcity and parsimony pervaded and people had to go without (Bramall, 2015:184).

In addition, it is worth noting that the beliefs of the older people concerning the retraction of the welfare state and the support they show towards the capping of benefits, as discussed in the previous chapter, is also likely to stem from this dominant austerity discourse. As Bramall (2015:187) notes, during the era of the World Wars, there was a common belief that all ‘citizens [should] submit willingly to...restrictions’ as part of ‘universal sacrifice, egalitarianism, and common purpose’. Hence, drawing from this ethos, the older people are likely to believe that the retraction of services is needed in order to protect society and ensure a state of equality (Bramall, 2015). It is due to these experiences that this older cohort have developed a hardened sacrifice mentality, which equates abstinence and self-discipline with morality, and encourages a more restrained and ‘moderate’ [Alice, Alma, Harry, Olive, Poppy, Ronald, and Wilma] way of living (Bramall, 2015:195).

However, whilst the older people reject modern day consumption trends and deter away from being in debt, it is of importance to highlight that not everyone, particularly younger generations, can be so well principled for three significant reasons; their ‘machines’ have been wired differently to that of the older people (they have a divergent nature), they have been constructed with an in-built weakness – an impulse to constantly consume regardless of the cost to their own entities, and their bodies are more exposed to the ‘violence’ of austerity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1; Ellis, 2017:110). In the first instance, the new ‘government of conduct’ has reformulated the notion of resilience to include a series of ‘creditor-debtor relationship[s]’ wherein biopolitical subjects are expected to go into debt as part of a ‘disaster management’ strategy to deter risk and sustain a ‘good life’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1; Evans and Reid, 2013:84; Lazzarato, 2011:91-94,130-132). Although in the past the possession of debt may have been perceived as bad, as a symbol of poor monetary management and over-indulgence (when the older people were younger), in today’s debt-driven world it is considered a sign of a good and sensible entrepreneur who understands the risks of living within a globalised, recession hit, world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984).

Furthermore, the societal ‘obligation’ to perpetually consume makes younger individuals vulnerable to the consumer ideologies of buying now and paying later; if they want a new television or car, they should get it on finance, if they want home furniture they should buy now and pay later, if they want a holiday, they should take out a loan; the world and its contents are made to appear as being available to all, with no temporal, spatial or capital limitations (Baudrillard, 1998:80–82; Lazzarato, 2011;112). Whether the acquisition of commodities will lead the person into debt is

not the concern of the consumer industry, there is no sense of morality or care, it is only about the individual buying what they want and the accumulation of profit (Ritzer, 2013:180). The individual's identity, self-esteem and worth has become framed not around their personal characteristics and what makes them original, such as their ability to be kind and caring, even altruistic, but around their ability to purchase commodities through the utilisation of credit cards (Dorling, 2015:110). The creation of a 'liberal system' of economics has therefore entrapped individuals, particularly those born post 1980, into a 'debt economy' whereby a web of 'pastoral power' ensnares its victims to succumb to spending money they do not possess under the premise that it will not only permit them access to endless goods, but it will also enable them to fulfill their duties as a neoliberal citizen (Evans and Reid, 2013:91; Graeber, 2012; Lazzarato, 2011:122, 128).

Finally, since the economic crash in 2008, a 'debt society' has been constructed which has helped to alter attitudes towards debt (Ellis, 2017:111). Although all individuals have been exposed to the detrimental consequences of this society, notably the retraction of welfare benefits, decreased wages, and an increase in the cost of everyday living, it is younger people in particular who have become its main victims because they are being coerced to purchase endless commodities, whilst simultaneously being made poorer by the policies of austerity (Ellis, 2017:110). The creation of a 'debtfare state' has helped to situate debt at the very core of human existence, meaning very few people can escape the requirement to owe somebody, somewhere, money (Ellis, 2017:110). Thereby, as indicated in the previous chapter, those in old age are very fortunate because they have largely been financially protected by governments since the late 1970s, as not only have their pensions been

guaranteed, but also they gained from the ‘right-to-buy scheme’ (many of the older people in Meir North bought their council houses from the state at a reduced price); a reality which younger people today have not experienced (Ellis, 2017:112). This generation cannot perceive of a world wherein they are debt-free because the new state does not allow them to be; they have to be debtors, this is an obligation of being a neoliberal citizen (Ellis, 2017:114). Whilst the older people in this study can consider whether to be in debt or not (with the latter being the ideal), for many younger people this choice has been removed, it is no longer about ‘whether they are *in* debt, but how they are able to cope with debt’; indebtedness has become normalised (*italics in original*) (Ellis, 2017:114).

Lazzarato (2013:66,96) affiliates with this view, believing that we contemporarily live within a ‘financialised society’ constructed of ‘creditor-debtor relations’. Debt is used by those with wealth and knowledge as a ‘technique of power’ to manipulate and control those who owe money - the debtors (Lazzarato, 2013:69-70). To be in debt is not considered abnormal as it constitutes the very essence of being a neoliberal subject (a *‘homo economicus’*) (*italics in original*) who should at every opportunity invest in endless commodities in order to improve global prosperity, even if this necessitates incurring personal debt (Lazzarato, 2013:70-71). Drawing from the works of Deleuze and Guattari, and Becker, Lazzarato (2013:187,194) contends that individuals (notably the young) have been transformed into ‘dividual[s]’ due to a process of ‘extreme’ ‘desubjectivation’ wherein bodies have been broken down into fragments or ‘constitutive elements’ and manipulated (once in parts, these bodies become ‘infinitely ‘amenable’’). As a consequence of this distortion, anatomical forms have become ‘machine[s]’ with no personal ‘subjectivity’ and no ability to

consciously reflect; they all think and act in the same way (such as accepting ‘consumption for consumption’s sake’ and perceiving debt as a natural facet of everyday life) in order to maintain the capitalist system (Lazzarato, 2013:187,194, 200).

Conversely, Lazzarato (2013:115-116) contends that Foucault failed to consider this new type of governing because whilst he explicated the shift from ‘*homo economicus* as a man of exchange to *homo economicus* as an entrepreneur’ (italics in original), he did not deliberate the consequences of money on this subject. Foucault recognised forms of discipline and regulation, but his theory of power failed to discuss ‘financial deterritorialisation’ wherein money becomes the most dominant form of capital and influences relations above all other tenets (Lazzarato, 2013:209). This form of ‘governmentality’ has extended beyond the inter-play of discipline and sovereignty to include the alteration of the ‘*homo economicus* into a *dividual*’ (italics in original), whose elements have been manipulated to fit into the current ‘debt machine’ (Foucault cited by Lazzarato, 2013:210). Once within the ‘debt machine’, the ‘*dividual*’ is trapped because they cannot escape being in debt; they become forever indebted (Lazzarato, 2013:88,193, 210). A new cyclical ‘credit-debt economy’ has therefore been established, as the debtor is expected to pay their debts, then go back into debt without delay, and sustain this trend under the rationale of naturalness (debt is like any other natural facet of life) (Lazzarato, 2013:74,88). It is this cyclical process which simultaneously encourages the individual to feel ‘responsible and guilty’, because whilst the former is felt due to the action of going into debt (this is an action of a ‘responsible’ citizen), the latter is felt due to the state of indebtedness and the need to pay back money, which often necessitates additional interest payments

and extortion (Lazzarato, 2013:209-210). This form of financial capitalism has therefore not ‘free[d]’ [individuals] from debt, [but]...chain[ed] [them] to it’; human subjectivity has become ‘enslave[d]’ to debt (Klein, 2008:161; Lazzarato, 2013:88, 193).

However, whilst the aim of neoliberals was to chain human subjectivity to a ‘consumer society’ and debt, those in old age continue to oppose this way of life through the creation of their own ‘grey economy’ (Bauman, 2002:183). The following interview narratives and photographs [Figures 9, 10 and 11] show the creative talents of the older people living within Meir North:

Knitting:

Alma: When [daughter] was expecting [Granddaughter], they came up. I’ve done a little jacket for my Great Grandchild...animals, doggies, chickens, cats, horses.

Figure 9: Knitted garments made by the older women who attend ‘*Friendship Group*’.



Arts and Crafts:

Sylvia: [Referring to Christmas and gift giving] Only token presents, because people have got a lot of presents to buy, like a friend I’ve known [name of friend] since [son] was in nursery. I am doing her...some place mats, I am laminating Cliff Richard place mats, she will use them. Her husband is into buses, so I will do placemats with buses on.

Figure 10: Woolly items made by the older women who attend ‘Friendship Group’.



Woodwork

Ronald: I have got a hobby...I do woodwork... Anything out of wood, all sorts. I have got all this wooden stuff. I have got a shed full of wood, then I save all good pieces of wood, particularly oak and mahogany and all stuff like that, and I use it to make these little cars with, they are about that big, like that [shows how big they are]. I can buy the wheels and things, but I have got to make all the other parts, then I have got the plan and work off the plan, put them all together...they look lovely you know.

Figure 11: Ronald's car model



These crafty actions of the older people affiliate with the Arts and Crafts movement in the late nineteenth century (Crawford, 1997:15). Like William Morris who was one of the ‘leading figure[s]’ of this movement, these older people seek to create ‘beautiful things’ with their hands, and in many ways reject the dominant tenets of ‘modern civilisation’ (Crawford, 1997:15). Their crafty practices embed socialist principles as the older people create products for others as part of a collective ‘grey economy’, which is not based upon monetary (profit) outcomes, but altruism, morality, and the wish to make others happy (Crawford, 1997:15, 25). The older people construct items such as ‘little jacket[s]’ for their Grandchildren [Alma], ‘placemats’ for friends [Sylvia] and cuddly toys for children, out of kindness and love; feelings which are often exempt from contemporary forms of production. The

items made are also ‘honest’ and ‘simpl[e]’ in their design, they do not pretend to be anything more than they are, and they are ‘functional’; requisites which Morris would have actively encouraged as part of the Arts and Crafts movement in this former era (Crawford, 1997:16,19).

This type of craftwork also induces feelings of ‘joy’, which is often denied in current forms of labour, as the older people have the autonomy to create these items according to their own specifications and motivations; they are not governed by any higher power (Crawford, 1997:17,18). There is a sense of empowerment, as the older people are not subject to dreary and tedious machine processes, but are given the freedom to be ‘masters’ of their own work and to be inspired by their own creativeness (Crawford, 1997:17,18; Morris cited by Clancy, 2009:145). Hence, this form of craftwork signifies a subtle type of resistance against an increasingly dehumanised and conformist world. The older people can ‘rejoice’ in their own creations which embed their heart, soul and identity, and can benefit from the ‘experience of designing’ objects that are original and symbolise their own personal innovativeness (Crawford, 1997:17-19).

Furthermore, these older people are what Campbell (2005:31) refers to as ‘craft consumer[s]’, because they are ‘directly involved in both the design and the production of that which is to be consumed’ (Campbell, 2005:31). The products produced by these crafty older people embody ‘love and passion’, emotions which are typically lost during the process of mass production and are not embodied in commodities bought in the current global market (Campbell, 2005:27). When these older people construct a wooden car or knit a jumper, they have complete control over its shape, design and the materials used (a liberty denied to other consumers) and a

part of their being is injected into their craft items allowing them to produce 'personalised objects' which reaffirm their personhood and 'nature' (Campbell, 2005:27,28; Elliot, 2016:19). For these 'craft consumer[s]', this form of consumption is an act of resistance against the 'alienating labour' that predominantly exists within society, which is often purely mechanical and repetitive, and allows them to alternatively produce 'humanised' items that embody personal meanings and subjectivity (Campbell, 2005:24,25,28; Elliot, 2016:21). The older people are therefore fighting back, they are not accepting contemporary forms of consumption and are instead trying to sustain an alternative consumer paradigm based upon the pillars of 'authenticity', ingenuity and personal self-creation (Campbell, 2005: 37,40).

These 'craft consumer[s]' can uphold many of the tenets of the Arts and Craft movement because of their socialisations and past experiences (Campbell, 2005: 31; Crawford, 1997:15). The older people have 'cultural capital' which has been established over their lifetimes and has enabled them to develop skills wherein they can transform 'raw materials' into a personalised product (Campbell, 2005:35, 36). As noted earlier, this generation in particular have grown up in a world wherein many items were rationed or were scarce, and therein they were taught by their parents and grandparents how to utilise their hands to make creative products (some were needed for survival) (Campbell, 2005:36). As Campbell (2005:36) states, 'craft activity' exists due to 'genuine popular folk knowledge' which is 'passed down through families' and teaches individuals how to be resourceful and utilise basic materials in order to create something functional and/or meaningful. These older people know how to cook, how to make models, how to knit and so forth, because former

generations have taught them these skills; their creativity is a construction of their past (Crawford, 1997:22).

It is through these crafty productions that a sense of nostalgia is developed as the older people think back not only to a time when they were shown these skills by their families, bringing back fond memories of collectivism and mutual dependency, but also to a time when society seemed so much more simple and people were not as invested in commodities as they are today (Crawford, 1997). The older people spoke to me for long periods of time about the items that they had made, particularly Ronald who explained every part of his model car, and it was evident in their facial expressions and the ways in which they spoke that they were happy, content and proud of their creations. Through growing, making and fixing items, those in old age, such as the participants within this study, can ‘take a magical step back in time’ and consequently create a defence against the detrimental changes that neoliberalism and mass consumerism have brought to society (Lowenthal, 2015:41). They can think back to a time of morality when society was not structured around commodity ownership, there were strong familial networks, people made do with what they had, and there was a dominant ‘moral fibre’ (Lowenthal, 2015:39).

However, whilst these ‘craft producer[s]’ are gratified by the creation of their own personal products, they are considered deviant consumers because they defy neoliberal consumer practices, notably because they do not endlessly purchase dehumanised objects and they reject ‘progressive commodification’ (Campbell, 2005:23,27). These older people do not allow neoliberal consumerism to undermine their sense of identity or infringe upon their values, craftiness or individual selfhood

(Campbell, 2005). They alternatively adopt the status of an autonomous ‘crafter’ who actively resists the mass production of depersonalised and unoriginal objects; they are deviant, three-dimensional (rather than ‘one-dimensional’) ‘craft consumer[s]’ (Campbell, 2005:24; Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xii, xiii, xx). The actions of these ‘craft consumers’ also refute the ‘normalisation’ process and the notion that nobody can escape the all-pervading force of consumption (Campbell, 2005:23; Schirato, 2012:99). The older people do not have a consumerist nature and they do not understand that bodies have become objects of an omnipresent gaze, a societal surveillance, which judges the exteriority of human entities like a painted canvas (Foucault, 1997). This cohort does not share the contemporary ethos that ‘technologies of the self’, such as money (even credit and unearned capital), have to be used to buy goods; they are essential for a positive representation of the self (Foucault, 1997; Peterson, 2003:189). They are therefore not sympathetic to the practice of limitless spending because they cannot comprehend why contemporary consumers, like Dorothy’s Granddaughter, want not only to be seen with the latest gadgets and gizmos but also to be seen with others who own the latest fashion items (whether this be a ‘Blackberry’ phone or some other commodity), and that commodity ownership is a societal obligation rather than a personal choice.

The reasoning behind this disjuncture can be found in a critical analysis of the theories thus far examined. In particular, Bourdieu’s theory of consumption has been criticised by Jenkins (1992:91) and Williams (2005:588) for being too objectivist in stance and failing to recognise the ability of individuals to be ‘critical[ly] reflexive’. Bourdieu, like Giddens (1984), believes that most of daily life is governed by a ‘practical consciousness’ dictated by the ‘habitus’, leading most actions to be

undertaken in an ‘unthinking and routine’ manner because of a perceived embedded ‘logic’ (cited by Williams, 2005:582,583). Even when resistance is possible because of the occasional ‘fuzzy logic’ of practice, power is deemed as emanating from the top, downwards, to the general masses, like Marx and Giroux proclaim, meaning acts of resistance become inconsequential because they are conducted within a stringent ‘hierarchical social space’ (Jenkins, 1992:90; Williams, 2005:582,601). These scholars believe that *all* people are targets of external forces rather than being the creators of their own life trajectory and therein are dominated by ‘mindless conformity’, as Jenkins (1992:91,97) aptly summarises, ‘behaviour has its causes, but actors are not allowed their reasons’. But if this were true, how could the attitudes and actions of the older people be explained?

Foucault’s (1997) analysis of power offers a more accurate insight into this phenomenon because he recognises the possibility for individuals to be resilient *and* resistant. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, within the former disciplinary society individuals were subjected to more overt forms of power that externally pervaded their body and altered their behaviour (Lazzarato, 2006:9; Rainbow, 1984:245). However power has since been modified, it is no longer imposed upon individuals from the outside but derived from a biopolitical state wherein individuals govern their own actions from within according to a newly developed ‘form of subjectification’ (Lazzarato, 2006:9; Rainbow, 1984:245). Whilst Marxist and Feminist theorists predominantly start from the position that all human beings are repressed to the point of the dispossession of autonomy, Foucault ‘interrogates power’ more extensively and begins his analysis with the notion of ‘freedom’ and ‘the capacity for transformation’ (Foucault cited by Lazzarato, 2006:10). The ontological

status of individuals is not of repression and blind obedience deriving from a hierarchical power, but of liberty and the right to oppose the structures of society, whether this be institutional, economic or societal, through individual action (Lazzarato, 2006:10).

The power to resist is ‘multiple and heterogeneous’, it does not exist in one form, and is learnt through converse, observation and human interaction (individuals are not born with an agentic essence to resist) (Lazzarato, 2006:10). Therefore, individuals, or more specifically ‘entrepreneurial subjects’, can utilise their ‘technologies of responsabilisation’ to become both resilient and resistant as they can modify their behaviour to create new ‘subjectivities’ that affiliate with, or challenge, the new risk-laden and consumerist world in which they are encompassed (Welsh, 2014:16,19). Hence in theory, any person within society could refute the tenets of neoliberalism, specifically its focus upon consumption and the procurement of debt; although this is much easier for those in old age because they grew up in a different era, they have been exposed to alternative discourses and ways of life, they have established hardened attitudes towards indebtedness and have consequently not become ‘desiring machines’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:2).

Merleu-Ponty offers a similar perspective despite a ‘social existentialis[t]’ position being taken (cited by Rabil, 1967:viii). Individuals are considered to have been born into a ‘*primordial*’ world, a world already constructed but necessitating the consciousness to perceive the world around its being; there is an interrelation between the objective (‘being-in-the-world’ as an external entity) and the subjective (experiences are perceived and felt individually) (Matthews, 2006:20; Rabil, 1967:19-37). In essence, the world is pre-made before our existence upon it, but there is an

opportunity to ‘coproduce’ a ‘pre-reflective *bond* with others’ (italics in original), alongside a collective and shared history (Langer, 1989:152; Rabil, 1967:31). This theory could help explain the divergences between older and younger people’s perceptions of consumption and debt because their ‘thought[s] about the world’ were derived during divergent eras (Rabil, 1967:37).

As noted earlier, the older people grew up during a period of thrift (in particular they experienced post war austerity in the 1950s) wherein global goods were not as easily available as they are today, computers were largely an unknown entity and going into debt was discredited (Rabil, 1967:37). When the older people were growing up, they lived and ‘prereflect[ed]’ on the world in which they were confronted with, whereby making, mending, baking and fixing were traditional behaviours and people ‘made do’ with what they had, whilst younger generations have grown up in a world of plenty, excess and unbridled commodification (Langer, 1989:150; Rabil, 1967). Their ‘lived or experienced world[s]’ are thereby antithetical because the relationship between their ‘bod[ies] and [the] world]’ were ‘co-produced’ in two very different eras, one within ‘first modernity’ (older people) and one within ‘second modernity’ (younger generations) as noted in the former chapter (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:206; Rabil, 1967:17,31). Thus, the older people’s bodies and subjectivities do not accord with the ‘pattern[ing]’ of the world that exists contemporarily and their skills and ways of life oppose the ‘being-in-the-world’ of neoliberal subjects; they have come to constitute active resisters of this political paradigm (Matthews, 2006:17).

The question which arises from this analysis is whether this hardened attitude towards excessive consumption is likely to be evident among future older generations? Research conducted by Biggs et al (2007) and Leach et al (2013) suggest that as time passes and those currently in their fifties become older, perspectives towards consumption will alter. The younger ‘boomers’ within their study, who constitute the next generation of older people, shared similar attitudes towards debt and commodity ownership as the older people in Meir North, as they were largely averse to debt and did not accord with the morality of purchasing endless goods just for the sake of keeping up with the latest fashion trends (Leach et al, 2013:110). These ‘boomers’ had been taught during their early socialisation that they should not ‘want to get into debt’ and they should be ‘careful with what [they] spend’ (two female participants cited by Biggs et al, 2007:44). The participants within this study also liked to ‘make do and mend’, as they grew their ‘own food’ and ‘mend[ed] [their] shoes’, and were appreciative of small gifts such as being given ‘a toy’ that their ‘Father [had] made’ for them (a female participant cited by Leach et al, 2013:109-110); sentiments which are equally shared by the older people in this study, notably Jenny and Betty.

There is however, a disjuncture between these ‘boomers’ and the participants within this study because they also showed signs of having created a ‘moral bridge’ between their own generation and younger generations (Leach et al, 2013:111). As Leach et al (2013:109) notes, the “‘boomers’ situated ‘between [the]... ‘make do and mend’ culture of austerity experienced by their parents and the ‘excessive consumerism’ of younger generations’. As a result of this middle positioning, the ‘boomers’ were more exposed to consumerist products and began to share the same ‘style, taste and social attitudes’ as the young (Biggs et al, 2007:45; Leach et al, 2013:109). This is in stark

contrast to the participants within this study, as there is no evidence of a ‘moral bridge’ or a ‘downward blurring’ of consumerist norms and values (Leach et al, 2013:109,116).

Moreover, it is not just the age difference between the first and second cohorts of ‘boomers’ that need to be considered, as financial capital also plays a significant role in the extent to which they consume (Leach et al, 2013;104). Whilst some people in old age do possess significant financial capital, and did significantly gain from ‘Grey Capitalism’ and the development of the welfare state, as was noted in the previous chapter, many others did not, and therefore attention must also be given to the more basic contention of wealth inequality (Higgs and Gilleard, 2006: 221). Many of the older people in Meir North have grown up in a ‘kinder society’ than younger people today, especially the ‘baby boomers’ who benefitted from lifelong employment, but they still continue to be financially poor (Beckett, 2010:194). As a result of this, many of the older people have had to become ‘craft consumer[s]’ because they have limited capital and it is cheaper to grow and mend items than it is to buy new commodities, especially due to the economic crisis and the rise in the price of goods ¹⁸ (Campbell, 2005:24). Due to having restricted wealth, many of the older people have no choice but to refer back to the ‘mores’ of their parents which taught them how to be frugal rather than affiliate with the ‘mores’ of younger people (specifically an acceptance of debt and the possession of throw away and wasteful attitudes towards consumption) (Cressey, 1961:137). The older people in Meir North do not have the freedoms or the resources to build a ‘bridge’ between their generation and the younger generation and

¹⁸ The act of making items is not included in this argument, because the price of wool and the cost of the materials to produce wooden cars, notably the ‘wheels and things’ [Ronald], can be more expensive than if the older person had bought the items already pre-made.

therefore belong to a divergent 'generational habitus' (Foucault, 2008; Leach et al, 2013:111,118). It will be interesting to see in the future whether a 'newer generational consciousness' is produced by older people because those living within deprivation may be forced, like those in Meir North, to draw upon more practical and frugal types of consumption which may not be so well versed (they may not have been taught this during their socialisation) (Higgs et al, 2009:106).

Thus, whilst all governments' post 1979 have encouraged individuals to excessively consume (deemed an essential 'technology of the self') to deter risks within a free market economy, the older people within this study refute and resist such expectations (Peterson, 2003:189). This generation do not understand or affiliate with the consumerist practices of younger people, including their own relatives, because they were born in a different era during 'first modernity' wherein there were few commodities and people were socialised to save, be 'thrifty' [Patirica] and make-do with what they had (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:206). This disjuncture arises because the older people have not suffered 'social amnesia', they have not forgotten everything except how to consume and they have not been affected by 'cultural apparatuses' and the constant bombardment of messages to perpetually buy goods regardless of functionality or need (Giroux, 2009a:179; Giroux, 2012:113). Hence, in contrast to the aims of the 'culture industry', the older people resist the 'social game' of consumption because they can wait for items, they do not buy on impulse, they invest for the long term and are not governed by peer group pressure (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3-4; Bourdieu, 1990:64; Trigg, 2001:101). The very thought of going into debt causes the older people ill-being, such as not being 'able to sleep' [Alma] and 'worry' [Dorothy], and thereby no 'creditor-debtor relations' are formed except

for those imposed by the global recession, which nobody can escape (Lazzarato, 2011:96). The process of linking the human body with a consumerist nature has therefore missed this cohort, as they govern their lives by the principle of 'moderation' whereby a cream cake costing a 'pound' is viewed as a real extravagance [Olive, Alma, Alice, Harry, Poppy, Ronald, Wilma].

It is this rebellious attitude that makes the older people a threat to society, because whilst they do accord with the principle of resilience as exemplified by their creation of a 'grey economy', this is not a valued form of resilience as they save rather than spend money and utilise their remaining 'freedom[s]' to resist all other tenets of neoliberalism (Lazzarato, 2006:10). These older people have socially constructed a collectivised 'being-in-the world' that resists and opposes the 'normalisation' process as they have 'co-produce[d]' a different subjectivity according to their own socialisation (which New Right activists have tried so hard to destroy) (Evans and Reid, 2013:85; Matthews, 2006:17; Rabil, 1967:17; Schirato et al, 2012:99). These older people are nostalgic for the former world wherein people had less, but were happy and content. These 'craft producer[s]' will therefore never belong in the neoliberal realm of excessive consumption, but then they wouldn't want to because it stands for everything they detest (Campbell, 2007:28).

Failed Consumers and Authorised Abnormality

Whilst the older people show resistant attitudes towards the neoliberal paradigm of consumption, their lives continue to be affected by its force due to some of the losers of the consumer 'game' adopting non-conformist and deviant methods to help maintain a socially acceptable status (Bourdieu, 1990:78; O'Malley, 2010). The younger people described earlier in this chapter are the fortunate winners of neoliberalism and the recession because they can afford two prams at '600' and '400' pounds respectively [Dorothy, Flora] or a 'Blackberry phone' [Dorothy], and have the wealth (or the means to acquire loans and go into debt) to be resilient to the risks imposed on them by external forces. However, this reality is not shared by a significant number of other people who are forced to make the decision between either becoming a societal failure, or adopting resilient practices of crime to avoid being demoted in the social hierarchy and enduring feelings of hopelessness and despair. This theme emerged as the older people discussed criminality within their area:

Alma's Interview:

Alma: I have seen the other side because I have been burgled twice. The last time was very alarming because being deaf I turn the key automatically and lock the door. It's just natural. So I know my door was locked and a man spoke to me behind, he said 'you've been robbed, but don't worry we are the police'. He showed me identification, he was alone when he came in, I had just switched the television on, it was 6 o'clock. I

had been watching Anne Robinson, I thought 'I better get to the dishes', but then he said 'don't worry' and showed me a roll of money, he said 'this is yours, you have been robbed'. I said it wasn't mine because 'I'm waiting for my money, my Daughter is going to bring it, I haven't got any' and he looked and then another came in, not nice, not nice. So he said 'we have contacted your neighbours, one that side and one this, to see if they've had anybody'. He went upstairs, another man come in by then and he went upstairs. I went to the stairs and he was coming down, I said 'get out of my house', I said 'where are my keys?', 'oh', he said, 'I've got them' and he gave me the keys and I said 'get out of my house'. He said 'we will go and report to our superior, he's in a car outside' and they went. They weren't bothered, just turned to me and said 'lock the door when we have gone'.

Alma: No, that was the second burglary. We were upstairs asleep, [I had a] husband then, didn't hear a thing, got in through the window. They took Doulton figures then and money, his car papers, we had a car still, that was the first, an awful mess. The second, I was ninety [five years ago] and it was winter, I'd been poorly. I remember I was sitting, but that time he took jewellery, my gold bracelet, rings. I was insured but they were sentimental. He didn't get my wedding ring because that was on my hand, I didn't worry as much as I thought I would...engagement.

Amy: He took your engagement ring?

Alma: He took it. He took that and three more that [husband] had bought me.

Yes.

Harry's Interview:

Harry: We were burgled once and that upset me, it was straight after Christmas, it was the day after New Years day. They took my daughters Christmas presents, they tried to take the Hi Fi, they took the television and the mess they left, and the smell, there was a smell. We had a little Chihuahua then, and when you picked him up after he used to flinch so I think they kicked him. Why we didn't wake up I don't know. I think the smell it got under my nose, cus I was the first one down that morning I had got to go to work, it smelt like... a hessian sack...oh it's the most unearthly smell. Oh it is horrible. They never got who it was. Er... and we were...we were on pins for a while after that.

These accounts incite great sympathy for Alma and Harry because of their awful treatment, loss of valuable belongings and sense of vulnerability. They also reveal a deeper, darker side to neoliberalism and the recession as the types of crime recorded imply that the sole aim of the burglars was to acquire possessions, such as rings, Christmas presents, cars etcetera, rather than to commit violence against these older people (which they could have easily undertaken, particularly in the case of Alma), suggesting failed consumption was the central motive for their actions (Bauman, 2004). Whilst no conclusions can be made as to who these burglars were, nor what characteristics they had (the belief that these acts are due to the 'undesirables' [Harry

and Robert], as indicated in the previous chapter, is likely to be derived from stereotypical prejudice), it could be argued that the contemporary emphasis upon wealth and commodity accumulation has encouraged, notably to varying degrees, this deviant and criminal behaviour.

In today's society there is a 'new tribal mythology' constructed upon the belief that the possession of immeasurable capital and objects will lead to increased status, likeability and inclusion (as gifts can be bought for others and attendance at significant social occasions like birthdays and weddings is viable) (Baudrillard, 2004:194; Douglas, 1982:24). Pressure is placed on all human beings to not only consume all the time, but to consume the best of everything. It is not enough to have a house and food on the table, people are expected to have the best home they can afford, the latest gadgets and expensive cars - in essence, to have is to be (Baudrillard, 2004:193). Thereby, when this ideal is unachievable through legal methods, especially in 'neighbourhoods of relegation' like Meir North wherein facets of 'competitive individualism' have failed (there are few opportunities for work, as explicated in the previous chapter), it is likely that illegal approaches will be adopted and some individuals will turn to a life of crime (Tyler, 2015:501; Wacquant, 2008:244).

This contention is supported by Bourdieu's (1990:78) theory of consumption because thefts and robberies could be causally linked to a lack of financial capital and the need to redefine the 'game' to fit the everyday experiences of the socially and economically marginalised. Those who commit crime 'step outside' of the typical 'habitus' and create an alternative, often encompassing divergent rules and strategies; they create their own normative behaviours and expectations (Bourdieu, 1990:78; Williams, 2005:601). The criminal has the same aspirations as the legitimate player in

the 'game' of consumption, they seek to be socially accepted by others according to what they own and their presented 'character', but their resources and talents to acquire the same outcomes are very limited (especially since the 'welfare rug [has been]...pulled from under [their] feet')) and therefore they develop a new 'cod[ed]' strategy to deter them from becoming a 'waste-product of the game' (Bauman, 1997:41, Bourdieu, 1990:78; Douglas, 1982:25; Goffman, 1959:203, 214; Wacquant, 2009:74-75).

From the older people's perspective this is a contravention of the rules as they flout the guidelines put into place to ensure all players have an equal chance to succeed, and they symbolise an enigma, an unpredictability, which cannot be easily discerned, but to the alienated player they are merely utilising their own ingenuity to adhere to the 'success-goal' devised by their 'symbolic culture' (Bourdieu, 1985:13; Cressey, 1961:179; Jenkins, 1992:71-72). Thus, a criminal understands that to be ahead in the 'game' they must use underhand tactics, such as 'cunning[ness]' (a characteristic deemed by Bourdieu as essential for success) and manipulation to guarantee their survival within a highly competitive and consumerist society (Bourdieu, 1990:80-81; Jenkins, 1992:70). Moreover, it could also be argued that whilst appearing to resist every ethic of society, the criminal is in fact 'self-disciplin[ed]' like the individual who goes to work to earn a wage and obtain commodities, because they have found a method that procures similar results (Dardot and Laval, 2013:106). The criminal is an 'economic subject' as they understand the significance of commodification and utilise their liberties to make 'free choices' that enhance their standard of living, even though this is precarious and potentially harmful both to oneself (further failure is a likely

outcome) and others (like the older participants) (Dardot and Laval, 2013:106,109,274).

According to Dardot and Laval (2013:107,264), the market teaches individuals to be 'rational' and 'help thyself', aligning with 'neoliberal governmentality', but, as Foucault (1997) also notes, irrationality is taught in equal measure. When an individual starts to experience a 'pathology of inadequacy' arising from factors such as unemployment, exclusion and persistent failure (of being 'losers' in every way), they may become frustrated and adopt thoughts of committing crime (Dardot and Laval, 2013:292). To those who have never committed a crime this appears senseless and deviant, but to the subject it is a systematic and effective way to alter the effects of an inequitable system which 'makes competition more violent' and deliberately produces disparities between subjects (Baudrillard, 1998:182). It is through crime that the downtrodden and despondent individual can 'remake themselves', re-enhance their status, and be reintegrated into society (Tyler, 2013:214).

However, this is not to argue that crime is a unique facet of neoliberal society because it has existed since time began and has often been the result of common motives such as greed, deprivation and survival. What is different is that in today's society greater emphasis has been placed upon the acquisition of wealth and commodities leading to an intensified pressure to fulfill 'self-interests' and in some cases to commit crime; these requisites have become the central 'motive for action' (Dardot and Laval, 2013:107-108). As Foucault (1997) and Dardot and Laval (2013:256) highlight, we have shifted from a population of '*calculating*' subjects to '*competitive*' (italics in original) subjects who are now 'wholly immersed in global competition'. The

criminal knows that ‘non-cooperation penalises itself’ and the complete abandonment of consumerist tendencies pushes him or her to the periphery of society, and thereby they have nothing else to lose when they commit a crime such as stealing from others, particularly from older people who do not have ‘strategies’ to oppose such challenges and are easy targets of criminality (Dardot and Laval, 2013:106; Jenkins, 1992:72; Mannheim, 1955). The creation of these criminal entities thereby constitutes one of the dark sides of ‘neoliberal normativity’ and their prevalence is set to continue as competition and autonomy are prioritised over all other values (Dardot and Laval, 2013:260, 298).

The transition from ‘modernity to late modernity’ has also helped to restructure society from being ‘*inclusive to...exclusive*’ (italics in original) (Young, 1999:7). Whilst in the former, all subjects were to be incorporated into a social mass, the latter serves to fragment and exclude through individualistic practices and competitive drives (Young, 1999:7). Exclusion is particularly felt by those people experiencing deprivation because they have to contend with a double ‘gaze’ which looks both ‘upwards’ (to those people who appear to have gained from equal opportunities, unlike them) and ‘downwards’ (to people with a lower social status who are perceived as being in a more fortunate position) (Young, 1999:9). The consequences of this ‘gaze’ are profound because it causes a community to turn in on itself, as one neighbour thieves from another neighbour, causing ‘incivilities’ to become rife (Young, 1999:16). This theory could be applied to those who commit crime in Meir North, as they may perceive that they have not been given the same rights as their victims (the older people) and therein proceed to take back, through theft, what they believe they are owed by society. Neoliberalism and its discourse of individualisation

has therefore caused society to become a target of an ‘implosive’ rather than an ‘explosive’ force, as traditionally embedded norms and values have been uprooted and replaced with a new unstable ‘social order’ (Young, 1999:21,50).

Thereby, Young (1999:53) argues that Merton’s (1938) deviancy perspective is beneficial for a sociological or criminological understanding of crime because it avoids a ‘simple deficit theory’ and a ‘positivistic conception of deprivation’ which constructs the idea that people commit crime to simply increase their own wealth. It cannot be argued that ‘bad conditions lead to bad behaviour’ because in the past, notably in the ‘late 1960s’, living conditions increased yet crime levels intensified, indicating that no dominant correlations exist between these two factors (Young, 1999:52). This discourse of crime might be ‘seductive’ but it is incorrect and reductionist (Young, 1999). Alternatively, increasing crime rates (like those evidenced in Meir North – see the previous chapter) should be associated with ‘relative deprivation’, wherein one individual perceives their circumstances to be in a poorer state than another, leading to feelings of unfairness and discontentment (Young, 1999:52). Young (1999:52) therefore proposes, in affiliation with Merton’s (1938) ‘strain’ theory (outlined in chapter three), that the term ‘relative deficit’ should be used because a person may judge their own living standards to be lower than another person’s and therein they are likely to commit crime. In a neoliberal world wherein competition and social comparison are central features, people are far more inclined to consider committing crime as a way to combat perceived personal injustices which limit their own social standing, rather than because they merely wish to increase their own wealth (Young, 1999:53).

Finally, before concluding, it is of importance to highlight one of the greatest irrational-rationalities of the contemporary era; the thrifty older people within this study are in fact considered as ‘moral monster[s]’ to a greater extent than the unemployed youth, the benefit claimant and the criminal who have increasingly been the target of their condemnation (Foucault, 1999:75). Throughout this thesis thus far, it has been suggested by the older people that they are superior to unemployed younger people because they have worked all their lives, to the benefit claimant because they have lived independently of the state, and the criminal because they have not committed crimes against others, but in reality, according to the neoliberal paradigm, they are in fact ‘monsters’ because they oppose the subjectivity of a ‘*homo economicus*’ (italics in original) subject (Foucault, 1999:58; Foucault, 2008:226). The unemployed youth, the benefit claimant and the criminal are all deviant, but their subjectivities can be ‘corrected’; they have simply chosen an inappropriate form of entrepreneurialism and resilience and therefore can be modified by ‘technolog[ies] of rectification’ (Foucault, 1999:58-91; Foucault, 2008). However, the older people fundamentally challenge the power structures and ‘domains of knowledge’ prevalent within society today, alongside the ‘laws of nature’ (their wires cannot be reconnected to desire like all other ‘machines’), and they do not show any form of remorse for their misconduct; they value their resistant attitudes and practices (Foucault, 1999:56, 62; Lazzarato, 2011:146). Therefore, this older cohort have become the ‘exception’ (unlike these ‘correct[able]’ groups) because they are not an ‘everyday phenomenon’ and represent an unauthorised, rather than an authorised, form of abnormality (Agamben, 1998:72; Foucault, 1999:58).

Conclusion

Overall, the aim of this chapter was to show the extent to which neoliberalism and the economic recession have affected those in old age, specifically in relation to consumerism. In the first instance, attention was drawn to whether the neoliberal ‘art of government’ had transformed the older people into ‘machines’ who excessively consumed (Foucault, 2008:27; Schirato et al, 2012:133). The ethnographic data uncovered that whilst this was the aim of the neoliberal discourse, the older people had antithetically not been transformed into docile consumer entities and were not ‘*homo economicus*’s’ (italics in original) because they did not possess throw away and wasteful mentalities towards commodities and opposed frivolous spending (Foucault, 2008:226). The older people do not understand younger people’s spending habits because they refute the discourse that commodities need to be perpetually bought, they oppose the practice of indebtedness, and they have defiantly established their own consumer ‘code values’ (Baudrillard, 1998:78).

Furthermore, the generational divergences in attitude towards consumption are an outcome of the young and the old growing up during different eras and experiencing antithetical socialisations. Many of the older people described growing up in a world of scarcity, wherein few gifts were received and when they were, they were usually handmade because it was cheaper, such as ‘dolls houses’, ‘ports and garages’ [Jenny] (Leach et al, 2013:105). In this era, people gave considerable thought to their purchases, they would not just endlessly consume, and they saved their money until they could afford to buy the product that they wanted. Furthermore, once a purchase was made, the item was treasured because the individual reflected upon how hard and

‘long’ they had worked in order to own it [Dorothy]. In contrast, younger people have been socialised within a ‘culture industry’ wherein the desire for endless products is embedded deep within their consciousness and their actions are determined by a ‘new morality of consumerism’ (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3-4; Baudrillard, 1998:80-82). Younger people believe they are in control of their spending habits when in reality they are robots of a conformist, ideological paradigm that not only conceals the ‘true nature of things’ to prevent a decrease in profits, but also coerces them to endlessly consume in order to enhance their happiness; an ‘[in]authentic happiness’ that symbolises the death of pure emotion (Adorno cited by Bernstein, 1991:3-10; Bernstein, 1991:13,22).

Unlike those in old age, younger people have been socialised to engage in a ‘social game’ of consumerism wherein they must outperform all other players through the ownership of commodities; the winner is literally the person who takes it all (Bourdieu, 1990:70; Jenkins, 1992:70-71). The ‘rules’ of this ‘game’ have been covertly disseminated throughout society since the late 1970s, leading younger people to consume ‘without knowing’ why; the act of consuming has become a naturalised ‘State-of-Being’ (Heidegger, 1962:78; Jenkins, 1992:70-78). According to Foucault (1997:242), this constant drive to consume is a form of ‘bio-power’ because human subjectivity has been reshaped in accordance with consumerist principles, and all cognitive thoughts have been reformulated around the notion that the perpetual purchasing of commodities is essential for the survival of both the individual and the market economy. Subjects can no longer decipher between what their natural, biological drives are, and what are man-made ‘wish[es]’, and therein uphold all these

practices in equal measure as part of a ‘normalisation’ process (Bauman, 2002:185; Petersen, 2003:19; Schirato et al, 2012:99).

As a consequence of this, many individuals (especially younger individuals) have become ‘desiring machines’ with no ability to turn their consumerist desires off; they have become addicts of, and crave pleasure from, commodities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1). These subjects have become ‘one-dimensional’ because their entire sense of self and purpose for being is centred around consumption, they can no longer identify what are ‘true and false needs’ leading to a permanent state of rational-irrationalism (Kellner, 2002:xii, xiii, xx, xxx). The transformation of younger people into ‘one-dimensional’ subjects has also led to the reliance upon, and acceptance of, debt, a notion which the older people perceive to be immoral due to their ethos of, if you ‘can’t pay for it...don’t have it’ [Dorothy] (Marcuse cited Kellner, 2002:xii,xx). The older people believe that a moral person is one who ‘wait[s]’ [Patricia] until they can afford a product, who purchases goods according to their personal budget and who adheres to the principle of ‘moderation’ [Wilma, Ronald, Alma, Harry, Alice and Olive] rather than excess. Thus, those in old age cannot understand the actions of younger people because they appear to be driven by the accumulation of superfluous commodities and debt which is considered iniquitous and would make them, if they were in the same situation, ‘sick’ with ‘worry’ [Dorothy].

However, whilst the older people hold moral views of frugality, younger people cannot be so judicious because their ‘machines’ have been divergently wired (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1). Neoliberalism has altered the meaning of resilience to incorporate a plethora of ‘creditor-debtor relationship[s]’ and therefore younger

people have come to believe that to be a good citizen they must go into debt (Lazzarato, 2011:96). The creation of a 'liberal system' of economics has served to entangle younger people into a web of debt which they cannot escape, leading to a constant cycle of needing to owe somebody, somewhere, money (Evans and Reid, 2013:91; Lazzarato, 2011:122, 128). Moreover, although all people have been affected by the 'debt society', especially since the recession in 2008, it is the young who have become its greatest victims because they have had to contend with the pressures of living within a consumer society whilst simultaneously being subject to the conditions of austerity (Ellis, 2017:110-111). In contemporary society, younger people cannot consider what it would be like to be '*in debt*' (italics in original) because this liberty has been systematically removed, they can only learn how to 'cope with debt' and ensure their own survival (Ellis, 2017:114).

In contrast to this, the older people have not grown up in this world and therein it appears alien and illogical. Due to growing up in post-war Britain, wherein rationing was prominent, this generation have learnt over time to develop thrifty practices and a disciplined money management system (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005:223,224; Berg 2015:287). Due to having little access to commodities, these older people have established a hardened attitude towards spending and believe that moral people are those that go without and only purchase goods that they really need (Miller 1998 cited by Bardhi and Arnould, 2005: 224). The older people's 'prereflect[ions]' upon the world and their 'Being-in-the-world' are constructed upon the notion that spending money on unnecessary goods which have no functional purpose and are only developed to improve a person's image or status is futile and meaningless (Foucault cited by Lazzarato, 2006:10; Heidegger, 1962:78; Langer, 1989:150). In addition,

because these older people grew up during times of scarcity, they also have an imbedded understanding that ‘supply systems’ are not built upon solid foundations, and at any point they can be destabilised creating chaos and disorder (Bramall, 2015:193). They know that whilst on one day there can be easy access to goods, on the next day, this access can be revoked, and people have to quickly adapt, be resourceful with what they have and ultimately adopt parsimonious practices (Bramall, 2015:184).

The craftiness and resourcefulness of the older people has been shown within this chapter through the exploration of the ‘grey economy’, which appears to be based upon similar principles as the Arts and Craft movement in the late 19th century (Crawford, 1997:15). The older people are ‘crafty consumer[s]’ because they produce ‘honest’, ‘simple’ and ‘beautiful’ products with their hands which embody ‘love and passion’; sentiments which have been systematically eradicated in the current production process (Campbell, 2005:23,27; Crawford, 1997:15-19). This economic system entrenches socialist principles, inclusive of collectivity and unity, and its main motive is not to create profit, which is the central objective of the global market, but to make others happy; altruism rather than greed is at the core of this economy (Crawford, 1997:15,25). Moreover, this form of craft production is steeped in nostalgia and memories of the past wherein people worked together and were dependent on each other, and relations were meaningful, they were established upon trust, affection and common mores (Crawford, 1997). Hence, the older people do not constitute ‘one-dimensional’ entities, but three-dimensional deviants because they do not accord with the neoliberal philosophy of excessive consumption, they create products that embody subjectivity and personal meanings, and they engage in

processes which undermine 'progressive commodification' (Campbell, 2005:23; Elliot, 2016:21; Marcuse, 2002:14; Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xii).

Conversely, the research conducted by Biggs et al (2007) and Leach et al (2013:104-114) has highlighted that such attitudes are likely to be phased out. Whilst second generation 'baby boomers' share similar perspectives to the current older cohort concerning thriftiness and indebtedness, they are, in contrast, more open to excessive consumption due to a 'moral bridge' (consisting of a 'downward blurring' of norms and values) having been built between their own generation and that of younger generations. However, this theory may not be applicable to all future generations because the amount of financial capital owned by an older person also determines their attitudes towards, and practices of, consumption (Leach et al, 2013:104). As was indicated in the introductory chapter, the older people in this area are some of the most deprived people in the country and therefore have to be frugal. The older people in this area grow and mend items because they do not have the financial capital to purchase new commodities, and thereby have no other choice but to refer back to the 'mores' of their parents rather than the 'mores' of younger people (Cressey, 1961:137). The older people within this study do not have the resources to build an intergenerational 'bridge' and therein have created a divergent 'generational habitus' (Higgs et al, 2009:102; Leach et al, 2013:111,118).

Finally, there is also a dark and sinister side to neoliberalism and the recession, specifically that of crime and deviance. The accounts provided by Alma and Harry were distressing, and they reinforced the notion that not everybody can be a winner of the competitive 'game' of consumption (Bourdieu, 1990:70). The pressure placed on

people to consume today has been exacerbated to such an extent that some individuals, largely those who are on the margins of society (the excluded) and have failed at consumption, develop their own rules of play to achieve an improved status (Baudrillard, 2004; Bourdieu, 1990:78; Young, 1999:7). These criminal players seek social acceptance like any other neoliberal subject, they understand that they will be judged according to their 'presentation of the self' and what they own, and therefore undertake deviant actions to deter humiliation and condemnation (they do not want to be deemed a 'waste-product' of society) (Bauman, 1997:41; Bourdieu, 1990:63; Goffman, 1959). Although the older people cannot rationalise these harmful actions, especially as they undermine their wellbeing, to the alienated and frustrated subject they are a way for them to accomplish the 'success-goal' constructed by broader society (Cressey, 1961:179). The criminal knows that the inability to consume causes punitive consequences, including shame and stigmatisation, and therein they 'remake themselves' through illegal strategies that redefine the neoliberal ideology of 'help thyself' (Dardot and Laval, 2013:264; Tyler, 2013:214).

Moreover, this analysis ultimately highlights one of the greatest irrational-rationalities of neoliberalism; frugal older people are more of a 'monster' than the unemployed youth, the welfare claimant (discussed in the previous chapter) and the criminal. The older people may believe that they possess better morals than these groups and that they belong to a superior social class, but in reality they are considered the greatest danger to the neoliberal order because their subjectivity and actions cannot be 'corrected' (Foucault, 1999:57). People who do not work, people who are dependent upon benefits, and people who commit crimes are not model neoliberal citizens, they do not fulfill their societal obligations, and they threaten disorder, but at least their

actions can be altered by ‘technolog[ies] of rectification’ (Foucault, 1999:58-91). However, the older people are wired differently, they have experienced divergent socialisation processes to the young and they have resistant and oppositional attitudes to consumerism, and thereby have ‘co-produced’ a world that is fundamentally different to the one that has been constructed by the neoliberal ‘pioneers of thought’ (Davies, 2014a:311; Rabil, 1967:17,31). The nuclei of the older people’s existence will never be the accumulation of unnecessary commodities and their status and identity will never be derived from the objects that they own. Conversely, although this cohort do demonstrate unauthorised forms of abnormality, they constitute the deviant and monstrous Other, and have become the only true ‘exception’, they do not care and will show no remorse because they are the defenders of the old world; a world which imbues nostalgia and traditional values and must be defended through acts of resistance (Agamben, 1998:72; Foucault, 1999:81; Tyler, 2013:9).

Chapter Five

Individualism, Insecurity and Egocentricity:

The Irrevocable Demise of the Community?

'Well, you can't wait for people to come to you, you have got to go out and see other people. Nobody is going to come knocking at the door and you know...please come and...you know...please come and be part of the community. You have got to go out and look for things.' [Wilma]

Throughout this thesis it has been shown that neoliberalism and the recession have had a detrimental impact upon those in old age in a plethora of complex ways, including the demise of their local town, the breaking down of their working class identity, inter-generational tensions, and a greater exposure to risk and insecurity. However, in antithesis to this, the thesis has also shown that the older people have developed resistance to these macro forces as they nostalgically think back to the past and try to sustain thrifty practices, altruistic attitudes, and a state of collectivism, which neoliberalism has sought to destroy. The older people appear to reject processes of individualisation and excessive consumption, signifying that they have alternative subjectivities and constitute three-dimensional deviants (Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xi). Thus, this chapter seeks to extend this analysis by unearthing the ways in which these global macro-economic forces have influenced community development in Meir North, inclusive of neighbour, familial and friendship ties, and the impact they have had upon the lives of the older people. Conversely, before this topic can be explored in-depth, the term 'community' is examined due to its ambiguous and elusive conceptualisation. Following this, there is an exploration of

the contrasting community perspectives of the older people, including arguments inferring that this group *do not* feel part of a community and therein are experiencing feelings of loneliness and exclusion, and those who *do* feel part of a community because they have developed strong bonds with, and attachments to, others, and thereby feel a sense of belongingness. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of how communities are being innovatively redefined and reconstructed by the older people according to their own personal objectives and needs, inclusive of the joining of clubs and religious groups (referred to more specifically as ‘personal communities’) and the ways in which these help enrich and enhance their ‘life-worlds’ (Pahl, 2005:636; Spurling, 1977:9).

Theoretical Conceptualisations of the term ‘Community’

Although the history of community studies extends across many decades and the term ‘community’ has been repeatedly utilised within research, there continues to be ambiguity concerning the meaning and scope of this concept. As Hacker (2013:23) notes, there is a ‘lack of [an] accepted definition’ leading to each new ‘community’ study drawing from different conceptualisations and constant reclassification. The persistent oscillation between definitions has helped to formulate the belief, both inside and outside the sociological discipline, that the concept of ‘community’ is ‘meaningless’ and unworthy of employment (Halsey 1974 cited in Crow and Allan, 1994:191). However, this view has been fiercely contested by a number of scholars who contend that whilst the term may have multiple connotations and be used in multifarious contexts, its obscurities do not outweigh its importance and usefulness for grasping both the interconnectivity of people and for ‘captur[ing] the imagination

of sociologists' (Crow and Allan, 1994:196). To understand the foundations of this debate, attention is turned to how theorists have defined 'community' and the common themes and disparities in their perspectives in order to seek a potential resolve, or at least a workable definition, enabling a shared comprehension of this concept.

To begin this conceptual quest, attention is turned to the ways in which scholars have synthesised the term 'community' and its central features. Thus in the first instance, Bauman (2001a:1-2) argues that a community is perceived as 'always [being] a good thing', as individuals can rely on other people during times of hardship and know they will 'listen with sympathy....forgive [them]' and 'hold [their] hand at moments of sadness'. Members of a community will recognise their obligation to others and will offer help without question or an expectation of being repaid, enabling security and positive wellbeing (Bauman, 2001a:2). A community is therefore considered a 'warm place, a cosy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day' (Bauman 2001a:1). In contrast, Crow and Allan (1994:1) take a far less utopian view of the community, as they focus upon the more tangible aspects of this concept, notably 'local social arrangements' and the ways in which individuals within a specific geographical area develop ties with others, construct a common identity, engage in communal activities, and show unconditional commitment to fellow residents. This definition is not too dissimilar to the one proposed by Willmott and Young (1962) and Edwards (2008:5), as they too recognise the importance of people sharing common experiences as part of a 'collective life' and engaging in communal activities in the public, rather than private (home and family), sphere.

The abstruseness of the term 'community' is further highlighted by its indistinguishable boundaries. Where does a community start and where does it end? Whilst this appears to be a relatively straightforward question, there is no collective answer as scholar's debate whether actual physical boundaries divide people into communities or if communities are symbolically and socially constructed. Coleman (1966:673) notes that 'we often speak of such a locality (a village, town, or city) as a 'community'', as if there was an unquestionable relation between where a person resides and the bonds which they form with others. Geographical boundaries are used to draw sharp lines of division between those who are included and those who are excluded from a collectivity, referred to as a 'place' or 'territorial' community (Crow and Allan, 1994:1-3). Moreover, Tonkiss (2003:298) contends that a community is largely defined by 'shared spaces', wherein relationships are developed according to common 'identities of interest', norms and values. Those who live within a neighbourhood share a common identity (via accent, behaviour and style) and benefit from comradeship whereby help and support are reciprocally offered and received (May, 2013:123).

Willmott and Young's (1962:37,108) examination of Bethnal Green, a deprived area in East London, epitomises this kind of community as many of the local residents had developed strong familial and friendship ties with others over an extended period of time. The community is described as being 'a place of huge families centered around Mum, of cobbled streets and terraced cottages, open doors, children's street games, open-air markets, and always, and everlastingly, cups of tea and women gossiping together on the doorstep' (Cornwell, 1984:24). This community is considered 'territorial' because its members provide support during times of need and engage in

communal activities with those who live in the local neighbourhood (Willmott and Young, 1962:35-36). Place and community are therefore entwined; residency equates to inclusion (Willmott and Young, 1962:35-36).

In addition, McKenzie's (2013:1) study of the 'St Anne's council housing estate' also demonstrates the creation of a 'territorial' community (Crow and Allan 1994:3). The residents within this area have firmly drawn their own community boundaries around living in, and 'being' part of, St Anne's (McKenzie, 2013:1-2). Those who live within this area are considered insiders because they are poor, have limited access to employment opportunities and/or commit crime (McKenzie, 2013:1). In contrast, those people who live outside of this area are excluded because they 'look down' on the 'St Anne's' community, especially their way of life, and construct detrimental stereotypes based upon right-wing discourses, i.e. that all those living off benefits are thieves, work-shy and drug addicts (McKenzie, 2013:1-2). The residents of 'St Anne's' build protective barriers to outsiders through a resilient attitude which supports and rationalises their way of life, including the value placed upon being a (single) mother, being dependent on benefits and undertaking criminal activities (particularly the men who play 'cat-and-mouse games' with the police in order to effectively avoid jail and punishment for drug and theft crimes) (McKenzie, 2013:4). These residents recognise the differences between their norms and values and that of broader society's, but their distinctiveness enables a unique form of integration, incorporating novel forms of 'worth, power and status' and reaffirms their identity of 'being St Anne's' (McKenzie, 2013:3).

Conversely, Edwards (2008:5) contests the idea of communities being constructed in accordance with rigidly defined boundaries, despite this being the ‘most common referent for the term’, due to the development of communication technologies and the expansion of community relations (Crow and Allan 1994:191). According to this perspective, sociologists should deter away from the belief that communities are constructed according to fixed spaces and alternatively consider how globalisation has ‘disembled[ded]’ and fragmented traditional communities in favour of worldwide social interactions (Edwards, 2008:5). In contemporary society, people can access a plethora of technological gadgets, notably laptops, mobile phones, tablets etcetera, which allow for forms of interaction and support without individuals being physically enclosed within the same space i.e. through the use of Facebook, Twitter and Skype (Crow, 2008:14). Community ties can now be made by a push of a button, regardless of where its members are situated around the world (Crow, 2008). These communities do not possess ‘neatly’ defined borders as the people within them extend their relations beyond localities to much wider geographical spaces with ‘free-floating’ and ‘fuzzy’ boundaries (Crow and Allan, 1994:177-182; Wellman cited by Crow and Allan, 1994:181). Hence, communities can be anywhere in the world, they are not confined, and can include any number of people, and thereby sociologists need to extend their conceptualisations of this term (Hacker, 2013:26).

In affiliation with this view, there are a plethora of scholars who assert that the boundaries of communities are not physically established, whether on a micro (locality) or macro (global) scale, because they are socially and symbolically constructed (Anderson, 2006). The lines of inclusion and exclusion are not drawn by pre-fixed physical or geographical objectivities but by mental constructions, which

serve to divide people according to subjective categorisations (Anderson, 2006). A community is devised by people according to their own judgements of who they think belongs, such as those who 'resemble' themselves and have similar characteristics (such as sharing their age, gender, socio-economic group and ethnicity), and share common interests (May, 2013:123). Those people who challenge or oppose these features are often marginalised from the community, as the term becomes associated with a 'rhetoric of similarity' rather than difference (May, 2013:123). As Anderson (2006:6) asserts, these communities are 'imagined', they are social constructs, wherein members mentally depict who is included and who is excluded according to their own personalised criteria. These judgements are not based upon fact as the community members will never know all those they could potentially share a given space (cyber or geographical) with, what they look or sound like, what they think or how they live their lives, all they will know is they exist and they are out there somewhere (Anderson, 2006:6). Those people who do become part of a community can only 'imagine' they are surrounded by like-minded people who share similar norms and values, even if in reality this is pure fantasy and based upon an idealistic notion of collectivism (Anderson, 2006:7).

Blokland (2003:62) accords with this perspective, as she argues that the concept of 'community' typically refers to the ways in which people 'group' others 'according to characteristics that are meaningful to [them]'. As a way to order their social lives, many people often 'classify' others whom they share their social world with according to shared 'features', and it is this form of categorising that leads to the formation of various communities, including family, friendship and neighbourhood communities (Blokland, 2003:62). Drawing from Anderson's (1990) concept of

‘imagined communities’ (and Pahl’s (2005:623) notion of ‘communities-in-the-mind), Blokland (2003:63) argues that once a community has been imaginatively established, its members create “we’ experiences’, which encourage co-operation, ‘bonding’ and a dominant form of togetherness. It is within a community that ‘both bonds and attachments are *sociable*’, they necessitate ‘affinity and affectivity’ inclusive of members showing warmth, compassion and empathy to others who they identify as possessing similar characteristics and belonging in a comparable community category (Blokland, 2003:67,73). Being within a community extends further than simply being part of a group, it necessitates iterations, ‘feelings’ and emotions, it requires that each member give a part of their self to others, and collectively develop positive sensations, such as excitement and ‘enjoyment’, which ultimately contribute to the formation of a ‘social identification’ (Blokland, 2003:63, 67).

Furthermore, Cohen (1985:12) argues that the term ‘community’ is not fixed due to its flexible boundaries and constantly changing nature. The boundaries of communities can, in some instances, be clearly defined in accordance with geographic and spatial elements, i.e. by the sea, a border of a country or a compilation of houses in one area, as has been noted earlier, but in many instances such ‘objectiv[ity]’ is void, as boundaries are created ‘in the minds of their beholders’ according to where they cognitively draw the line between themselves and others (Cohen, 1985:12). It is through ‘social interaction’ and the utilisation of language that people can position themselves in relation to its symbolism, comprehend their community (who is included and who is excluded) and reformulate ‘moral codes’ to reinforce community boundaries during times of change when common norms and values, and their identity, are threatened (Cohen, 1985:9-28). Similarly, Suttles (1972; 21-22) states

that individuals create ‘cognitive map[s]’ of their residential area and ‘what they think it ought to be like’; they subjectively determine their own communities. The communities that are created can be ‘egocentric’ (‘I’ communities) or ‘sociocentric’ (‘our’ communities) in formation, but become real entities in the minds of the developers (Suttles, 1972:33-40). These mental constructions are more likely to be established by residents who live within ‘defended neighbourhoods’ wherein poverty and deprivation predominate and sharper divisions between people exist (Suttles, 1972:40). Hence, in order to maintain a sense of community there has to be a constant reformulation of symbolic meanings and ‘embellishment’, wherein people collectively comprehend certain symbols in a similar way to feel a sense of commonality and belonging (Cohen, 1985:15).

Featherstone’s (2013) ‘*Being-in-Hull, Being-On-Bransholme*’ study supports these constructivist theories. The residents who live on the Bransholme housing estate, defined as one of the ‘crappiest’ estates in Britain, have socially constructed a form of ‘negative civic pride’; a type of communal solidarity which seeks to deter ostracism and marginalisation (Featherstone, 2013:180-182). This is a defensive pride held by all members of the community as part of a ‘siege mentality’ shown to those who have radically restructured their way of life and facilitated the production of negative labels and stereotypes i.e. the view that the ‘crapiest’ people live in the ‘crapiest’ places (Featherstone, 2013; 182; McKenzie, 2013:1). It is unlikely that these residents have ever met the people who have helped to destroy their former ways of life, inclusive of their traditional working class economy and their reputation, but they devise mental constructions of these perceived enemies in accordance with commonly held preconceptions, exacerbating feelings of hostility and anger, and further justifying the

‘defending’ of their community (Featherstone, 2013; Suttles, 1972:33). The linguistic symbolism of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ brings these otherwise alienated and demoralised people into a close relationship, as their community becomes established around common notions of similarity (shared experiences among the insiders) and difference (between the insiders and the outsiders) (Cohen, 1985; Featherstone, 2013). These devised boundaries ultimately serve as a ‘social control apparatus’, because those within the community enclave can decipher who belongs within this area and who does not and they can begin their onslaught against any potential intruders who seek to attack their traditional ways of life and undermine their unity (Featherstone, 2013; Suttles, 1972:21).

Thus in summary, even this brief overview of the term ‘community’ incites antagonism and conflict as there is no clear definition of its meaning or its social or geographical remit. Perhaps it would be judicious to ignore the complexities of this term and simply adopt Bauman’s (2001:1-2) belief that a community is like ‘a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day’. It would certainly be less problematic to adopt such a conceptualisation, and it would bring an instant resolve to the issue, but does it really capture what a community is? A more detailed exploration of this term reveals greater complexity due to other scholars indicating the significance of social relationships, interactions and trust, and engagement in collective activities (Crow and Allan, 1994; Edwards, 2008; Willmott and Young, 1962). Furthermore, it is also not clear where boundaries of a community start or end, or whether it is a real entity or something imagined (Anderson, 2006; Cohen, 1985; Coleman, 1966; May, 2013; Tonkiss 2003). The only aspect of a community which can be ascertained is that it is socially constructed (the

construction of multiple meanings evidences this) and, in the large instance, it is ‘a good thing’ (Bauman, 2001a:1). Hence, what arises from this exploration is a plethora of key questions which can be applied to the research undertaken in Meir North, including; how do the older people in this area define the term ‘community’? Is their definition similar to any of those previously outlined or do they have a unique conceptualisation? And ultimately, do they feel part of a community, especially during the current era of individualisation, insecurity and egocentricity that has been explored in previous chapters?

Isolation and Insecurity: The Decline of the Local Community

All the participants were asked ‘Do you feel part of a community? If yes, why’, and ‘How does it make you feel being part of a community’? Whilst many of the older participants did say that they were part of a community and this encouraged positive forms of wellbeing (which will be discussed later in this chapter), many others believed they were not part of a community and were quite secluded:

Flo: You have got one or two quite good neighbours around, but it is not, it’s not like it was years ago where you knew all your neighbours and everybody sort of helped one another, you know. I mean now, I know [name of another resident] across the road and another one, but most of them I don’t know them up the street you know, just one or two older ones that are left. I mean they are alright next door but they don’t sort of, you wouldn’t feel comfortable asking them to run errands for you if you were stuck you know. I

mean they are pleasant, they talk to you and that, but not like years ago where you could sort of go round and say 'could you help me?' like, 'I have lost my key' something like that. There was always somebody to help you and we were always ready to help other people, you know, but that has changed in this way. It has changed a lot really... it has gradually changed, all different people now... I don't know them, I don't know them.

Marjorie: It never used to be like that, I mean...I think it is probably the same with a lot of parts of Meir, a lot of people would say...people aren't neighbourly like they used to be, you know. And the social contact isn't there, so it has changed, it has changed, and I don't think all that much for the better really...but I think that's with society in general because people don't seem to care about other people do they? Do you know what I mean? I am alright, bother what anybody else thinks...or that's how it very often seems to me...they don't want to get involved do they? I think it is sad and disappointing.

Sylvia: When I moved in there was all these old people in the street and now I am one of the old people, but again, 'morning', 'hello', you know, 'are you alright?' And 'it's cold this morning'. The thing I have noticed with neighbours, this is just an old person's point of view, you don't get to know their names...when we were young, the neighbours used to come out in the street and you would talk to them

by their name, but now it is just ‘good morning’ because most of them go out in cars, so there is none of that friendliness that there used to be.

Molly: I mean like when it was the Royal wedding, they didn’t do anything and we went to knock on people’s doors and said ‘shall we put some trellis tables out?’, you know and get some bunting, ‘no thank you’, so anything special, they don’t bother. I don’t know if some of them have not got family, you never see them out and about, so perhaps they haven’t got family, or I don’t know, some just keep themselves to themselves.

These accounts infer that the older people have witnessed considerable changes to their community. The older people have come to reside in an area wherein people are detached, they do not provide ‘their name’ [Sylvia], they do not encourage meaningful social interactions (they only say ‘morning’, ‘hello’ and ‘it’s cold this morning’ [Sylvia]), they are not ‘neighbourly’ [Marjorie], and they do not offer information about their own self or their families (they ‘keep themselves to themselves’) [Molly, Flo] which is vital for the creation of intimate community relationships. These findings accord with the research undertaken by Blokland (2003) in ‘Hillesluis’, as whilst many of the local residents spoke to their neighbours, they often only ‘greeted them on sight’ and did not enter into each others houses and/or offer any further forms of support (Blokland, 2003:80). The residents in ‘Hillesluis’, like the older people in Meir North, ‘scarcely’ knew of each other, they ‘hardly s[aw]’ each other and they were not ‘depend[ent] on one another’; they lived largely separate

and unconnected lives due a ‘diminished need to be neighbourly’ (Blokland, 2003:80,122).¹⁹

Moreover, Blokland (2003:110,111,116) highlights that the detrimental economic (deindustrialisation) and technological (greater innovativeness) transformations that have occurred in this area have also impacted upon community formations, specifically as they have altered from ‘public-familiar to anonymous’. Similar trends have occurred in Meir North, because, as was shown in the first and third chapters, the local town in this area has also declined, all that is left is takeaways, hairdressers and charity shops [Sylvia, Betty, Jenny, Flora]. With many people, including the older people (who are the least mobile), choosing not to shop in this area it means that community relations cannot be established because the local residents no longer see each other in the local neighbourhood. Moreover, referring back to the creation of ‘imagined’ communities, if the local residents no longer interact with each other, it means that they can no longer decipher who is similar and who is different to their own self (people become unknown entities) and as such, no community boundaries can be formed (Anderson, 2006:6). Without these ‘distinctions’, the older people in Meir North, like the people in ‘Hillesluis’, cannot be ‘*embedded*’ in their local area, they cannot establish bonds, and they cannot experience a ‘special sense of belonging’ (Blokland, 2003:80, 117). The impact of neoliberalism and the recession upon former industrialised areas like Meir North and ‘Hillesluis’ therefore extends beyond

¹⁹ Although it should be noted that in ‘Hillesluis’ there are other factors that have helped contribute to community breakdown, notably the social milieu which includes a higher number of ethnic minority groups which threaten to undermine cohesion due to a discourse of difference (Blokland, 2003:80).

infrastructure and the economy ('bricks [and] mortar'), to more personal aspects which significantly infringe upon the ability of local residents to form meaningful relations with others and develop an integrated community (Blokland, 2001:80, 268; Blokland, 2003).

According to Forrest and Kearns (2001:2130), this demise in 'neighbouring'²⁰ is particularly disheartening for those within 'disadvantaged neighbourhoods' because good quality relationships with neighbours helps to protect against the adverse effects of living within an area which has experienced significant deterioration, and offers security during periods of adversity most likely to be experienced by the poor and the immobile. This contention is particularly applicable to the local residents in Meir North, specifically those in old age, because they have had to contend with the harmful effects of poverty and environmental decay, and also community fragmentation and a loss of social support, which have worsened the quality of their daily lives and caused significant 'biographical disruption' (Morgan, 2011:20). There is now a belief that nobody 'cares' anymore and therein feelings of 'sad[ness] and disappoint[ment]' are experienced [Marjorie].

The older people's narratives imply that they are nostalgic for the past, particularly because they recognise that their community has changed over time due to a decline in 'civically engaged' activities and processes of 'social decapitalisation' (Putnam, 1995: 65-71). The theme of nostalgia is specifically inferred by Marjorie who stated

²⁰ Similar findings are presented in May and Muir's (2015:3.2,4.4) study, as they found that many older people did not believe 'neighbouring' occurred in their area (a city in the north of England) because their interactions with others were superficial and lacked any significance, i.e. they would 'just talk outside' and would 'not go into each other's homes' (as stated by 'Emily, aged 72').

that 'it never used to be like that', and Flo who noted that the community was 'not like it was years ago' because whilst in the past local residents offered support during times of need and everyone 'helped one another', contemporarily these forms of social capital have been retracted causing significant insecurity. In addition, Molly recalls how in the past the community would have come out onto the streets and publicly celebrated the 'Royal wedding', but today, local residents do not 'do anything', they do not want to put 'trellis tables out' or 'get some bunting'. These accounts imply that people would rather 'bowl alone' than engage in communal activities due to a lack of 'social connectedness', and that 'social trust' and 'thick' community relations have been displaced by 'thin' relations which involve no collective forms of 'effort' or 'energy' (Cattell, 2001:1502; Coleman, 1966: 671,673; Putnam, 1995:66,72-73).

It is also of significance to note that whilst I was in Meir North, I listened to many stories of how the older people grew up in an area that had a strong sense of community because people who worked in the 'Potteries' (in the factories) lived near to each other, and this included family members, friends and neighbours. The older people spoke very fondly of their past working-class community, it was evident that they wished they could go back in time and re-live those happy days. These nostalgic memories are similar to the people living within 'Hillesluis', as they too 'often depicted a cohesive, cosy working-class neighbourhood' (Blokland, 2001:271; Blokland, 2003:191). It is clear therefore, that this older cohort have established a 'collective memory' of the past which is not based upon absolute truths, but upon memories that have been co-operatively established (Blokland, 2003:80,191). There is a 'collective character' to the memories that the older people have, as they are

discussed, refined and created through social interactions (especially at the clubs and groups which the older people in Meir North attend, which will be discussed later in this chapter) and they have become real in their minds; their social constructions have become real-life realities (Blokland, 2003:191). Due to many of the older people in Meir North having lived in this area for a long time, they can share a '*social position*' (italics in original) and therein can collectively and nostalgically recall memories of the past; they want to go back to the 'good old days', an era which was 'cohesive' and 'understandable' (Blokland, 2003:191,197; Blokland, 2001:281).

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the local community within Meir North is due to its changing demography, as new privately owned homes have been built attracting a more prosperous class of individuals that have yet to develop a sense of belongingness to this area. The issues raised by this demographic conversion become evident within the following narratives:

Lilly: I mean we don't know the new people but that's because they haven't been in long.

Molly: I should say I know about 50 per cent of them, cus they are always coming.

Patricia: Where I am in my row, a lot of the properties have been bought from people in London, so they are here today gone tomorrow sort of thing, so you don't get to know all of them. You get to know one or two like, but they don't stay long enough.

Pearl: I can honestly say I know about a third of the people on the estate where I live. Whereas you used to know everyone in your street, now people tend to seem as though they enclose themselves in that little building and you don't get to know them. I know they do shift work, that makes it difficult... I mean they drive out and because they are working different shifts and different hours, erm...there's hardly any sound at all during the day...there's very few people about.

Olive: Well, I don't think it has got better than it was then...people I won't say are as friendly as they used to be years ago...I think it's because people are out to work nearly all day, they come in at night and the tea's on and they are very busy and they don't want anybody interfering in their lives, that's my opinion you know. I mean you can go all week and not see your neighbours, you know so, that's why.

These narratives show how the older people's lives have been affected by the infiltration of new working class people into their area of residency. Whilst this older cohort used to know 'everyone in [their] street' [Pearl], today they know 'about 50 per cent' or 'a third' of them [Molly, Pearl] causing feelings of anxiety and apprehension. This area has become a 'zone of transition', meaning the local population is constantly in a state of flux and strong communal bonds cannot be established (Phillipson, 2007:332). Furthermore, whilst the arrival of these

aspirational working class people (rather than the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert]) is considered beneficial because they help to improve the reputation of the area, they also undermine the development of a community because they do not engage with the older residents or take part in community activities due to being ‘very busy’ and going ‘out to work nearly all day’ [Olive] (Coleman, 1966:675,699,710). This trend is unlikely to be reversed because these new working class people go to work in the day when the older residents are outside of their homes (as noted in chapter three, this is the safest time of the day in an area plagued by ‘gangs’ [Ronald, Flo, Sylvia, Molly, Dorothy, Flora] and ‘druggies’ [Molly, Ronald, Pearl, Sylvia and Harry]) and they do not stay in the area for a long period of time (‘they are here today, gone tomorrow’ [Patricia]), causing a permanent state of social degeneration (Coleman, 1966).

The narratives presented become of even greater significance when considering the older people’s relationship with other local residents, notably the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert]. As has already been noted, the older people have had to construct symbolic boundaries between their own entities and that of the ‘undesirables’ because their social norms and values threaten to drag Meir North down into unknown depths of despair and decline (the older people do not want to be known as the ‘crapest’ people liv[ing] in the ‘crapest’ place) (Featherstone, 2013:182; Suttles, 1972:33). The older people have therefore effectively developed a ‘siege mentality’ towards these people because they oppose the tenets of being working class and represent the ‘abject’ (Featherstone, 2013:182; Tyler, 2013:9). However, the findings in this chapter also suggest that the older people have been unable to develop a community with people they hold in greater esteem, who have the potential to improve the reputation of Meir North through the regeneration of its local economy and the

rejuvenation of its social landscape. Whilst the ‘undesirables’ [Harry, Robert] are deliberately detached from the older people’s ‘sociocentric’ community, the new aspirational working class have chosen not to be part of their community, causing the older people to experience forced exclusion (Cohen, 1985:12; Suttles, 1972:37-42). *The excluders have become the excluded*. As a result of this, the older people have become surrounded by ‘distrustful’ Others who they adopt ‘avoidance and separation’ strategies against, and also unknown younger workers who do not seek to be part of their local community, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Bauman cited by Crow, 2002:35; Fukuyama, 2000:122).

Bauman’s (2007b:86,87) theory of ‘mixophobia’ helps to further explain the complicated ‘segregationist’ trends that are prevalent in Meir North. Under conditions of ‘liquid modern[ity]’ (or gas ‘modernity’?) people are increasingly being exposed to ‘mind-boggling, spine-chilling and [a] nerve breaking variety of human types and lifestyles’ which they may not understand nor affiliate with, leading to social tensions and conflict (Bauman, 2007b:86,90). As a way to protect their own entities, individuals seek ‘islands of similarity and sameness’ (which Anderson (2006), Blokland (2003) and Pahl (2005) also infer through their ‘imagined’ communities theories) whereby they form bonds with people who they perceive to be like their own self, and they construct rigid boundaries around these ‘islands’ to protect against unwanted intruders (Bauman, 2007b:87). The older people within this study accord with this metaphor, as they have tried to develop an ‘island’ with other older people who they perceive (in their minds) to possess a comparable nature, and also the new working class people in their area (Bauman, 2007b:87). However, in contrast to this, this older cohort have also tried to block all entries to this ‘island’ to the

‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert] because they have a phobia of mixing with this sort of individual; they pose a threat to their existence and therein must be excluded (Bauman, 2007b:87). Conversely, despite building these mental constructions (or barriers), the ‘undesirables’ [Harry and Robert] continue to invade their space, causing increasing intolerance, whilst the welcomed newcomers refuse to be part of their community because they do not share the same ‘we’ feeling’ or see their own selves as being ‘similar’ to that of the older people and therein do not attempt to be part of their collectivity (Sennett cited by Bauman, 2007b:87). What has resulted is not a sense of ‘togetherness’, but perpetual feelings of ‘anxiety and anguish’ as the older people have not been able to create the ‘island’ that they would have liked; it has antithetically become a space of ‘similarity’ *and* difference (Bauman, 2007b:87,90).

The issues surrounding this enforced form of social exclusion are part of a much broader shift towards individualisation, and the neoliberal expectation for individuals to ‘take over responsibility for themselves, make their own decisions and imperil their own lives and loves’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995:4-5). Whilst the new, aspirational working class people may seek to establish relations with local residents, this is not an easy task as they are coerced to undertake labour, including long shift work, in order to deter risk and retain their citizenship rights (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995:5-6). As noted in the previous chapters, younger individuals have grown up in a different era to those in old age (during ‘second modernity’) and therefore have had to accept a constantly changing economic sphere, inclusive of perpetual unemployment and insecurity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:206). In a competitive, neoliberal world, younger people can no longer afford to stay in the same

place hoping work will come to them. Instead, they have to always be on the move according to where they can find work leading to 'place polygamy' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:25). The older people do not recognise this need because they grew up in an era of 'first...modernity', whereby 'place monogamy' (most of the participants had 'aged in place') was the norm, and people tended to be attached to one, rather than multiple, places (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:25,28; Smith, 2006:32). It is because of this wide dispersion and lack of ties that many individuals have become more self-sufficient (they have learnt to rely only upon themselves) and dismissive of traditional 'social commitments' which are vital for the older people's 'existence and identity' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995:6-7).

The theme of egocentrism and community breakdown is extended by Sennett's (1998) analysis of work and time. The trajectory and nature of these aspects are outlined through a cross-comparative analysis of the 'work ethic' of Protestants, dating back to the sixteenth century, with the current populace who are governed by a capitalist system (Sennett, 1998:98). Drawing from the work of Weber, notably *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Sennett (1998:99) asserts that Protestants were extremely hard-working and believed in 'self-discipline' because their status and worth became affiliated with the work they undertook and their ability to not 'delay gratification' (considered a 'deeply self-destructive practice') (Sennett, 1998:99,106). A successful Protestant worked hard, created significant wealth and reinvested all profits back into the modes of production; the greater the wealth earned, the higher the societal positioning accorded (Sennett, 1998). These character traits resonate with the '*homo economicus*' (italics in original) in today's 'enterprise society' because these economic subjects also coalesce capital accumulation with social status and

sustain a dominant 'work ethic' in order to achieve immediate gratification (Foucault, 2008:147; Sennett, 1998:98).

However, unlike the Protestants discussed by Weber, the contemporary '*homo economicus*' (italics in original) is not driven by religious doctrines or the expectation to demonstrate morality (Sennett, 1998:105). The neoliberal worker is unlike the Protestant worker because they are governed by a 'winner-take[s]-all market', wherein the threat of failure is constant and they must demonstrate their talents otherwise they are 'doomed to fail' (Foucault, 2008:148; Sennett, 1998:118,135). To avoid a feeling of worthlessness, the neoliberal worker must outcompete all others through their own aptitude and demonstrate their success at fulfilling the obligations of a neoliberal citizen (Foucault, 2008; Sennett, 1998:119,122). The neoliberal subject does seek wealth, but rather than investing this back into their own businesses, they alternatively invest into their own self and commodities that lack any form of meaning or significance (Sennett, 1998). Hence, it is argued that this constant need to work and consume has played a role in undermining community formations because many individuals no longer have the time or the capacity to spend with others; what makes them righteous is their possession of capital and goods, not their relationships with neighbours, friends and family (Sennett, 1998:119,135; Stiglitz, 2010:275-276). Relationships of this type hinder rather than enhance the individual's status and success, and thereby where possible they should be avoided (Sennett, 1998).

Therefore, these theories imply that human relations could have been undermined by the construction of a ‘money economy’, because everything within its circumference has been transformed into an object with a monetary value (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:244). The creation of this capital system has fundamentally altered human cognition due to drives and desires becoming largely fulfilled with the ‘spending [of] money’ and the ‘possession of as many things as possible’ (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:235). Some individuals are vulnerable to experiencing a ‘corrosion of character’ because they have been coerced to attach a price to all the objects they own and all facets of their life, including their time, as they constantly ask ‘how much [are] they worth?’ (Sennett, 1998:10). Only time spent on acquiring commodities is considered fulfilling due to the consequent feelings of happiness and contentment, and therein a reliance upon the ‘money economy’ becomes inescapable (the individual recognises that they need this economy for their own positive wellbeing) (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:235-244; Poggi, 1993). Many people have become trapped in this cyclical web of money and things because they no longer know what they truly desire; consumption and work have become their only points of reference and thereby time must only be spent undertaking these practices (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:238; Sennett, 1998:10).

This overview of the ‘money economy’ provides a potential rationale as to why the older people in Meir North are unlikely to be part of a community, notably because many relationships are now governed by financial capital (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:244, 246). The older generation are largely outside this relational system because whilst they do consume and undertake some forms of labour, notably as part of their own ‘grey economy’ (see chapter four), they are prudent in their spending

practices (as was noted in the previous chapter, they follow an ethos of ‘moderation’) and their lives are not governed by time and workplace pressures. The older people continue to seek to establish connections based on trust, compassion and morality, whilst others seek to form bonds based principally on ‘monetary interest’, which they view as being essential for the development of a shared consensus and the sustainment of their existence (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:246). The two viewpoints are antithetical, especially as one prioritises wealth over social relations, believing the former has a real value whilst the latter are not ‘worth anything’ (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:240).

Moreover, as some people seek objects to fulfill their satisfactions, their ‘freedom’ becomes restricted because they are forced to choose between monetary accumulation that lies at the heart of their very existence, or spending time with others, which contradictorily hinders the success of the former objective (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:248). As a result of this, these individuals have to ‘weigh up’ and ‘calculate’ how to gain the most from the little they have, leading to the prioritisation of work and money and denied access to the one remaining ‘priceless thing’ in society; ‘the object of personal activity’ (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:248, 252-253). In today’s society, there is often little time to spend with others, nor in some cases is there the inclination to do so, because the only objective of a neoliberal subject is to own endless amounts of objects which help construct identity and enable personal fulfillment. Some contemporary consumers have therefore become ‘self-oriented, narcissistic and self-promoting’, they can no longer identify themselves as being part of a collective with shared aspirations and thereby prioritise their own entity, their

own needs and the enhancement of their 'self-esteem' over all others as part of a 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch, 1979:44; Southerton, 2011:134).

The creation of a 'culture of narcissism' and the consequent changes to the local community reinforce the notion of instability because whilst the older people seek to hold onto former 'customs, norms, mores, and laws', the society around them is rapidly altering, causing these requisites to become 'irrelevant' (Coleman, 1966:712,713; Lasch, 1979:44). This is a response of social capital becoming considered a 'public good' rather than a private good, and being discouraged by the neoliberal, free economy (Coleman cited by Fukuyama, 2000:255). In the current era, individuals should seek to achieve their own objectives and thereby there is no motivation to form relations with others (Coleman cited by Fukuyama, 2000:255-256). The only way to deter this process is for 'nonmarket forces', such as churches and families, to reinforce other values not intrinsically connected to the accumulation of wealth (Coleman cited by Fukuyama, 2000:255-256). This perplexes the older people because they can only draw from their own experiences which no longer fit with the society they are part of, and therein they feel helpless to the transitions made because they cannot construct 'new guides for action', nor locate their own or others positioning within the newly formed community (Coleman, 1966:712). Hence, the older people long for their perceived former community and seek to recapture this, but they may never, 'regrettably', get this back as it has become a 'paradise lost' (Bauman, 2001a:3).

In addition to this, the participants were also asked ‘Do you have close friendship and/or familial support? If yes, why, if no, why not?’ Interestingly, whilst the question referred to ‘friendship’ *and* ‘family’ support, the older people’s narratives predominantly focused upon the latter, suggesting that at this point in time this was of the most concern and had the greatest significance to their lives (however friendship ties will be discussed later in this chapter). The ethnographic data indicated that the neoliberal drive to work had undermined the older people’s relations with family members, as the following narratives indicate:

Molly: Then there is my daughter...if she can’t ring me, she doesn’t ring me, like if she has finished work late, I’ll text her and say ‘don’t bother ringing’ because she works thirteen hour shifts you know.

Alice: I mean obviously the family, I mean, the Grandsons are at uni, I mean erm...their Mum and Dad are at work all day now so we don’t get to see them as much as I would like, you know... I don’t see my daughter as much as what I would like to, only if we go along.

Pearl: I don’t see [daughter] that much because she lives in Leicestershire...She’s out in the countryside and I know she would like me to move closer to her, but it isn’t my kind of lifestyle that I have been used to and I don’t think I could tackle that.

Patricia: I live on my own and er...my family don't visit very often like the children, they say 'oh we haven't got time we are working'...they don't visit as much as I would like them to. They only seem to come when they want me to do something, you know, 'can you do me a favour?', that kind of thing, or they will come at Christmas or Mother's Day, 'here's a card', 'here's a present', but each time they come 'oh I can't stop I have got to do this', 'I can't stop I have got to go there'. You know, you feel as if you have got to hurry up, tell them what you want to say and then they have gone. Like my daughter, with her being a carer she has to go to work seven days a week and she says 'I haven't got time to come up and visit'. So she hasn't got time to come and visit me now, so that's what worries me because I think 'if ever I am ill who's going to come to me?' Because she can't because she is working.

It is evident that the participants wish to see their family members more often, as Alice states; 'we don't get to see them as much as I would like' and Patricia commented that her family 'don't visit as much as [she] would like them to' due to 'work' commitments. These accounts imply similarities between the younger members of the participants' families and the new, younger people in Meir North, because they seem to prioritise economic values over all others, leading to the '*disintegration*' (italics in original) of traditional family values (Coleman, 1966:696, 673). The differences between these generations can be accounted for through the 'circle' analogy provided by Coleman (1966:696), because whilst the older people are fixed into a local community, representing one 'rigid circle' (like the community in

Bethnal Green outlined by Young and Willmott (1962)), younger people's lives are increasingly being constructed around a series of 'concentric circles', all inter-linked but demanding divergent periods of their time. The older people's grandchildren and children may want to visit them more often, but in reality there are greater demands put on their time by work and their own families, meaning they have 'got [to] go there', 'got to do this' and 'can't stop' [Patricia]. Younger family members have to constantly shift between multiple 'circles' of reference and thereby cannot provide the levels of support and interaction the older people so desperately seek, especially as their 'circle' is deemed as being of 'less[er] importance' (Coleman, 1966:696). As Castells (2010:470) notes, today work 'structures social time' and in countries such as Britain wherein people are made to work longer hours and have fewer holidays than many other people in countries across the world, they have very limited time to give to others, especially extended family members. Therefore, there is a risk that the older people will become a secondary prioritisation for many younger people, especially their relatives and younger neighbours, and will be left to fend for themselves as autonomous individuals. This is a 'state of Being' which this generation is neither used to, nor equipped for, leading to uncertainty, unhappiness and ultimately a sense of vulnerability (as epitomised by Patricia's comment 'if ever I am ill who's going to come to me?') (Heidegger, 1962:78).

This contention is supported by Standing (2011:1), who argues that recent global, economic and social trends have created an open and competitive market to such an extent that no one can take their position for granted and thereby every working age person has to perpetually prioritise work over all other features of their life. As highlighted in chapter three, the older people were very fortunate to acquire a job at

sixteen and be able to hold onto this until they retired [Flo, Martha, Patricia, David, Ronald, Robert, Dennis] because in today's society many younger people are having to contend with flexible work shifts, zero-hour contracts and the individualisation of risk i.e. insecurities have been passed from the responsibility of the collective to 'workers and their families' (Standing, 2011:1). Many people, especially the 'precariat', are currently experiencing substantial uncertainty as they live within a world where their economic contribution can be easily replaced by another and they have become worthless (they are simply a means to an end, as replaceable as any other piece of machinery) (Standing, 2011:1). This is exacerbated by the recent 'shock therap[ies]' imposed on countries like the UK (United Kingdom), wherein global institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank are pushing governments to make significant cuts to all sectors in order to reduce national debt, making unemployment a constant probability for millions of people (Klein, 2008:163). As a result of this, employment insecurity pervades the lives of the young and therefore rather than engaging in community events or visiting relatives, they often have to prioritise economic requisites to the detriment of all others (Standing 2011:11).

Furthermore, this shift has caused the fracturing of former working class communities. As noted earlier, in the past individuals worked in the same place that their family resided and therein could establish strong community bonds. However, due to the demise of local economies, like the Potteries in Stoke-on-Trent, younger people cannot experience this trend because they are now having to seek work where it is available, with those with capital (social, economic, monetary) abandoning the area to move to more prosperous 'ideopolis's', leaving those without these aspects to endure profound effects including the 'dying out' of the traditional working class

‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990:3; Bourdieu, 1993:2; Charlesworth, 2000:3-23; Coleman, 1966: 696; Hutton Report, 2008:24). These shifts have consequently caused the dismantling of homogenous working class communities that in the past shared both ‘residenc[e]’ and ‘occupation’, and have uprooted and weakened familial relations (Charles et al, 2008:79). This depressing reality is set to worsen under conditions of the contemporary recession as the already existent issues become exacerbated and more people, especially younger unemployed people and those in old age, become trapped in deprived and economically stagnant areas like Meir North (Charlesworth, 2000).

The accounts of the older people also accord with the central arguments of risk theory, as it has become evident that global forces, notably neoliberalism and the economic crisis, do not just effect what is ‘out there’ in terms of the economy, but also what is ‘in here’, referring to the ‘intimate and personal aspects’ of people’s lives (Giddens, 2002:12). These external processes have altered the family unit in a number of ways as it has increasingly been put ‘under strain’ and is expected to alter the role it once played (Giddens, 2002:12). In a ‘risk society’, individuals are required to work to prevent any exposure to threats (such as a loss of income or lowered living standards) and ‘self-create’ a future according to their own ideals (Beck, 2007:4,6; Giddens, 2002:25-26). Working has thereby become a form of insurance, or more precisely, ‘risk management’, as many people have to work long hours in order to protect themselves from potentially harmful unknowns (‘catastrophes’), limiting the time they can spend with their families (Beck, 2007:9; Giddens, 2002:28,34).

In addition to this, the shift from women being centred in the private sphere, such as within the home, to more public spheres, such as work and education (largely due to revised equality laws, greater freedoms, and the increasing need for dual earner incomes) means that they can no longer be considered the main carers in their families (Bauman, 2007a). Many women in contemporary society have ‘expectations, wishes and life projects’ that are connected to their family, but also to more personal intentions, which means that they often have to lead a ‘double life’ consisting of caring duties and employment (Beck, 1992:132,134). This causes ‘conflictual crises’, as many women feel the pressure to work to try to deter risk and also the pressure to look after their families, forcing them to make a decision (like any other reflective ‘risk citizen’) as to how to spend their time effectively, i.e. to work, or to visit relatives (especially older relatives who often require greater time and support) (Beck, 1992:132). This progressive transformation perplexes the older people because whilst the family ‘appears to [be] the same as [it] used to be from the outside....[it has on the] inside become quite different’, its internal structure has changed, and therefore no longer fulfills the role it once had in the past (Giddens, 2002:12-19).

Conversely, the issues of work constraints and spatial distancing identified by the older people as hindering their relationships with their relatives, could be overcome by the ‘information revolution’ and online forms of communication (such as through the use of Twitter, Skype and Facebook) (Evans and Reid, 2014:49). It is due to these forms of communication that ‘global interconnectivity’ has occurred, as people have remained connected in spite of their geographical positioning (as information is passed from person-to-person at a touch of a button) and temporal differences (i.e. emails and messages can be read at the convenience of the receiver), enabling ‘greater

fluidity' in social relations (Evans and Reid, 2014:49; Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2126). Information Communication Technologies have introduced more individualised 'tactics' of communication, whereby users can choose an easy and convenient way to communicate with significant others, notably their family, overcoming former boundaries and allowing for 'online sociality' (Dijck, 2013:4,7). These new online technologies could provide a solution to the older people's loneliness, specifically the lack of contact they have with family members who are under pressure to uphold their citizenship duties, because they have enabled a 'time-space compression' wherein kinship can be done with speed and 'at a distance' (Allan, 2008:6; Harvey, 1990:284; Mason, 2011:68; May, 2013:126).

However, whilst in theory these technologies could overcome feelings of loneliness, there is in practice a 'digital divide' between those who are 'connected' (younger generations) and those who are 'disconnect[ed]' (the older people in Meir North) (Evans and Reid, 2014:50,55; Gilleard et al, 2014:1; Jaeger, 2004). The ethnographic research revealed that the older people do not utilise technologies for a plethora of reasons. Firstly, as was explicated in the former chapter, this cohort believe that commodity purchases should be kept to a minimum as they follow an ethos of 'moderation' and therein money should not be spent on expensive technological gadgets such as laptops, smartphones and iPads (all that is needed is a 'cheap phone' that allows the individual to 'just ring out and text' [Dorothy]). These older people share similar views to the older people within Sourbati's (2009:4) and Selwyn et al's (2003) studies, as they also 'lack[ed] [the] motivation' to invest in these forms of technology because they did not see the 'need' or the relevance of such items and

therein continued to value face-to-face interactions over all others; signifying that modern forms of technology are generationally opposed.²¹

The ethnographic research also unearthed an uneasy relationship between the older people and computer technology, as whilst two participants could email and Skype relatives, the majority could not, reinforcing the necessity for older people to maintain more personalised and/or physical forms of contact with family members, which is often more time consuming and reduces the commitment given to other ‘circle[s]’ of importance, such as work and consumption (Coleman, 1966:696). The older people are left with only traditional forms of contact, such as a phone call, a letter, or a visit from a relative (which are ‘embodied’ forms of contact, and are embedded in the ‘local’), which many family members can no longer commit to due to leading busy lives and/or living far away (such as those living in ‘Leicester’ [Pearl] or at ‘uni’ [Alice] who cannot easily visit in person) (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2129; May 2013:126). It is due to this lack of technological skill and the rejection of contemporary ‘habits of connectivity’ and fluidity, that this cohort have ultimately become disconnected from both society (on a macro scale) and their families (on a micro scale), and this situation cannot be improved through ‘repair work’, such as a reliance upon a ‘place’ community, because according to these older people it no longer exists (Crow and Allan, 1994:3; Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2127,2129; Evans and Reid, 2014:54).

²¹ There are other factors that could account for the older people’s rejection of Information Communication Technologies, including their low income, access (many public libraries have closed down since 2008), their life experiences (this generation would not have had to use these technologies in the workplace), their low level of education, and health issues (poor memory, arthritis etc.), but according to Selwyn et al (2003:564), ‘most empirical analyses agree that age and experience of being an older adult...have a significant impact on ICT usage’.

Finally, it is of importance to highlight that the accounts provided by the older people concerning their wish to be part of a community defy the logic of a neoliberal state. The neoliberal ideology deters people away from establishing social bonds with others, redefining 'mutual dependence' as a 'shameful condition' (Sennett, 1998:139). The efficiency and prosperity of the economy relies upon individuals spending their time working and consuming, and therefore there is an expectation that the older people just accept this way of life and the consequences of weakened social relations (Sennett, 1998:139). However, the older people's reluctance to accept the essential characteristics of being a good neoliberal citizen, incites comparisons to be drawn between their own entities and that of other needy beings, like welfare benefit claimants, causing them to become exposed to the discourse of 'social parasitism' (Sennett, 1998:140). In a neoliberal world, both the welfare recipient and the retired older person seeking to be part of a 'place' or family community demonstrate a 'weak, dependent self' (a bad self) rather than a 'strong, independent self' (a good self) and therein have come to constitute a burden upon society (Crow and Allan, 1994:3; Sennett, 1998:139-140). Neoliberalism encourages people to show an apathetic attitude towards others as there are no 'deep reasons to care about one another' and there are 'no reason[s] to be needed', but those in old age cannot comprehend this way of life (Sennett, 1998:146,148). Hence, this cohort continue to ask the question 'who needs me?', desperately hoping the answer will be someone, somewhere, but in many cases, the same, monotonous and unchanging reply is given; 'noone', nowhere (Sennett, 1998:146).

Social Unity, Integration and Gift Giving: A Defiant Community Spirit

The analysis thus far suggests that the majority of the older people believe their community, inclusive of both a 'place community' and a family community, have demised (Crow and Allan, 1994:3). A dominant sense of nostalgia is evident, as the older people wish to return back to the past wherein they were surrounded by people they knew and family members were local and offered support, unconstrained by the commitments of work and consumption. The accounts suggest Bauman's beliefs (2001a:3) concerning the 'regrettabl[e]' demise of the community are applicable, as there has been an irreparable break in the ties with local residents and family members, causing significant misery and despair. The future looks bleak and unchangeable, as the older participants are tied to a place with no sense of community and have no way of resolving the issues because '*history [has] sh[runk] to the (eternal) present*' (italics in original) (Beck, 1992:135). However, to end the analysis with this conclusion would be too deterministic and narrow-focused because in antithesis to the former accounts, many of the older people within this study *did* feel they were part of a community and provided an alternative, and much broader, picture of the social milieu and relations within Meir North:

Poppy: We do feel part of a community because we know everybody.

Round where we live we talk, if we see one another we stand talking for ages you know, so yeah. My son married the girl next door. We are all like that, there is [name of a neighbour] down the road and we are all like that, we are all very friendly. If we saw somebody missing for a while or somebody's curtains, well I do because I am very nosy. It was

like the other week, [name of a local resident] was standing on [name of road], now we know she has got dementia problems and I said to Robert [her husband], 'if she is still out when I get back I will ring her daughter, you know' and I am sure they would do the same for us.

Wilma: Oh yeah, because I have lived here for so long and know so many people [laughs]. There is a good community I think in most areas. It's pretty good really.

Martha: It is the people, it is the people, you wouldn't meet people like this in Cornwall or in Devon. I mean, you could go anywhere here and sit and have a cup of coffee, you could go in a pub of an evening and sit by yourself and feel quite safe and people would talk to you, people would bring you into conversation round here, you go further a field and they won't...no, no. They are very, very friendly people. In fact we've got, we've got a name, with me going a lot of places, living in a lot of places, people tell me they find Stoke-on-Trent people very friendly as they meet them. Yeah it's, they are very, very friendly people, yeah. It actually means, like, you fit in, you know, you are not an alien, you are wanted. I know I can depend on people, I know they would be there for me if I was taken ill. I know that if I had to go into hospital I would have regular visitors, so yeah, I am where I want to be at the moment, yeah. I just feel as though I have come home after all them experiences, I have come home and I am going [to] spend my days where I started, that's all.

As these narratives indicate, Poppy and Wilma believe they know ‘everybody’ or ‘so many people’ who are friendly and ‘talk’ to each other, allowing for strong bonds to be formed between residents (as shown by the comment ‘my son married the girl next door’). There is a feeling of security, the older people know other people are watching out for them, as if ‘somebody [goes] missing for a while or somebody’s curtains [are closed]’ [Poppy] then others would notice and would offer immediate help, such as by ringing up relatives or going to visit their neighbour. In addition, Martha signifies a strong attachment to this area as she discusses the differences between people in Stoke-on-Trent and those in other areas like ‘Cornwall and Devon’, believing the level of friendliness shown in the former area is unidentifiable anywhere else and that is why it has a ‘name’, a reputation. For Martha, Meir North is her ‘home’, it is a place where she can ‘depend on people’ and she intends to remain in this area for the rest of her life as this is where she ‘started’, where she was born and where she most ‘fit[s] in’ and is ‘wanted’. These accounts ultimately resonate with the conceptualisations of the community presented by Bauman (2001a:1,2), as the residents feel those around them will ‘hold [their] hand at moments of sadness’, and also Willmott and Young (1962) because resemblances can be drawn with the community found in Bethnal Green established around strong familial and friendship ties and ‘everlasting cups of tea’ (cited by Cornwell, 1984:24).

It is also evident from these narratives that the older people seek a sense of ‘belonging’, in terms of having a strong attachment with others within their local area, specifically their neighbours, in order to enhance the quality of their lives (May and Muir, 2015;2.1). Being part of a community whereby neighbours interact on a daily basis is essential for the development of the older people’s ‘personhood’, as they are

social creatures by habit (Calhoun 2003 cited by May and Muir, 2015:2.1). The formation of strong ties between the local residents within Meir North has enabled the older people to not only feel happy and secure, but also to develop ‘attachment’ to this ‘geographical place’, as is evidenced by Martha’s account (May and Muir, 2015: 4.1). Moreover, as May and Muir (2015:4.1) identified from their own study with older people, feeling part of a community does not have to include neighbours and relatives, but can also include strangers, who can help to develop an area’s sense of ‘friendliness’. Again, Martha reinforces this view because she refers to how she could ‘sit and have a cup of coffee’ or ‘go in a pub of an evening and sit by [herself] and feel quite safe and people would talk to [her], people would bring [her] into [the] conversation’. It is the actions of strangers, alongside their ‘micro-interactions’ with others, that truly indicate to a local resident whether the place in which they reside is a ‘good place’ and ‘the right place for them to be’ (May and Muir, 2015:4.1-4.2).

To argue that ‘neighbouring’ has been significantly undermined by the tenet of individualisation is also erroneous, as the following accounts demonstrate (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2130):

Ronald: We have got some really decent people, I mean [Alma] for instance, she is 95, 96 this year, people like that, you know they are friendly, they will help anyone, they go to church, they wouldn’t steal off anyone, all they would do is help someone. There’s quite a few people like that you know and those are the people that make the backbone of Meir like you know, they have lived in Meir near

enough all of their lives you know, and they are people that make it a pleasant place to live in.

Lilly: Oh yes. We are comfortable; we know the area and that. We could go other places and not know anybody, not see anybody, but we have got a neighbour that comes in to see us, that comes to ask us every day 'are we alright? Do we need anything?' So to me that is a lot.

Dennis: We have got really, really good neighbours because we look after each other. If we go on holiday they look after our house and if they go on holiday, I look after theirs. I look after four in that street, I have got their alarm numbers and everything. I pick all the mail up and check the house is right.

Olive: I have got a neighbour next door...whenever my car is out he will tell the other neighbours that 'she is not in at the moment she has gone out'. Oh I tell you, the neighbour across the road, he said 'a bird can't plop on your house unless I know about it', so you can see that's the way I am looked after.

Pearl: I know they are watching out every day to make sure my curtains are drawn. When the snow was on the ground, which was...we didn't get a lot I know, but it was moved before I got up, they had been around and done that. [The neighbour] next door

comes and checks my car to make sure everything is all right. I've got another neighbour who comes around every few days just to check that I'm alright. If I have men in doing some jobs, another neighbour opposite will always come in and be there when they are doing it to make sure that they are not taking advantage of me, being one woman on my own.

Molly: I have got good neighbours both sides and erm... I know if I need anything I have only got to ask and vice versa you know...it helps a lot if you have got good neighbours sometimes, you know. When I had to get the paramedics out, a few months ago when I had a panic attack, they fetched her around [her neighbour] and then she took me back to her house until my daughter got there. It isn't everybody who would do that you know, but er...they said 'would she come' and I said 'oh I don't know'. Next thing, she was in. She said 'you daft thing, why didn't you yell'. But erm...I have only got to knock on the door or anything and they would do the same, like if we go on holiday or anywhere, we tell each other and then they just keep an eye out, which I think is quite nice because not everybody has got neighbours like that.

What becomes evident from these accounts is that neighbours are central to the older people's community. The relations that the older people have with their neighbours are based on strong bonds, as is indicated by Ronald and the ways in which he talks about Alma. It is clear that he is very fond of Alma and everything that she does for

the community, whether this be for the ‘church’ or in relation to ‘help[ing] someone’. It is because of Alma’s actions, alongside others (‘there’s quite a few people like that’), that Ronald likes to reside in Meir North because they ‘make it a pleasant place to live’. Furthermore, these neighbourly relations are based on trust and ‘transactions’ (Blokland, 2003:81). The older people know that if they need help their neighbours will ‘look after’ them [Dennis], they will ‘come in to see [them]’ [Lilly], and they will check that ‘everything is all right’ [Pearl], which means ‘a lot’ to them [Lilly]. If the older people ‘go on holiday’ their ‘house’ will be checked [Dennis], and if there is an emergency, such as when Molly had the ‘paramedics out’, they ‘would come’, they would help and they would ensure that they were safe and being looked after. Moreover, there is a form of neighbourhood surveillance, as Olive’s neighbour said that ‘a bird can’t plop on [her] house’ without them ‘know[ing] about it’ and Pearl ‘know[s]’ that her neighbours ‘are watching out every day to make sure [her] curtains are drawn’. Thus, the actions of the local people in Meir North represent a form of ‘latent neighbourhoodism’ because they demonstrate a ‘willingness to help’ in times of need and it is through these actions that the older people know they are being ‘looked after’ [Olive], they can feel a sense of security and ‘attachments’ are formed (Blokland, 2003:81,85).

Furthermore, the data suggests that even in stigmatised ‘problem’ neighbourhoods, such as Meir North wherein there are higher than average levels of crime and deviance, unemployment and deprivation (see chapter one), people can still sustain community relations (Van Eijk, 2012:3009). Whilst the New Right might proclaim that ‘problem’ areas are ‘socially dysfunctional’, the findings from this ethnographic study show that this is not the case as the older people have constructed a purposeful,

and well-integrated community (Van Eijk, 2012:3010). Meir North might be a losing area of the neoliberal regime, and it might suffer with issues of ‘conflict, dissociation and withdrawal’, but the older people, along with other people within the area, are trying to fight back through upholding collective and unifying practices (Dorling, 2010:288; Van Eijk, 2012:3010). This is of particular importance for the older people because they are already excluded from many other forms of community (found in places like the workplace), and are vulnerable due to ‘declining mobility’, poor health and mortality (notably the loss of significant others such as spouses, siblings, friends etcetera.) (Perren et al, 2004:966; Phillipson et al, 1999:717). It is through neighbouring that the older people can re-identify their useful role within the community (rather than reasserting their ‘roleless role’) and can re-affirm their self-worth and ‘sense of social embeddedness’ (Perren et al, 2004:966). Neighbouring thereby helps to develop an ‘ethic of care’ between the older people and those who live within their neighbourhood, and fortifies their ‘ontological belonging’ to Meir North and their ‘way of being-in-the-world’ (Bennett, 2015:955-956; Miller (2002) cited by Bennett, 2015: 955,956,966).

It is also of importance to note that the relationships these older people have with their neighbours further signify the creation of a ‘gift’ economy (Mauss, 1990:4). In conjunction with the gifts exchanged between these members as part of their ‘grey economy’, they also provide and are provided with, the gifts of time and kindness, which are limited in today’s ‘money economy’ that is driven by greed (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:244). Whilst neoliberals oppose socialism, the older people and their neighbours continue to sustain a socialist state (albeit on a micro scale) through the giving and receiving of gifts (Mauss, 1990). This economy is upheld through a ‘form of contractual morality’ wherein the older people seek to help others and others

seek to help them due to it according with their 'normative system' of values, which governs their lives and precipitates that actions should be undertaken for compassionate rather than egocentric reasons (Mauss, 1975:20-21; Mauss, 1990:4).

Whilst these are perhaps unconventional gifts in a neoliberal world due to gift-giving practices having become centered around objects, such as 'outfit[s]' or new phone[s] [Dorothy], Mauss (1990:4-5) states 'exchange' can consist of 'acts of politeness', like how these residents look after each other as part of a much broader self-sacrificing economy. As with any form of gift exchange, the older people and their neighbours give away a part of their own self to the receiver, but to a much greater extent than those who simply give physical commodities to others, as their gift is derived from their heart and soul and is authentically pure (Mauss, 1990:12). Thus, as suggested in the previous chapter, the community formed in this local area serves as a symbol of resistance against the heartless capitalistic paradigm constructed since the late 1970s due to its alternative '*prescriptions for behaviour*' (italics in original), specifically its interconnectedness and altruistic mores (Mauss, 1975:22; Sumner 1960 cited by Mauss, 1975:22). The older people are part of a community that continues to value the 'common good' and the 'public' which fundamentally contravene the societal rules imposed by the 'neoliberal pioneers' (Davies, 2014b:1,5).

This gift-giving system could also be linked to an innovative 'division of labour', because whilst the older people are not formally in an economic system due to their retirement, they do rely upon others to help them function and sustain positive wellbeing (Bellah, 1973:97). This 'division of labour' is not as complicated as that found within the workplace, but it is still comprised of divergent roles which all come

together to allow for a functioning community (Bellah, 1973:97). The older people and their neighbours have established 'mutual dependence', 'rights and duties' and a collective form of 'co-operation', allowing for a more harmonious and secure way of living (Bellah, 1973:97,100). As a result of this, these neighbours have ultimately created a 'system of organs' that work together to protect their own survival and help reaffirm their 'useful' role within the community, leading to increased 'self-esteem and [a] sense of social embeddedness' (Bellah 1973:108; Perren et al, 2004:966). When one of these organs fails within this microcosm, such as a neighbour not checking on another, or not looking after the homes of those on holiday, their interconnection is lost and this detrimentally affects all the organs (people) (Bellah, 1973:108). Thereby, unlike the individualist thesis presented earlier, these findings indicate the maintaining of a series of dominant relations as the older people continue to be connected through 'durable bonds' which serve to uphold mutual dependency (Bellah, 1973:112; Durkheim cited by Gane, 1992:4).

In addition to feeling part of a community comprised of local residents and neighbours, a plethora of participants also discussed having close relationships with family members indicating that 'thick' forms of trust and support also still exist (Cattell, 2001:1502):

Jenny: I get support off my family yes. I have got two good children you know and er...grandchildren, they are very good and help out you know. I mean I only have to pick the phone up and [daughter], lives at Werrington, is there you know. If she can't take me shopping then my Granddaughter will. Same with going up the hospital and

that, they always find a way of swapping their days to take me up, you know.

Flora: I have got children. I have got two sons and that, and they are quite close. If I need anything, I could ring them...somebody is always calling. You know, same as yesterday, my Granddaughter came with my great grandchildren...I like to see them.

Ronald: They are a lot of support actually because I mean my two daughters, one of them is a nurse, the other one is on [the] council...they are very supportive in helping, you know, transport us anywhere we want or if we, [Flo] phones up, you know, [daughter] will particularly, being a nurse, she will come up like and give good support you know.

Martha: So er, that's why I am back here because all my family never moved away really. We have got a son in er...Western Coyney, I have got a son in Longton, I have got a Granddaughter in Longton with four children, so I have got four great grandchildren, and er...my Grandson is moving into a house just there, in that street there [points to the house from the community centre] this month. So we are all here... So that's my story up to present [Laughs]. I have got my family...erm...all close by, they have sort of put me in the middle of all of them, which is fine, they can all come in.

Sylvia: Well yes, of course [son] would help, yes. You just phone him up, ‘the light bulb has gone, can you come and put a new light bulb in for your Dad because he is not tall enough?’, Yes, yes. He’s there, [son] is...Oh yes. He phones me up, he contacts me every day...and they come up about once a fortnight, once a month and they bring my Grandson up.

Harry: Yes. Erm...if I need anything that I couldn’t lift, they would lift it. I mean I have had to, we have had to take down a shed at my old address, re-erect it, they did that, they did all the move for us. I hired a van, we just sat down and ‘whoosh, whoosh, whoosh’ it was up within two hours, we had moved within two, three hours. I never lifted a thing.

Pearl: Oh yes. We have two set days, Thursdays and Sundays, we phone each other, but then if there is anything in-between, yes we get in touch. Oh yes I am in constant touch with her [daughter], I was there at the weekend.

The ties these older people have with their families indicates the rigidity of the individualisation thesis proposed by Bauman (2001a), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Giddens (2002). If all anatomical beings’ consciousnesses had been changed to an individualised state, especially the younger generations’ who were born during the era of ‘second modernity’, then the older people would not have established bonds with their family members, nor would they have developed a

dominant community (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:206). The analysis thus far depicts a bleak future, as it suggests that most individuals possess a 'monadic self', which is independent, introverted and dissociated and disconnected from others (May, 2013:35). It is only the older generation who wish to be part of a community and show 'deep reasons to care about...another' (Sennett, 1998:148). However, this is clearly not the case as inter-generational ties have been formed and this cohort can rely upon those in their 'circle' to provide 'support' [Jenny, Ronald, Martha], help with their homes (such as 'put[ting] in a new light bulb' [Sylvia]) and gardens ('we... had to take down a shed at my old address, re-erect it, they did that, they did all the move for us' [Harry]) and to sustain more traditional forms of contact, such as a visit [Flora, Pearl] and a phonecall that allows them to stay 'in constant touch' [Pearl, Flora, Jenny, Ronald, Sylvia] (Coleman, 1966:696; Sennett, 1998:146,148). This theory is therefore accused of over 'exaggerat[ing]' the impact of individualisation and ignoring aspects such as 'relationality' and attachment (May, 2013:37).²²

It can therefore be concluded from this analysis that the theory of individualisation fails to consider how 'family members relate to each other' and overlooks the complexity and durability of human interconnectedness (Charles et al, 2008:137). The research undertaken in Meir North and other studies (such as Charles et al (2008) and

²² It is also worth noting that criticism is drawn to the individualisation thesis because whilst flexible working is considered a negative outcome of neoliberalism, the older people's accounts imply that such economic trends can conversely have advantageous consequences because it allows people to choose when they want to work (as Jenny's children 'find a way of swapping their days to take [her] up' to the hospital) and allows more time to be spent with older relatives (Ronald's children who work as a 'nurse' and in the 'council' 'transport [him and his wife] anywhere'). The development of 'flexible capitalism' is therefore beneficial for some people, especially women, as it permits a certain level of choice (the individual can choose how to spend their time) and provides a solution to the tension between caring duties and work commitments (Crompton, 2006:7,12).

McCarthy (2012)) have shown that people do seek to help others, that their own needs can become secondary (they are not driven by purely selfish motives), and a balance between work and family commitments can be accomplished (Charles et al, 2008:128). What thereby becomes of significance is how people across the age groups have managed to sustain forms of social solidarity and collectivism, despite dominant forces seeking to destroy such facets. This quandary is solved through an exploration of 'relational' perspectives that focus upon the development of civilisation and the inter-relation between the individual and society (Elias, 2008:3; May, 2013:56).

These two aspects are often considered divergent, as if an individual can only understand its own existence in relation to its own self, whilst a society is something outside of its human form (Elias, 1991:6). Individuals are perceived as being on their 'own', they constitute the 'inside' of their existence, whilst 'others are out there', they are unknown 'alien[s]' (Elias, 1991:27). The individual is deemed a 'subject' with feelings, emotions and consciousness, whilst society is external to its constitution, it is an 'object' and is unable to influence its inner spirit or soul; the individual is an independent entity (Elias, 1991:56). However, as Elias (1991:1,6) notes, we must stop perceiving there to be a 'gulf between [an] individual and society' and alternatively recognise their entwined relationship, as one does not exist without the other, they are co-dependent.

Civilisation has progressed periodically through a common inter-play of forces from both the individual *and* society, as individuals are coerced to adopt individualised modes of existence alongside accepting their 'social coexistence [with other] human beings' (Elias, 2008:3). All people, regardless of their geographical positioning, are

born into a 'social habitus' wherein they are taught a 'specific language' that they employ during interactions with fellow human beings, and a 'specific pattern of civilisation' is developed (Elias, 2008:5). The family in particular plays a crucial role in this civilising process as guardians teach children that they are part of a group, an 'association' or a 'social whole' (Elias, 1991:11). Through socialisation, a child learns that they are reliant on others and as they grow others are reliant on them as they form complex relationships (Elias, 1991:14). The connection between 'families and communities' is therefore inextricable because they both rely upon 'functional interdependencies' and cannot be reduced to a series of individuals because there is no lone self, only multiple selves within a given society (Elias, 2008:147,153).

Hence, whilst many neoliberal theorists perceive current economic and social conditions as permanent and unchangeable, 'civilisation has not yet ended' and the future is in fact open to amendment (Elias cited by Korte, 2001:31). Although there has been a dominant drive to create a state of individualism, signified by overt egotism and the prioritisation of the self over others, society and the individual are still interconnected by a form of 'interdependenc[y]' and therein an 'I-we balance' can be accomplished (Scheff, 2001:103). People are not completely incapable of empathising with others, they are not 'machines' without 'subjectivities', feelings or emotions, and they do have the potential to combine the 'I-self' with the 'we-self' (Lazzarato, 2013:187,194, 200; Scheff, 2001:103). In addition, whilst neoliberalism and the recession have tried to eradicate the 'we-self', remnants of this remain because in opposition to its aims, risk and the feelings of insecurity have conversely brought people together as they collectively seek to find ways to deal with forces they have no control over and were not devised by them (Elias, 1987:78; Scheff,

2001:103). Thus, individuals will always be conjoined by ‘chains’ of commonality and social solidarity in spite of political forces seeking the contrary as they are ‘social being[s]’ (Elias, 1991:16,17,35). Individuals are social creatures, they naturally follow the ‘laws of human relationships’, including the seeking of help from others to overcome adversity, allowing human connectedness to prevail and the absurdity of pure individualisation to be revealed (Elias, 1991:17).

In addition, Bellah (1973:149,151) accords with this perspective by drawing attention to the ways in which human beings are intrinsically tied to society due to a process of civilisation and a shared language; the ‘whole’ (society) cannot be ‘explain[ed] [without] the part’ (individuals). Society develops an ‘image and resemblance’ in the mind of individuals, causing their thoughts to become socially constructed around common norms and values and a unified collectivity to be formed (Bellah, 1973:149). However, the affiliation between society and the individual is not considered harmonious because individuals have to deal with a perplexing dichotomy of narratives, contending with both their own inner thoughts and feelings (the ‘personal’) as an ‘object’ belonging to their own selves and the forces from outside, the social discourses permeating their entity and seeking to derive it to their own ends (the ‘impersonal’), leading to a ‘double center of gravity’ (Bellah, 1973:152). This can ultimately cause a constant state of ambiguity as the individual tries to deal with two ‘states of consciousness’ which emanate from divergent ‘origins and properties’ (Bellah, 1973:152). Thus, when fulfilling the ‘natures’ of the individual self, the collective self is infringed upon and ultimately ‘suffer[s]’ (‘sacrifice[s]’ have to be made); both states of being cannot be simultaneously upheld (Bellah, 1973:152,154).

It is this ‘pulling apart’ of the being, wherein it is ‘divide[d] against [itself]’, that could explain why there are multiple perspectives within this chapter concerning community formation (Bellah, 1973:155). People are, in essence, forced to choose whether they follow their social being or their individual being (Bellah, 1973:155). Some individuals can, as Elias suggested, achieve equality between the ‘I-self’ and the ‘we-self’, allowing for the formation of a community because they have the capacity to put others before themselves and prioritise the social over the personal (cited in Scheff, 2001:103). Whilst in sharp contrast, other individuals cannot equitably contend with the ‘double center of gravity’ and allow social forces to dictate their actions, leading to increased individualism, egocentricity and community breakdown (Bellah, 1973:152). Thus, although there are notable differences between these theories, they both fundamentally contradict the perspectives outlined earlier in this chapter because it is evident that all individuals have the freedom (if they have the capacity and the will) to be part of a collective group and form trusting and supportive relationships with other human beings (Bellah, 1973). The acts of compassion and kindness evidenced earlier are vulnerable to attack due to the increasing intensity of the neoliberal ideology which continues to push for individualised measures of security, but the individual must rebel against these forces which perpetually and ‘violent[ly]’ assault their ‘strongest inclinations’ and follow their ‘we-self’ rather than their ‘I-self’ (Bellah, 1973:163; Scheff, 2001:103).

The belief that being part of a collectivity is a natural feature of human life is also supported by Sennett (2012:5) who perceives all human subjects as being ‘social animals’ and as having ‘mutual support built into [their] genes’. When an individual cannot accomplish their own aims they will instinctively seek help from others to

sustain their existence, this is in spite of the neoliberal quest to alter human subjectivity to an individualistic state (Sennett, 2012:5,68). All individuals are governed by a 'genetic code' wherein they must work with, and depend on, others like all other 'hive' creatures and this is an unchangeable 'state of Being' (Heidegger, 1962:78; Sennett, 2012:69). In contrast to many neoliberal thinkers, Sennett (2012:5) concludes that 'cooperation' can coexist with 'competition' because the former is so embedded within human genetics it cannot be eradicated by the latter; people have to work with others to feel human and maintain their own existence.

Although the central argument of this thesis infers that individuals *do not* possess an existential state because their consciousness and behaviour are socially constructed through discourse, it is still accepted that people are social beings, they derive their sense of self from interactions with others and cannot 'survive alone' (Sennett, 2012:72). This point remains true for both younger and older generations, because although the former cohort have grown up during an era of a 'winner-takes all exchange' rather than a 'win-win exchange' (like those in old age), people can 'switch from one kind of exchange to another' and form attachments with others (Sennett, 2012:72,73). Therefore, whilst it was argued that older people are 'social parasit[es]' because they possess the character trait of dependency and seek to be part of a unified group (defying the aims of the neoliberal agenda), the narratives of this cohort suggest that *all* beings are susceptible to this as they are socialised to be part of a 'hive' (Sennett, 1998:139; Sennett, 2012:69). Neoliberalism may encourage people to adopt 'narcissistic' characteristics but this can be resisted; all people, regardless of age, can continue to care for others and possess an inherent desire to develop social relations (Lasch, 1979:44).

Resistance to Individualisation: The Creation of ‘Personal Communities’ ²³

Whilst some of the older people may feel they have become excluded from their community because they do not know the new residents in their area and have infrequent contact with their families due to work and time pressures, they can choose to attend clubs which help combat the detrimental effects of ‘de-traditionalisation’ and individualisation (Davies, 2011:75). As risk theorists suggest, in an increasingly individualised world wherein former structures, particularly those provided by the family, have disappeared, the individual is left to choose how they ‘do relationships’ and who becomes significant in their lives (Giddens cited by Davies, 2011:75). Therefore, the former *community* (a traditional working class community) may have changed and in many ways have become unrecognisable to many of the older people, but substitute and more ‘personal[ised] *communit[ies]*’ can alternatively be created, as is evidenced by the accounts of the older people who attend ‘*Friendship Group*’ and ‘*Luncheon Club*’ (Pahl, 2005:636):

Wilma: Well, you can’t wait for people to come to you, you have got to go out and see other people. Nobody is going to come knocking at the door and you know...please come and...you know...please come and be part of the community. You have got to go out and look for things. I mean when this place was built [the local community centre], we fought for over seven years to get this and now we have got it there is no way we are letting it go.

²³ (Pahl, 2005:636)

Molly: It is only since I have been coming here, as I know more people...Wilma kept saying 'come down, come down' and I said 'alright', kept putting it off, and I thought 'no, I will go down' and erm...yeah, I quite look forward to it actually on a Tuesday, it just gets you out of the house for a few hours. I think it is very welcoming really, you know, you just come somewhere and people speak to you, they don't say 'where do you live?', 'how long have you lived here?', they just say 'hiya, are you alright?' and that's it. I think it's really good that people will come to somewhere like this. I just wish I had known about it years ago...I love it.

Martha: Yes, because they work, I don't see them all the time and that's why I am putting myself out. Like I say, I like coming to meet these girls, meeting the other girls, yeah, they are [a] very good community for accepting people, erm...especially if they know you are from here. You just fit in like a jigsaw puzzle; you have just been missing for a while. I do look forward to these Tuesdays, I do, yeah.

Olive: I think you can be, I think you can be if you want to be part of the community you can be, like the likes of here you know and that, if you want to come on a Tuesday you can do, you know. You can be part of the community.

The attitudes of these older people symbolise positivity and self-motivation. Wilma has no husband and no children and could easily become lonely if she did not actively seek to be part of a community. She knows that ‘you can’t wait for people to come to you, you have got to go out and see other people’, an attitude shared by Olive who recognises ‘you can be...part of the community...if you want to...’ and Martha who states that she is ‘putting herself out’. It is evident that the use of the community centre is pivotal to Wilma’s sense of happiness and security as she states they ‘fought for over seven years’ to get access to this local space and she would not ‘let it go’. During my time in the field, I became close to Wilma (as she is the leader of the community activities which are undertaken in the local community centre and holds the key to the centre) and I noticed that one of her most striking qualities was her commitment to others and her ability to include all people regardless of their background; particularly those who she knew had lost their spouse, like Martha and Betty, or were lonely, like Molly. For many of the older people who attend this club it is an opportunity to ‘get [them] out of the house for a few hours’ [Molly] with like-minded people who they ‘fit’ with like a ‘jigsaw puzzle’ [Martha] and to re-establish and re-negotiate connections with others in the local area.

Moreover, during my time in the field I witnessed how the older people developed positive forms of interaction, inclusive of trust, respect and mutual understanding, through engaging in co-operative activities undertaken at both ‘*Friendship Group*’ and ‘*Luncheon Club*’. During the former, the older people would arrive and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee with their friends, they would then discuss their week and their families, engage in gossip and undertake an activity which varied each week but included creative arts (making hats and jewellery, decorating cakes, knitting), cooking

sessions (organised by an outside agency), singing sessions, quizzes and memory games. Whilst during the latter, members would arrive, engage in group conversations (often reminiscing about the past), take their seat at a nicely laid out table (with cutlery and napkins) and collectively enjoy a meal together cooked by Wilma (often a meat dish, with homemade cake or trifle for dessert). At both of these events, the session would be drawn to a close with a game of bingo wherein Wilma would call out the numbers and the remaining members of the group would collectively shout out common phrases and the room would erupt into laughter. Before leaving, the members would hug each other and say 'see you next week', indicating that they had a close relationship and they valued their time together.

These 'personal[ised] [friendship] communities' demonstrate that even people within deprived areas who have experienced significant economic and social transformations can continue to sustain meaningful relationships (Wellman and Wortley 1990 cited by Phillipson, 2007:330). Friends can help overcome some of the issues that a break in family ties brings, as they can offer support in times of need and enable the individual to feel like they are part of a collective group, which is essential for a feeling of belongingness (Weeks et al cited by Davies, 2011:76). The friendships developed among the older people are 'pure relationship[s]' because they embody equality, trust and compassion and have been elected through choice (Giddens 1991 cited by Davies, 2011:76). It is these friendships that become of central importance to the older people because in contemporary society wherein individualisation and fluidity prevail, the older people can 'reflexively organise their own self narratives', allowing them to take back control of their lives and minimise their exposure to feelings of uncertainty and loneliness (Budgeon, 2006:3.4,6.2). The older people's friend networks therefore

serve as a 'biographical anchor' (or a 'normative reference') because they reinforce who they are during a period wherein the self and personhood could be easily lost, and allow for continuity, specifically in relation to maintaining the older people's identities, reinforcing their shared culture and sustaining their positive attitudes towards collectivism (Budgeon, 2006, 6.2; Davies, 2011:79; Pahl, 2000, and Spencer and Pahl, 2006, cited by Davies, 2011:81).

Cattell (2001:1502) also argues that working class communities can be maintained through transitory periods as local people come together to provide 'mutual aid and solidarity'. From examining two areas in the UK, notably Cathall and Keir Hardie, it was found that whilst they both have similar characteristics 'in terms of poverty, deprivation, unemployment, and a high proportion of single parents', alongside a 'history of stigmatisation' (not unlike those found within Meir North), they did not both experience similar community formations (Cattell, 2001:1504). In Keir Hardie, 'thick' communal ties have been formed and there is a dominant 'sense of place' due to a shared history and identity (Cattell, 2001:1504,1507). However, in Cathall the community is largely fragmented due to residents having 'little sense of pride in the area', notably because of high levels of criminality and demographic change, leading to decreased ('thin') levels of trust among local residents and social isolation (Cattell, 2001:1505,1507). Thereby, this study indicates that there is no simple formula between deprivation and community disintegration; the former does not instantly lead to the latter, which is evidenced by the ethnographic data attained from Meir North (Cattell, 2001:1502). Economic and demographic factors are influential in shaping residents' sense of belonging, but it is how they respond to these issues and their

motivation to build their own forms of 'social capital' which determine whether they do, or do not, become included within a community (Cattell, 2001:1510).

It is also of significance to highlight that many of the older people are part of another type of 'personal community', the Church community (Pahl, 2005:636):

Poppy: Well I go to the church, every three weeks I help with the lunches because we have a luncheon club on a Wednesday with the church. I sometimes go to the talks, but only if it is somebody I wanted. We have got a good community at the church.

Pearl: I do go to Meir Church but not on a regular basis, but I still regard myself as part of their community. I like going on short holidays with the church, we go on days out, things like that and we have been to France for a week, and that was lovely...erm...so I do join in with things with them when I can, the religious festivals and things of course, yes I am there.

Olive: Well I am very involved in the church, which I suppose makes you feel part of the community, you know. You know, because although we are a church community, everybody still has their problems and erm...the thing is if you get to know people well enough, they talk about their problems and it gives you erm...I suppose it gives you a better sense of community and helping other people.

Marjorie: I have got the family of the church.

Joint Interview:

Alice: We are a church community. We are more involved with the church. If there's any socials, you know, I mean occasionally they have whisky and beetle drive, which I love you know. They have quizzes, quiz nights, we always go to them.

David: There is always something going on. So as we say, we are heavily involved with the church. I am always up there Monday morning, doing the accounts. Wednesday morning there's a service and there's always some jobs after that. Thursday night there is a service, Sunday morning is taken up, plus I'm the churchwarden so there are meetings every week you know. It's a bit like family, we have got a church family because you know everybody, you know, you get on with everybody, we talk to everybody you know. Er...in fact we know more people that way with being part of the church to be quite honest with you.

These accounts indicate the value attributed to the institution of the church by the older people; although their levels of commitment vary from attending 'every three weeks' [Poppy] and 'not on a regular basis' [Pearl], to being 'very' or 'heavily' involved [Olive, Alice and David]. The church provides social activities for the older people that help strengthen their bonds with others, like 'luncheon club on a

Wednesday' [Poppy], 'short holidays' [Pearl], 'days out' [Pearl], 'quiz nights' and 'whisk and beetle drive[s]' [Alice]. David in particular plays an active role in church life, he is there most days 'doing the accounts', attending 'service[s]' and undertaking his duties as 'church warden'. David believes, like Marjorie, that the church 'is like a family' because of the frequency he sees the people there and the strong ties he has formed with them, i.e. he 'know[s] everybody' and 'talk[s] to everybody'. The older people also appreciate this institution because of its spiritual, moral and religious teachings. For example, Pearl refers to her attendance at 'religious festivals' and how 'of course, [she]... [is] there' and Olive comments on how those who attend the church 'talk about their problems' with others, they seek help and resolve from like-minded people who also follow the teachings of God. The church therefore enriches the older people's lives because it permits group integration and allows for the formation of a 'good' [Poppy] and 'better' community, deterring feelings of loneliness and isolation [Olive].

The significance of religion to these older people is comparable to aborigines in Australia (Durkheim, 1915:88). Whilst this contention at first appears abstract, common behaviours can be identified and interesting metaphors can be drawn between these two groups, despite the geographical distancing between their entities. To put this in context, the aborigines are grouped together in clans and are 'united by a bond of kinship' determined not by blood relations but by the sharing of the 'same name' and the perception of being part of a 'single family' (Durkheim, 1915:102). The members of this 'family' consider their ties to others as being of a 'very special nature', and they serve to fulfill their 'duties towards each other' to maintain their connection and sense of belonging (Durkheim, 1915:102). Each clan has their own

totem which is socially constructed and symbolically signifies sacred objects, encompassing important 'beliefs and practices' (Durkheim, 1915:88). Through constructing a totem, the clan can distinguish between the 'sacred [and the] profane' and in many instances 'animals' or 'vegetables' become the focus of their spirituality due to their meaning and significance (Durkheim, 1915:103-119). When the clan worship their totem, they worship their God, their own entities and the society to which they belong, reinforcing shared norms and social solidarity (Durkheim, 1915:206). Therefore, the clan creates religion and through this religion they reinforce their own existence and community (Durkheim, 1915).

Conversely, whilst it would be imprudent to suggest that the older people's religious beliefs are as 'primitive and simple' as the aborigines, there are common similarities, including the older people's perception of being in a 'family' [Marjorie and David] despite not being related by blood (they are 'families of choice'), and the common engagement in social and religious activities i.e. through attending services at church, festivals and social events (Allan, 2008:14; Durkheim, 1915:95,113). Although these older people do not have 'totems', it could be argued that were they to have one, it would represent what they hold close to their own self, notably morality, God, compassion and prudence (rather than 'animals' and 'vegetables') (Durkheim, 1915:88,103). These 'sacred' factors dominate their lives, re-affirm their individual and social identities, and unify their community (Durkheim, 1915:119).

Therefore, it could be argued that all these types of 'personal communit[y]' enhance the wellbeing of the older people (Pahl, 2005:636). They all require that the older people engage in communal activities and uphold reciprocal 'moral obligations' with

others, alongside the sustainment of shared values and mores (Pahl, 2005:636). It is through the construction of these 'personal communities' that the older people can preserve their selfhoods and sense of belonging which are increasingly being undermined by changes brought about by neoliberalism and the recession (Pahl, 2005:636). Moreover, these types of community which have been developed by the older people are 'imagined communities' or 'communities-in-the-mind'; they are communities which have been cognitively constructed, but continue to be 'very real and important to them' (Anderson, 2006; Pahl, 2005:636,637). Whilst the older people still long to include some of the newer, working class residents into their community (or metaphorically onto their 'island'), they have at least managed to develop communities which include people that they like, respect, and care for, which serves as an act of resistance against the process of individualisation (Bauman, 2007b:87). Many of the older people will not accept the demise of their community, and therein have chosen to develop communal relations according to their own personal needs and 'biography', which ultimately enhances their wellbeing and sense of inclusion (Pahl, 2005:636).

Finally, before concluding, it is also of significance to note that these accounts oppose both the 'Great Disruption' (Fukuyama, 2000:112) and 'risk society' (Beck, 2007:6) theories. In relation to the former, Fukuyama (2000:251) stated that there had been a 'decline of religion in the face of modernisation, mean[ing] the end of the social order', but the older people evidently resist such processes through continuing to build a religious community and living their lives according to a deeply embedded religious morality. Whilst some people in society might seek to uphold an individualised lifestyle, directed by their own self-drives and motives, as advocated

by the neoliberal discourse, those in old age are antithetically utilising their autonomy to hold onto religious norms and values which help sustain ideals of collectivism (Bauman, 2001a). For them, God, religion, and ‘age-old tradition[s]’ are important in upholding the status quo, notably close-knit and interconnected communities, and thereby they work together to ensure such traditions are maintained (Fukuyama, 2000:255).

Linked to this is Lash’s (2000:48) contention that we have shifted from a ‘risk society’ to a ‘risk culture’ due to a process of ‘detraditionalisation’. However, as has been shown by this analysis, some people are still very reliant upon institutions, inclusive of the family and religion, and therein do not belong in this new ‘culture’ (Lash, 2000:48). Lash (2000:48) specifically states that the concept of a ‘risk society...is not modern enough’, but perhaps his notion (along with Douglas’s) of a ‘risk culture’ is too modern and fails to consider the diversity of human experiences and the ways in which institutions have been ‘reconfigured’ and re-negotiated rather than completely dismissed or terminated (Crompton, 2006:10). Older people in contemporary society do not shape their identities around ‘late modernity’ precepts, like science, rationality and individual ‘reflexivity’, but around older institutions that have existed for centuries and remain central to their identity and sense of self (Lash and Wynne, 1992:7). These older people do not belong to a ‘risk culture’ or even a ‘risk society’, but to an earlier period that imbues great nostalgia because subjects were social and risks were collectivised (Beck, 2007:6; Lash, 2000:48).

The older people's strong affiliation with religion also demonstrates opposition to the effects of modernity and the central features of a 'risk society' as proposed by Beck (2007) and Giddens (2002). The older people continue to depend on religion and metaphysical forces to deter uncertainties. This dependence on a greater power and the upholding of traditional practices refutes Beck's (2007:4) theory of a 'self-created' future, because these older people still believe their future is determined cooperatively with others and via God's will, defying the requisites of the Enlightenment and scientific development. In a secular country these actions contravene what is expected of anatomical beings, because their 'existence and...future [should] depend on *decisions*' (italics in original) which they have actively derived, rather than by a 'blow of fate' or supernatural powers (Beck, 1992:136; Beck, 2007:4,8). To be a good citizen within a neoliberal society, the individual should affiliate with the assertion, '*I risk, therefore I am*' (italics in original), and seek individualised solutions to harms and insecurities (Beck, 2007:16). However, in opposition to this, the older people continue to seek collectivised strategies as part of a 'we' discourse, symbolising their resistance to becoming a 'risk person' and their defiance to accept the conditions of the 'risk society' (Beck, 2007:6,16; Lash, 1994:144).

Conclusion

The central aim of this chapter was to examine the extent to which neoliberalism and the recession have impacted upon the older people's local community in Meir North, inclusive of their ties with neighbours, friends and family. An exploration of the term 'community' raised many questions, including how do the older people in Meir North define their community? And what meaning do they attach to being part of a community? The ethnographic data revealed that the older people do not have shared experiences of community relations, because whilst some believed there was no longer a community in Meir North, causing feelings of loneliness and isolation, others believed they were part of a community which enhanced the quality of their lives, notably because they felt safe and secure, and reaffirmed their sense of belongingness (Blokland, 2003). Thus, these macro forces have not uniformly shaped the communities of the older people, leading to divergent levels of wellbeing and perceptions of inclusion.

In relation to the former perspective, one of the major themes to arise was that of change. The older people who did not feel part of a community believed that their neighbours were no longer as friendly as they used to be, they did not like to share 'their name' and often kept their interactions brief, such as by saying 'hello' and 'morning' [Sylvia]; findings which accord with Blokland's (2003) study in 'Hillesluis'. The data also suggested that there had been a shift from 'neighbouring', wherein the older people formed strong bonds with the people in their local area, specifically their neighbours, to the production of a 'neighbourhood', defined solely by its geographical borders and infrastructure (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2130).

Whilst this social trend would be detrimental to the lives of many people across the country, it is particularly disheartening and disadvantageous for those living in Meir North because strong community ties would have helped protect them against the negative consequences of living within a 'disadvantaged neighbourhood', including deprivation (as inferred by the statistics in the introductory chapter), the decaying of the local environment (as evidenced in chapter three), and criminality (an issue discussed in chapters three and four) (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2130). Rather than relying upon others to help them come to terms with the changes in their area and the altered norms, values and traditions they are experiencing, these older people have alternatively got to contend with a lack of trust and social disengagement, which undermines any 'special sense of belonging' (Blokland, 2003:117; Putnam, 1995).

Another common theme to have emerged within this chapter is that of nostalgia (which has recurrently featured throughout this thesis). The transformations that have occurred in Meir North have caused many of the older people to reflect upon the past, and to want to go back to the 'good old days' (Blokland, 2003:197). This is not surprising given that in their minds, the community in the past shared a common identity and was integrated and unified, whilst today it is 'segregationist' and fragmented (Bauman, 2007b:87). At the same time, the older people are having to deal with the consequences of 'undesirables' (the 'abject') living in their area that has lead to feelings of 'mixaphobia', and exclusion from a community that they do wish to be part of, notably which includes the new aspirational working class people within their area who they respect (because they remind them of the people that they used to share their community with) and consider to symbolise hope and regeneration (Bauman, 2007b:87; Suttles, 1972:33; Tyler, 2013:9). For these older people, there is

no longer a sense of togetherness in Meir North, the community is not 'like it was years ago' [Flo] because they have become surrounded by 'distrustful' and unknown Others (Fukuyama, 2000:122). Therefore all they have left is a 'collective memory' of the type of community that did once exist which serves to alleviate some of the adverse outcomes of community breakdown (Blokland, 2003:191). The older people cannot 'imagine' a community in the present and therefore they try to live in the imaginary community of the past (Anderson, 2006).

The insecurities and risks that neoliberalism and the recession have caused, particularly in the relation to employment, have also undermined the relations that the older people have with their family members. Some of the older people's narratives indicated that they 'do not get to see' [Alice] their families as they 'don't visit as much as [they] would like them to' [Patricia] because they have to 'work'. These viewpoints encouraged cross-comparisons to be drawn between the younger aspirational working class people who have recently moved into Meir North and the older people's relatives, because they both appear to prioritise the 'circle' of employment over all other 'circles', causing traditional bonds to break (Coleman, 1966:696). The current global economy is volatile and permeated with insecurities, particularly since the recession and the implementation of 'shock therap[ies]', and therefore many people are having to protect their own entities through working long hours that limit the amount of free time they have to spend with others, especially older people who still rely upon face-to-face interactions (due to a lack of technological skill) that demand greater commitment (Klein, 2008:163; Standing, 2011:1). The older people are left in a state of perplexity because whilst from the outside the family institution looks the same as when they were younger, in reality its

role and purpose have altered, it has increasingly been put ‘under strain’, causing isolation, permeated with vulnerability, to be experienced (Giddens, 2002:12-19).

However, these were not the only themes to arise from the older people’s narratives, because collectivism, belongingness and resistance also became of significance. In contrast to the former viewpoints which imply that there has been a ‘regrettabl[e]’ demise of the community due to the irrevocable damage caused by neoliberalism and the recession, many of the older people also stated that they believed they were part of a community, as they knew ‘everybody’ where they lived [Poppy and Wilma], they ‘look[ed] after each other’ [Dennis] and ‘fit[ted] [together] like a jigsaw puzzle’ [Martha] (Bauman, 2001a:3). These conceptualisations of the term ‘community’ ultimately accord with Bauman’s (2001a:1,2) and Willmott and Young’s (1962) studies, because they imply that the older people are cared for by local residents, especially their neighbours, they are ‘listen[ed]’ to, and are comforted by their presence during times of hardship and ‘moments of sadness’.

The older people have created a community with their neighbours, wherein they share ‘we’ experiences’ and demonstrate altruistic and compassionate practices (Blokland, 2003:63). The construction of this type of community makes the older people feel happy, content and ‘comfortable’ [Lilly], and transforms Meir North into a ‘a pleasant place to live’ [Ronald]. Moreover, ‘latent neighbourhoodism’ has enabled dominant bonds and ‘attachments’ (which include ‘affinity and affectivity’) to be formed during these fluid times wherein the solid foundations of their community are increasingly being shaken by macro, individualising forces (Bauman, 2007b; Blokland, 2003:67,73,81,85). This finding in particular challenges the New Right perspective

that stigmatised ‘problem’ neighbourhoods cannot sustain community relations because it is evident that these older people have developed a meaningful and well-connected community, which deeply embeds an ‘ethic of care’ (Bennett, 2015:955; Van Eijk 2012:3009-3010).

Theories of individualisation, such as those proposed by Bauman (2001c), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Giddens (2002), are also refuted due to the ways in which the older people continue to defiantly sustain socialist principles in order to uphold the ‘common good’ (Davies, 2014b:1). The creation of a ‘gift’ economy exemplifies the older people’s resistance to the neoliberal system because they have developed a social ‘contract [of] morality’ precipitating that they exchange gifts of politeness, kindness and time; almost unrecognisable ‘gifts’ in the contemporary era (Mauss, 1975:20-21; Mauss, 1990:4-5). Whilst in a ‘money economy’ only actions that lead to an exchange of capital or objects are encouraged (as discussed in the previous chapter), the older people have established relationships with their neighbours based upon mutual obligations, collective forms of co-operation and social solidarity (Bellah, 1973:97; Durkheim cited by Gane, 1992: 4; Frisby and Featherstone, 1997:244). It is through this gift giving that the older people give away a part of their self, a unique gift which is unlike any other (it is priceless), enabling intimate and long-lasting bonds to be established and a deep-seated form of ‘social embeddedness’ to be experienced (Bellah, 1973:108; Mauss, 1990:5; Perren et al, 2004:966).

Therefore these older people, along with other people within their community, have resisted the individualising and egotistical processes of neoliberalism, notably because as ‘relational’ beings they possess an inherent nature to form a ‘social coexistence’ (Elias, 2008:3). In contrast to the proclamations of neoliberals, many people are continuing to ‘balance’ their ‘I–self’ with their ‘we-self’, and therein are sustaining forms of social solidarity and collectivism (Scheff, 2001:103). Neoliberalism may have created a ‘double centre of gravity’ wherein people are exposed to two ‘states of consciousness’ (a self-centred consciousness and an altruistic consciousness) which cannot be simultaneously upheld, but there is still the freedom to choose a form of consciousness and to prioritise the social over the individual (Bellah, 1973:152). Hence, although neoliberals have deliberately sought to produce a ‘narcissistic’ self and have tried to equate social dependency with ‘social parasit[ism]’, their efforts have failed because there are still many ‘hive creatures’ who wish to be part of a collective and show ‘deep reasons to care about...another’ (Lasch, 1979:44; Sennett, 1998:139,148; Sennett, 2012:69).

Moreover, although neoliberalism and the recent economic crisis have played a significant role in weakening community ties, there have been creative attempts to re-conceptualise and renegotiate the community according to individualised needs. Rather than accepting the disadvantageous consequences of these macro forces, many of the older people have chosen to ‘do relationships’ in their own way, notably through the development of ‘personal communities’ such as ‘*Friendship Group*’, ‘*Luncheon Club*’ and the church community (Giddens cited by Davies, 2011:75; Pahl, 2005:636). The older people who attend these collective groups recognise the complexities of developing a community under the current economic and social

conditions, but still continue to actively ‘go out and see other people’ [Wilma] according to the rationale that any individual can be ‘part of [a] community...if [they] want to’ [Olive], they just have to ‘put [themselves] out’ [Martha]. It is these aforementioned clubs that ultimately enable the older people to reconnect broken ties with others in their community, reconstruct positive ‘pure relationship[s]’ (they have created their own ‘family’ [Marjorie and David] incorporating trust, shared understandings and respect) and develop a dominant sense of belongingness (Durkheim, 1915:102; Giddens cited by Davies, 2011:76). These communities serve as a ‘biographical anchor’ for the older people during an era wherein their selfhood and shared culture are under threat, and help repair the damage caused by individualisation processes (Pahl, 2000, and Spencer and Pahl 2006, cited by Davies, 2011:81).

The construction of ‘personal communities’ and the older people’s determination to be part of a collectivity ultimately demonstrates the rigidness of the ‘Great Disruption’ and risk theories (Beck, 2007; Fukuyama, 2000:112; Pahl, 2005:636). As has become evident throughout this chapter, those in old age continue to rely on institutions, particularly the family, neighbours and religion, and appreciate morality, social unity and ‘age-old tradition[s]’, opposing the contention that ‘social order’ has come to an ‘end’ (Fukuyama, 2000:251,255). Whilst it is certainly evident that historic institutions are under threat, especially because of the contemporary neoliberal prioritisation of the ‘I-self’, the older people are resisting their demise by ‘reconfigur[ing]’ their meaning in accordance with more personalised requisites (Scheff, 2001:103; Crompton, 2006:218). The older people continue to view their

own self as connected to others, they prioritise the 'We-self' over all others and value inter-dependency (Scheff, 2001:103).

Thus overall, when referring back to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, it becomes apparent that the older people in Meir North define the term 'community' in relation to having close ties with neighbours, friends and family members. Being part of a community is considered 'a good thing' by the older people, especially because it helps to reinforce their selfhood, enables bonds to be formed, and a dominant sense of unity to be socially constructed (Bauman, 2001a:1-2; Crow and Allan:1994; Suttles, 1972). The older people's conceptualisation of the term 'community' most affiliates with the perspectives of Anderson (2006:6), Blokland (2003) and Pahl (2005), because they seek to create an 'imagined' community based upon subjectively constructed boundaries. Whilst some of the older people do not feel part of a community because individualisation, egocentricity and insecurity have undermined their relations with others, they still continue to hold cognitive constructions of what their community should look like and who should be included (based upon the nostalgic past), and they long to accomplish this in order to experience a feeling of belongingness (Blokland, 2003). It is this defiant wish to be part of a community, this enduring community spirit, that will not only sustain the older people's current 'state of Being', but will also reaffirm their 'Being-in-the-world' which is intrinsically co-dependent and inter-subjective (Heidegger, 1962:78).

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Ways Forward

In conclusion, the central aim of this thesis was to understand the ways in which neoliberalism and the economic recession have affected older people living within a deprived area, specifically Meir North in Stoke-on-Trent. Focus has been given to how these global-macro forces have shaped the socio-economic experiences of those in old age, at a micro, everyday level. It is through this research that we have come to understand how the neoliberal transition from a roll out (development and expansion) to a roll back (austerity and the recession) state has impacted upon this low growth area which sits at the fore of the crisis of neoliberal economic reform (Peck, 2013:719). Conversely, whilst writing about neoliberalism and the economic recession is not considered awe inspiring because many scholars have ‘track[ed] its every move’ and ‘catalog[ed] its many sins’, this thesis has attempted to challenge this contention through identifying and addressing a significant gap in research, notably through creating a mid-range theory which denotes the ways in which these global forces have shaped social life, embedded in a specific place (Purcell 2016:615). It is this approach that has ultimately given a voice to a typically marginalised and silenced cohort (deprived older people) and unearthed how economic and political change has fundamentally shaped, and impacted upon, their everyday lives.

The ethnographic methodology, underpinned by a phenomenological epistemology, has enabled myself, as the researcher, to understand the older people's 'state of Being' and what it means for them to be '*in-the-world*' (italics in original) (Heidegger, 1962:78). The older people's narratives represent their 'worldhood of the world', and infer how their human forms are embedded within multiple social 'realities' and environmental contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1971:14; Heidegger, 1962:145). The ways in which the older people perceive, view, and understand their life-worlds is derived from their consciousnesses, which are '*pre-reflective*' and interpretive (italics in original), and shaped by the pervading discourses of neoliberalism and austerity (Eberle, 2015:564; Heidegger, 1962:89; Spurling, 1997:25-27). There is, therefore, a dominant interconnection between the individual and society because they are interdependent and intertwined; they coexist as part of a social whole (Heidegger, 1962).

However, whilst the research undertaken in Meir North has shown that there is a vital relationship between the individual, their consciousness and their everyday environment, this is overlooked within high sociological theory (Heidegger, 1962). Although theorists such as Foucault (2008), Bauman (2012), Beck (2007), Giddens (2002), Bourdieu (1990) and Giroux (2009b) all discuss key issues that have been explored within this thesis, such as altered subjectivities, individualisation and exclusion, their theories are generalised and refer to all people indiscriminately. However, as this applied social research has shown, whilst these theories are useful for extending our understandings of the world and social reality and should not be overlooked (as in the case of gerontological research), they cannot be read in isolation because they construct broad generalisations that are not applicable to all people and

do not consider individual experiences of '*Being-in-the-world*' (italics in original) (Heidegger, 1962:78). Sociologists should deter away from utilising these theories to broadly explain social phenomena without considering the roles and perceptions of individuals, their intersubjective nature and relations with others, and their connection with their local environment (Heidegger, 1962). The creation of a mid-range theory, which this thesis has attempted to construct, overcomes this issue because it bridges the macro and the micro, and enables a more in-depth understanding of everyday life. It is through this process that the broad claims of these theorists, who have substantially influenced sociological thinking, are altered from abstractness to tangibility, and are given a new relevance, a more micro-focused relevance, to contemporary society.

Furthermore, what this research has shown is that older people *are* an interesting cohort to study and should not be considered peripheral to sociological interests. Tyler's (2013, 2015) and Charlesworth's (2000) analyses of class identity, stigmatisation and exclusion could have been considerably enhanced if they had also incorporated the study of older people. This critique is also extended to many of the studies that have been incorporated within this thesis, such as Beatty and Fothergill (2011), Featherstone (2013), Giroux (2009a), O.Jones (2012), Klein (2010), MacDonald and Shildrick (2007), McKenzie (2013) and Skeggs (2004). Those in old age grew up in a different era to the young, their perceptions and beliefs have been devised in a dissimilar '*temporal*' (italics in original) moment, and therein they have a unique life trajectory (Spurling, 1977:28,35). Older people bring new and divergent perspectives to the fore that often contrast with those of younger people and thereby

should be included within sociological research because they provide an additional layer of meaning to our sociological understandings of the world.

In relation to this research, the central objective was to understand the extent to which neoliberalism and the recession have affected older people living in the deprived area of Meir North (in Stoke-on-Trent). A plethora of key themes emerged from the ethnographic data, highlighting not only the ways in which these macro forces have detrimentally impacted upon the lives of those in old age living in an area of severe deprivation, but also how this cohort are resisting such processes and attempting, in their own way, to fight back against their destructive consequences. Thus, beginning with the former argument, it has become apparent that whilst neoliberals have sought to alter the subjectivities of *all* human beings through a form of ‘bio-power’, their objective has failed as the older people have opposed this transformation and therein do not possess the subjectivity of a neoliberal subject (Foucault, 1997:242; Foucault, 2008). Whilst it could be argued that this is a positive outcome (as will be discussed later in this chapter), it has conversely had an adverse effect on this older cohort because they no longer believe they belong within the current world; they have become free-floating objects amidst a sea of transitional change.

The older people grew up in an alternative world to the one created in 1979 and thereby do not know what it means to be governed by ‘technologies of the self’ and ‘technologies of domination’ (Foucault, 2008; Peterson, 2003;189). Whilst the older people are surrounded by people (their family members, neighbours and people in the local area) who appear to work long hours (as highlighted in chapter five) and endlessly consume (as explicated in chapter four), they are retired and govern their

lives by an ethos of ‘moderation’ [Wilma, Ronald, Alma, Harry, Poppy, Alice and Olive]. Neoliberalism has created a society which the older people do not believe they belong to because their subjectivities are tied to a former epoch, specifically a ‘first modernity’ epoch, wherein there was greater security and not as much emphasis was placed upon the individual to be self-reliant, entrepreneurial and autonomous (Beck, 1992:24; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:1,2,206). These older people are not ‘*homo economicus*’ subjects (italics in original) and are therefore living in a state of perplexity because their old world has disappeared and they are excluded from the ‘new world’ (Bauman, 2001c:35; Foucault, 2008:226). This enforced segregation and displacement has ultimately led the older people to feel like they no longer have a place in contemporary society and thereby they experience feelings of isolation, exclusion and loneliness.

Conversely, although the older people’s subjectivities have not been significantly altered by neoliberalism, it has become evident that the neoliberal ‘anti-welfare’ discourse has perforated their consciousness’s, coercing them to believe that state benefits should be ‘roll[ed] back’ in order to deter economic and societal collapse (Foucault, 2008; MacLeavy, 2016:253; Peck, 2013:719). As was shown in chapter three, the older people share the neoliberal contention that a ‘big government’ is disadvantageous for society, and therein concur with the discourse of anti-welfarism (MacGregor, 2005:143; Ong, 2006:10). For this older cohort, the rationale of ‘no work, no benefits’ makes logical sense because this is the only way for society to recover from the recent economic crisis; people taking from society without giving back is considered ‘unnatural’ [Flo] (Burnett and Whyte, 2017:59; Dorling, 2015:153). Discourses of self-responsibility and autonomy have encouraged the older

people to 'subject-mak[e]', as they rearticulate unemployed people as 'undesirables' [Harry, Robert] (Jensen, 2013:69). This derogatory and stigmatising term infers that people who do not work and are reliant on benefits are considered 'noncitizens', as 'national objects', because they do not show any 'self-respect', they perceive benefits to be a right rather than something to be 'earned' [Flo, Martha] and they believe in, and sustain, a 'culture of entitlement' (Dorling, 2015:153; Jensen, 2013:60; MacLeavy, 2016:252-256; Ong, 2006:21; Tyler, 2013:9). Neoliberalism and the recession have therefore helped shape the older people's perceptions of benefit claimants, ensuring that divisive 'deserving' and 'undeserving' categories are established, and support for the retraction of state welfare is increased, specifically according to a new, 'rearticulate[d]' paradigm of citizenship rights (Ong 2006:6).

However, whilst this older cohort condemn the actions of the unemployed, particularly those in their area, they fail to see that they have become the victims of a system that deliberately divides people into 'winners' and 'losers' and produces significant geographical inequalities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Although benefit dependency is viewed as a personal failing, it could alternatively be explained in relation to the many 'moment[s] of destruction' that Meir North (and many other former industrialised areas) has experienced since the late 1970s, which has caused it to lose at the competitive 'game' of economics and to consequently experience the collapse of its local economy (inclusive of its local shops and services) (Brenner and Theodore 2002:366; Peck et al 2013:1097). Moreover, as the IMF and World Bank threaten to impose greater 'shock therap[ies]' upon countries in order to reduce global debt, this desperate situation is likely to be exacerbated (Klein, 2008: 136,140,161). Areas that cannot generate profit for the global economy will continue to be

‘penalised’ in this way, leading to increased levels of deprivation and suffering (Wacquant, 2008:237).

Whilst the older people continue to criticise the perceived life choices of the unemployed, they fail to understand that according to the neoliberal ideology they too, somewhat paradoxically, are of the same social standing and are appraised according to a discourse of social parasitism (Tyler, 2013). Older bodies that do not work and consume are also considered ‘abnormal’, and indeed, as this thesis has shown, are depicted as criminals (in the Foucauldian sense); neoliberalism does not discriminate in its discrimination (Foucault, 1999:91). It is due to this pejorative classification that *all* of these ‘abnormal’ people have become confined within one space as part of a strategy to control the unwanted masses, which Giroux (2007:309) refers to as a ‘biopolitics of disposability’ (Foucault, 1999:91). As is evidenced by the *‘Compendium of Ward and Locality Statistics’* (2017) for this area, Meir North has largely become an area for failed neoliberal citizens, such as the poor, the unemployed, the uneducated, benefit claimants, and older people who are classified as *‘revolting subjects’* (Italics in original) (Tyler, 2013:3). There is little hope of escape from this area because its infrastructure and environmental conditions are ‘poor’ (‘bad’), anomic and unproductive, and opportunities for social mobility have been systematically revoked (Gough et al 2006:28,72). Furthermore, although there are new people coming into this area who symbolise regeneration and renovation, unless it receives significant investment (not just in relation to housing but also into the local town and service provisions) their presence will not make a difference; they are also likely to become entrapped in this ‘neighbourhood of relegation’ (Gough et al, 2006:116-117; Wacquant, 2008: 239).

In addition to these negative consequences, neoliberalism and the recession have also fundamentally undermined the relations that some of the older people have with others in their community, leading to ‘diminished’ forms of neighbourliness and weak familial ties (Blokland, 2003:122). This process of ‘social decapitalisation’ has caused the older people to no longer feel like they are ‘*embedded*’ within their local environment and to feel social isolation; there is now no ‘special sense of belongin[gness]’ (Blokland, 2003:80,117; Putnam, 1995:71). This fracturing of social bonds is particularly disadvantageous for these older people because they are not only having to contend with living in a ‘disadvantaged neighbourhood’ which has high levels of deprivation and is suffering from urban decay, but they are also having to re-negotiate altering trends of sociality (especially as they continue to be dependent upon ‘embodied’ forms of contact such as a ‘visit’ or a ‘phone call’) which is causing ‘sad[ness] and disappoint[ment]’ [Marjorie] (Forrest and Kearns, 2001:2129,2130; May 2013:126). Due to this community breakdown, many of the older people ultimately want to return back to their nostalgic past, the ‘good old days’, because according to their ‘collective memory’ this was an era imbued with social trust, social solidarity and a shared sense of collectivism (Blokland, 2003:191,197).

It is not just the fragmenting of community relations which the older people have had to contend with since the late 1970s, as they have also experienced an attack against their working class ‘habitus’ and identity (Bourdieu, 1984:165). Due to Thatcher’s belief that the working class were ‘dangerous’ and thereby needed to be destroyed through a series of assaults on their culture and way of life, including deindustrialisation and anti-unionism, there has been a reconceptualisation of what it means to be working class (Giroux, 2008; Klein, 2008:138). The people who form

part of this socio-economic group are no longer considered as ‘subject[s] of value’, but as ‘use-less subject[s]’ due to their skills being irrelevant to the neoliberal economy (Bauman, 2003:123; Skeggs, 2004:62). In this contemporary ‘revolting’ period, those who affiliate with a working class heritage are considered as being ‘*revolting subjects*’ (italics in original) because they symbolise stagnation and regression and therein must be excluded from society (Tyler, 2013:12).

This disintegration of the working class has caused the older people to become embroiled in a ‘*struggle*’ (italics in original), not only cognitively as they try to contend with the connotations of being working class and what it means to be working class in contemporary society, but also in the real-world, as they fight back against people who they perceive to be undermining their working class culture and way of life (Tyler, 2015:493). Neoliberalism has destroyed working class identity to such an extent that the older people have had to draw upon their own nostalgic memories of being working class to formulate new categorisations (Bauman, 2017; Blokland, 2003). It is through this process that the older people have constructed their own class hierarchy, wherein they situate at the top, because they are the respectable working class (which means that they work hard, they share traditional working class norms and values, and they want to help maintain a sense of community), the new people who have come to live in the new houses are positioned centrally, because they are the aspiring working class (they have not yet reached the standards of a true working class person), and the unemployed people within Meir North are at the bottom, because they are ‘undesirables’ [Harry, Robert] and do not constitute the working class (nor will they ever). This new class paradigm has led to the former working class turning their condemnation inwards (they have in essence begun to

attack each other), ultimately leading to ‘mixophobia’ and exclusion from what used to be an ‘island of similarity and sameness’ (Bauman, 2007b:86,87).

However, although it is evident that the older people have been detrimentally affected by these macro-economic forces, particularly because they have caused significant ill-being, the ethnographic findings also contrastingly reveal a theme of resistance. This theme became particularly evident in chapter four, wherein it was shown that the older people refute the contemporary expectation to endlessly consume, which is considered a practice of any good neoliberal citizen, and alternatively choose to follow an ethos of ‘moderation’ [Wilma, Ronald, Alma, Harry, Poppy, Alice and Olive] (Foucault, 2008). What this infers, is that whilst neoliberal forces have shaped the consciousnesses of the older people (particularly in relation to welfare dependency), there are other dominant factors that influence the way in which they perceive the world and their state of *‘Being-in this world’* (Heidegger, 1962:78).

In particular, it is of significance that the older people grew up in ‘austerity Britain’ (‘1939-1954’), because they have had to learn how to economise due to rationing and the unavailability of many vital products (they know what it is like to have empty ‘larders’) (Bramall, 2015:183). As such, this cohort more than any other cohort within society, have come to understand that ‘supply systems’ are ‘fragil[e]’ and thereby have learnt how to consume in a more functional way that deters ‘waste’ (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005: 232; Bramall, 2015:193). It is due to these experiences that the older people have internalised the values of frugality and thriftiness, and have developed a hardy attitude towards adversity (which may also account for their lack of empathy towards welfare dependency). For this older cohort, what defines a person is not how

many commodities they own, but the ways in which an individual can uphold the 'moral' and virtuous practices of parsimony (Miller 1998 cited by Bardhi and Arnould, 2005: 224). These older people thereby defy neoliberal tenets, and have come to constitute three-dimensional subjects (Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xi).

Linked to this, the older people have also constructed their own 'grey economy' that accords with the central precepts of the Arts and Crafts movement in the late nineteenth century (Crawford 1997:15). Due to the older people having grown up in a world of scarcity, they have developed their crafty skills over time and have learnt how to transform 'raw materials' into personalised items, such as knitted cardigans and teddy bears, which they can give to others as presents (Campbell 2005:35, 36). These 'craft consumer[s]' utilise knowledge and skills that they have learnt from their families to create items that are 'honest' and 'functional' in design, yet deeply embody (from the core) altruism, love and affection (Campbell, 2005:31; Crawford 1997:16). These crafty productions symbolise a form of opposition to 'modern civilisation', as the older people create 'beautiful things' that reaffirm their identity and encourage empowerment; they become the 'masters' of their own work (Crawford, 1997:15-18; Morris cited by Clancy, 2009:145). It is through this creativity that the older people can nostalgically think back to an era wherein life seemed so much more simple, people were not driven by money and the ownership of commodities, they did not live in debt, and there was a collective 'moral fibre' (Crawford, 1997; Lowenthal, 2015:39). This 'magical step back in time' enables the older people to build a protective defence against the dehumanising world that neoliberalism has constructed (Lowenthal, 2015:41).

Alongside the creation of a 'grey economy', the older people have also developed a 'gift' economy which fundamentally opposes the neoliberal contention that egalitarianism, collectivism and the prioritisation of the 'common good' should be abandoned in favour of competitive individualism (Davies, 2014b:1,4; Mauss, 1990:4). The older people are part of a neighbourly network that continues to sustain socialist principles through the giving and receiving of gifts (specifically in the form of time, kindness and thoughtful actions) and an inclusive value system (incorporating dependency, social support and collaboration) (Mauss, 1990). This economy is based upon a collective sense of morality, wherein all the members recognise the need to look after, and care about, others, and is inherently self-sacrificing (Mauss, 1990). These 'hive' creatures defiantly continue to build a 'social habitus', which is made up of many different people and is connected via webs of reliance and inter-dependency, because their 'state of being' is dependent upon the formation of human relations; they cannot 'survive alone' (Heidegger, 1962:78; Sennett, 2012:69,72). Thus, the older people (along with many other people) are rebelling against the individualising forces of neoliberalism as they continue to prioritise the 'We-self' over the 'I-self' and help preserve the 'social whole' (Elias, 1991:11; Scheff, 2001:103).

It is this socialist and co-dependent 'state of being' that has helped many of the older people to overcome one of the greatest threats to their social existence; the weakening of social bonds with their community (Heidegger, 1962:78). Whilst not all the older people have been successful in overturning communal demise (as noted earlier), others have actively tried to protect their ties with others through the creation of 'personal communities' (Pahl, 2005:636). Rather than accepting the neoliberal rhetoric of individualisation, some of the older people have found an alternative way

to 'do' relationships, specifically with family members, friends and neighbours, which have enabled them to form attachments and develop an 'ethic of care' that makes them feel secure and well 'looked after' [Olive, Dennis] (Bennett, 2015:955; Blokland, 2003; Giddens cited by Davies, 2011:75). It is through this defiance that these older people have successfully 'reconfigured' traditional institutions, re-imagined their community, re-established 'moral obligations' with others, re-negotiated what it means to be within a community and ultimately reaffirmed their selfhoods and sense of 'belonging' (Anderson, 2006; Crompton, 2006:10; Lash, 2000:48; Pahl, 2005:636).

Thus overall, it can be concluded that the older people within Meir North have been detrimentally affected by neoliberalism and the recession, as they have experienced increased levels of deprivation and exclusion, a deteriorating urban environment, weakened social ties and the undermining of their working class 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984:165). The 'new world' is not a world that those in old age recognise, it does not accord with their 'collective memories' of the past and this has caused significant ill-being, including loneliness, insecurity and isolation (Bauman, 2001c:35; Boym, 2001:xiv). However, this older cohort are finding ways to resist, notably through creative and crafty practices which continue to embody 'love and passion', the upholding of communal bonds, and the sustainment of a selfhood which accords with their nostalgic past (Campbell, 2005:23,27; Blokland, 2003). Whilst the beliefs and actions of the older people might appear to a neoliberal society as being parasitic because they are detrimental to progress and serve as a hindrance to economic prosperity, they are in fact a way to resist the harsh and devastating consequences that these macro forces have caused; there is logic to their seeming illogicalness (Sennett,

2012). The older people are ‘abnormal’, they do not have neoliberal subjectivities and they do not constitute ‘one-dimensional’ beings, but it is through this abnormality, which imbues resistance, that the absurdity of neoliberal normativity is highlighted and it becomes apparent that there is, in spite of Thatcher’s original proclamations, an ‘alternative’ (Foucault, 1999:91; O.Jones 2012:251; Marcuse cited by Kellner, 2002:xi).

Areas of Future Research and Ways Forward

This ethnographic research lays the foundations for further research to be undertaken, by both sociologists and gerontologists. The most obvious next step would be for researchers to investigate how neoliberalism and the recession have impacted upon *both* older and younger generations simultaneously. As noted earlier in this thesis, often many scholars choose a specific age group to study, often deciphering between those in old age and the young, meaning that topics are typically studied through a one-dimensional lens. This is the case for the research that has been undertaken by scholars such as Featherstone (2013), MacDonald and Shildrick (2007), Tyler (2013) and Skeggs (2004), and the ethnographic research in Meir North, leading to gaps in knowledge concerning how other groups in society would have experienced the same phenomena. In particular, it would be interesting to concurrently explore both younger people’s and older people’s understandings and experiences of neoliberalism and the recession and unearth what their views are concerning employment, consumption and the community. It would be advantageous to conduct research that includes the voices of multiple groups within society, especially those who are typically marginalised and excluded, and to undertake a cross-comparative analysis;

this would be a beneficial way to move this research area forward.

In addition to this, greater research could be conducted in the field of class. Referring back to the debate in the introductory chapter, it could be argued that the research undertaken in Meir North shows that the notion of ‘class’ *is* still of value for understanding social structures and human relations within society today, and it has *not* become a ‘zombie category’ (Beck cited by Tyler, 2015: 498). This research has attempted to ‘make sense of [some] of the disorienting transformations’ that have occurred since the late 1970s and has highlighted that there are significant ‘class-based inequalities’ within society, particularly in low-growth areas such as Meir North (Tyler, 2015:497; 2008:20). It is through this analysis that it has become apparent that the notion of ‘*struggle*’ (italics in original) can be applied across the classes, as suggested earlier, but also *within* classes (Tyler, 2015:493). Neoliberalism has created a new ‘dirty ontology of class struggle in Britain’, but this struggle is both vertical *and* horizontal as the working class have turned inwards and have begun to condemn and exclude people within their own socio-economic group, as has been shown by the older people’s narratives (i.e. the classification of the ‘undesirables’, the aspiring working class and the respectable working class) and their ‘mixophobia’ (Bauman, 2007b:87; Tyler, 2008:18). Further research could therefore be undertaken into how the meaning of class has altered, specifically in relation to how it has become an imaginative configuration and is subjectively used by former working class people to reaffirm their identity and help order their increasingly disordered world. The notion of class has not ‘die[d]’, it has found a ‘new way of expressing [itself]’ as Hoggart (1989) contends, but further research needs to be undertaken to understand the creative and innovative ways it is being kept alive, especially within

the current era of austerity and 'Brexit' (the exit of the UK from the EU) (Hoggart 1989:vii, cited by Tyler, 2013:77).

Finally, this study pushes many boundaries as it traverses through divergent fields of research, and tries to draw them together into a singular and coherent framework. This research has a phenomenological epistemology, it adopts an ethnographic methodology, and has attempted to analyse the everyday lives of a typically silenced cohort (notably in sociology) living within a deprived area utilising high theory. It could be argued that this approach challenges many preconceptions about what sociological and/or gerontological research should look like and encompass, but this is where its originality lies. This is not to dispute the value and meaning of traditional perspectives, but to show that new and exciting research methods can be adopted to study social phenomena. Like the older people within this study who have shown that an 'alternative' world can be constructed through their creative and crafty actions, the aim of this research has been to show that an 'alternative' paradigm of scholarship can be devised through the adoption of creative and crafty theoretical and methodological practices (O.Jones, 2012:251). It is hoped that other academics within the social sciences will also want to undertake this innovative quest, and help contribute to a new 'obsession' (Purcell, 2016:615).

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Appendix

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Table 2: Participant Characteristics

Name	Personal Characteristics
Alice	She was very chatty, and had a positive attitude towards life (she was smiley and had a warm nature). She epitomised active ageing, as she was part of many clubs and had lots of friends and family members to support her. She was also married, and her happiness derived from being able to share her life with somebody that she loved and who provided constant support.
Alma	She was the oldest person that I interviewed. She struggled with her hearing, and at times it was hard to understand what she was trying to tell me (I had to ask for clarification a few times). Her stories of being burgled were heartbreaking, because she looked so fragile and vulnerable. What amazed me the most, was that she still continued to be happy and content despite these painful memories, and this was largely because of her faith in God and her relationship with her daughter.
Betty	She was a little woman, but she had a very big personality. She and I would share bus journeys to the next local town, and she would openly talk about her loneliness, especially due to not having any children and being a widow. I believed that whilst she would laugh and joke with her friends at ' <i>Friendship Group</i> ' and ' <i>Luncheon Club</i> ', and gave the impression that she was happy, she was in fact struggling with life by herself and desperately sought social interaction and inclusion.

David	<p>He was a little reserved at first (largely because his wife tended to dominate the interactions), and perhaps a little weary of my presence, but as the interview continued, he soon began to open up and became more relaxed about being asked questions. He had a happy disposition because he had a loving wife, a supportive family and he played a key role in the Church. He gave the impression that he was a very busy man, with lots of interesting activities (linked to the Church) to fill his time.</p>
Dennis	<p>He really liked to talk about the buses, and how the bus service had changed over the years. It was nice to see such passion about a subject (even if it was not applicable to the research itself). He also had clear views on what Meir North should look like and how it had altered over time - he was highly critical of people who received benefits. He felt that he was part of a community, and he appreciated being given the responsibility to look after other people's homes whilst they were away on holiday.</p>
Dorothy	<p>She was quite assertive in her views and confident that they were accurately formed. She was against people receiving benefits unless they had earned them (believing this to be a real injustice within society) and she strongly believed that people on benefits should do voluntary work. She presented a frustrated and despairing attitude towards the current welfare system.</p>

Flo	She was very kind, caring and thoughtful. She had the biggest smile and a cheery and joyful nature. She was a quiet member of the group, but she engaged with all the group activities and was a valued friend to many. She became very invested in my project, and helped me to find participants. I could not have completed this research without her continued assistance and support.
Flora	She and her friends always said that they were the ‘naughty group’ because they often talked the loudest and laughed the most. She had many friends within the group, was well liked, and well integrated. When she talked about welfare, she got annoyed at how she was left to fend for herself, with her children, whilst the young appeared to be given everything and did not understand the meaning of hardship.
Harry	He was a well-liked member of the group, who attended the Christmas ‘ <i>Luncheon Club</i> ’ gathering. He told many jokes during his visit (some of them were rude and made many of the other attendees blush) and caused a lot of laughter among the group. He really cared about the local area and the community, and he was disheartened at the changes that he had witnessed over time.
Jenny	Despite having significant mobility issues, she continued to attend both ‘ <i>Friendship Group</i> ’ and ‘ <i>Luncheon Club</i> ’ on a regular basis. She had a close set of friends within this group, and I often saw her laughing with them, and reminiscing about the past. She liked to talk about her family and she often asked about others and how they were doing; she had a very caring nature. She always partook in all the activities (she especially enjoyed the game of bingo at the end of each session) and was

	a popular member of the group.
Lilly	She was lovely, very shyly spoken, but had some very useful and interesting points to make about Meir North. I felt honoured that she had come to the community centre to be interviewed as she had poor health (she was unsteady on her feet) and needed the support of her husband. She believed there were many people on benefits who did not deserve to be and this needed to be changed. She also felt that she was part of a community, and this enhanced her wellbeing.
Marjorie	She was well spoken, very intelligent and believed strongly in God. She spoke of how faith brought her comfort, especially during times of hardship. She also explained how the local community had changed and many people, especially younger people, did not want to be part of the Church, which was very disappointing. The increasing shift away from Christianity towards secularism, caused her considerable discontentment and dissatisfaction, especially as she is a Lay Minister and she had lived her life in accordance with religious teachings.
Martha	She was very young at heart and wanted to maintain a beautiful appearance. She wore make-up, pretty clothes and always had her nails painted. She was quite flirtatious, very witty, and smiled a lot. It was clear from her conversations with others, and myself, that she was very content with living in this area and she was well supported by her family.

Molly	<p>She was quite a reserved member of the ‘<i>Friendship Group</i>’, notably because she lacked confidence and struggled with anxiety. She engaged in all the activities, but tended to only interact with a few people who she felt most comfortable with. However, although she was quiet, she did have a sense of humour, and often laughed and joked with her close friends who she sat with each week.</p>
Olive	<p>She was a strong-willed and self-assured character, who was confident in her views. She was assertive, and spoke of how times had changed as younger people were increasingly more idle and relied upon the state, and this made her angry. She also seemed saddened at the ways in which the community had changed due to it becoming more fragmented and her not knowing the names of many people within the area.</p>
Patricia	<p>She was very talkative and possessed quite a negative attitude towards Meir North and the ways in which her family treated her, i.e. that there was no real community anymore and her children never seemed to have enough time to visit or look after her when she was ill. She also spoke of financial hardship, and how she often had to buy clothes from charity shops. I remember feeling saddened after speaking to her, because she gave the impression that she had led a hard life and that she was lonely.</p>

Pearl	She showed a very caring attitude towards others, was kind and sensitive, and spoke very softly. She enjoyed being part of the Church community, especially as they provided holidays abroad, and she felt that she had nice neighbours who gave her support. She liked living in Meir North and spoke fondly of the place.
Poppy	She was lovely and had an optimistic outlook on life and living within Meir North. She enjoyed being within this area, notably because she had established meaningful relations with other residents and those who attended her local Church. She also had good neighbours that looked out for her and her husband, and made her feel safe and secure within this area.
Robert	When I interviewed Robert, Poppy (his wife) was present, and they both looked very happy together. Robert agreed with Poppy that they were part of a community, but he showed dissatisfaction at younger people claiming benefits without a just cause. He, like Harry, labelled those people who received welfare benefits without giving anything back to society as ‘undesirables’. This term took me by surprise at first, I was taken aback, but as time passed I began to untangle the symbolic meanings that were associated with this term, and in what context.
Ronald	He was a quiet member of the group, but that was because he was partially deaf and could not hear the other members of the group talking. He was very intelligent, and his passion for building cars was evident. He explained, in great depth, how he made wooden cars and he brought them into the community centre to show them to me. He was so proud of his creations (even if his wife, Flo, thought they took too much space up

	<p>in their home), and it was clear that they enriched his life, providing excitement and meaning.</p>
<p>Sylvia</p>	<p>She had a sense of humour and made me laugh many times during my time in Meir North. She had experienced some hardships, notably linked to family issues and the demise of the local community, but she still continued to smile. She was also very independent, and had taken freelance writing up as a hobby (she was one of the view participants who could use a computer). It was clear that she liked to keep busy and therefore she was always trying to fill her time with creative and/or social activities.</p>
<p>Wilma</p>	<p>She was the leader of '<i>Luncheon Club</i>' and '<i>Friendship Group</i>'. She was caring and friendly, and was always willing to help. She was also very independent and did not like to be a burden upon anybody. Everybody I spoke to thought very highly of Wilma. She is an inspiration. Every week she would visit the shops to get the food and drink for the sessions being undertaken at the community centre (including all the food/drink for the 20 to 30 people who attended '<i>Luncheon Club</i>'). She does not possess a car, and therein she would make multiple trips each week, using a trolley, and would then prepare and cook all the meals by herself in the community kitchen or at home. Often she would use her own money (rather than the group's kitty money) to bake cakes for the members and she would ensure that every person had tea and coffee and was well looked after. She would only sit down during the game of bingo, as she would call out the numbers. Without Wilma, there would not have been a '<i>Luncheon Club</i>' and</p>

	<p><i>'Friendship Group'</i>. Wilma and I formed a close bond and I could not have undertaken this research without her help and support.</p>
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RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

13th January 2014

Amy Jones

16 Thomas Avenue

Newcastle under Lyme

Staffordshire ST5 9AF

Dear Amy,

Re: An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire

Thank you for submitting your application to amend study for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e- mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via

<http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk Stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jackie Waterfield Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager Supervisor

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK

Telephone: + 44 (0)1782 734466 Fax: + 44 (0)1782 733740

Personal Information Form

Date:

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

Marital Status (optional):

Former or Current Occupation:

Interview Guide

Meir North and Wellbeing

- Tell me about how long you have lived in Meir North for?

- What is it like to live in Meir North?

- Is it a nice place to live?

- Does living in Meir North make you happy? If so, why, if not, why not?

- Have there been any changes in Meir North over the last thirty years (or as long as the resident has lived within the area)? If so, what changes?

Social Networks

- Do you feel part of a community? If yes, why?

- IF YES - How does it make you feel being part of a community?

- Do you have close friendship and/or familial support? If yes, why, if no, why not?

- Do they work in the area? Are there good work opportunities in Meir North?

- Have you ever felt a sense of loneliness whilst living in Meir North? If yes, why and when, if no, why not?

Environment

- How would you describe the local environment in Meir North?
- How does this environment make you feel on a day-to-day basis?
- Do you feel safe living here? If so why, if no, why not?

Health

- Do you think there are more or less agencies and services (including local shops, banks, post offices and health and care services) in your area than thirty years ago? Why do you think this?
- Do you have easy access to these agencies and services? If so, why, if not, why not?
- Do you think it is important to be healthy?

- Do you feel you uphold a healthy lifestyle and why?

Recession

- Has the current recession impacted upon you? How?
- Do you think there are responsibilities or obligations attached to the receiving of welfare benefits, specifically those linked to health and employment benefits and why do you think this?
- How would you describe your current quality of life?
- We all have worries or stresses from time to time, are there any things in your life, which you worry about?

Exit Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences of living in Meir North or how living in this area makes you feel?
- Do you know of anybody else who I could interview?

Thank you for partaking within this study.



Information Sheet

(INTERVIEW)

Study Title:

An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire.

The Research Aim:

To understand how political and economical forces have impacted upon people over 60 years' wellbeing from 1979 to the present day within a former manufacturing area in North Staffordshire.

Invitation:

You are being invited to consider taking part in the PhD study: *An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire*. This project is being undertaken by *Amy Louise Jones*.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time

to read this information carefully. Please contact me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to undertake this research because you fit into the desired age group required for this investigation (you are aged sixty or above) and live within Meir North (a de-industrialised, rural-urban area) in North Staffordshire. As part of this study, twenty participants will be interviewed.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign consent forms (linked to participation and the use of quotes verbatim), two are for you to keep, and the other two are for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will participate in a semi-structured interview, which should last between 60 and 90 minutes. If you choose to partake, the interview will be undertaken at a mutually agreed time and in a mutually agreed place, such as within the local community centre or a quiet local café.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

In the first instance, you will be asked to read this information sheet which outlines the core objectives and the expectations of the research, to sign consent forms (to give permission for your participation in the study and for any quotes to be used verbatim (word-for-word) in the final thesis) and there will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions that you may have. Following this, you will be encouraged to discuss aspects such as; the changes you may, or may not, have witnessed and experienced during your residency in Meir North, your level of health, and what your everyday life is like. The responses that you give will be recorded (if permission is granted) via a dictaphone (audio recorded).

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

It is hoped that the sharing of your everyday life experiences and well-being will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for you. Moreover, by participating in this research you will help contribute to an original study that reflects upon people over 60 years' experiences of living in your area, especially during the current recession.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no risks to taking part in this study.

How will information about me be used?

The interview will be transcribed onto a secure, password-protected computer. This data will be analysed and quotes may be utilised verbatim within the thesis [if permission has been granted]. However, no names will be used within the study to protect the participants' identity. Furthermore, the information gained from this research will *not* be retained for future research studies.

Who will have access to information about me?

- The data collected will be stored securely on a password-protected computer; it may be kept for up to five years by the principal investigator, and then will be securely disposed of.
- Although all personal information will be anonymised (no names will be used, no physical or personal information will be recorded), and only broad demographic data will be noted (such as your age, gender and place of residency), there is a slight chance that you will be identifiable to other residents within the area or those who know you, as they may recognise some of the views that you hold.
- *Also, it should be noted that I do have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal*

activity, abuse either to yourself or another or suicidal tendencies, I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is being undertaken as part of a research degree at Keele University.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact:

Amy Louise Jones (Researcher)

Tel Num: 07902920526

Email Address: a.l.jones@keele.ac.uk

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher, you may contact:

Dr Mark Featherstone (Lead Supervisor)

Tel Num: 01782 734179

Email Address: m.a.featherstone@keele.ac.uk

Dr Emma Head (Second Supervisor)

Tel Num: 01782 733898

Email Address: e.l.head@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton, who is the University's contact for complaints, regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton

Research Governance Officer

Research & Enterprise Services

Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306



Information Sheet

(Observations)

Study Title:

An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire.

The Research Aim:

To understand how political and economical forces have impacted upon people over 60 years' wellbeing from 1979 to the present day within a former manufacturing area of North Staffordshire.

Invitation:

You are being invited to consider taking part in the PhD study: *An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire*. This project is being undertaken by *Amy Louise Jones*.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully. Please contact me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to undertake this research because you fit into the desired age group required for this investigation (you are aged sixty or above) and live within Meir North (a de-industrialised area) in North Staffordshire. As part of this study, a number of participants will be observed during community events, such as at '*My Community Matters*' sessions, Luncheon Club, Friendship Group, local meetings and/or any other social activities.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign consent forms, two are for you to keep and the other two are for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be observed undertaking everyday activities within Meir North, including your actions, interactions with others, and use of language. If you choose to partake,

the observations will be undertaken at a mutually agreed time and in a mutually agreed place such as within the local community centre and/or at community events such as at Luncheon Club, Friendship Group and other community gatherings.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

If you take part, you will be observed during your everyday activities, notably how you interact with other people, the language that you use, and the actions that you display. The aim is to observe your natural interactions and behaviours in everyday situations and therefore no additional involvement is required. You will be asked to read this information sheet which outlines the core objectives and the expectations of the research, to sign a series of consent forms (to give permission for your participation in the study, and for any quotes to be used verbatim (word-for-word) in the final thesis) and there will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions that you may have. The data will be collected (if permission is granted) via handwritten notes.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

It is hoped that the sharing of your everyday life experiences and wellbeing will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for you. Moreover, by participating in this research you will help contribute to an original study that reflects upon people over 60 years' experiences of living in your area, especially during the current recession.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no risks to taking part in this study.

How will information about me be used?

The observational data will be recorded onto a secure, password-protected computer. This data will be analysed and quotes may be utilised verbatim within the thesis [if permission has been granted]. However, no names will be used within the study to protect the participant's identity. Furthermore, the information gained from this research will *not* be retained for future research studies.

Who will have access to information about me?

- The data collected will be stored securely on a password-protected computer; it may be kept for up to five years by the principal investigator, and then will be securely disposed of.
- Although all personal information will be anonymised (no names will be used, no physical or personal information will be recorded), and only broad demographic data will be noted (such as your age, gender and place of residency), there is a slight chance that you will be identifiable to other residents within the area or those who know you, as they may recognise some of the views that you hold and/or know that it is you who has undertaken such activities.

- *Also, it should be noted that I do have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another or suicidal tendencies, I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.*

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is being undertaken as part of a research degree at Keele University.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact:

Amy Louise Jones (Researcher)

Tel Num: 07902920526

Email Address: a.l.jones@keele.ac.uk

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher, you may contact:

Dr Mark Featherstone (Lead Supervisor)

Tel Num: 01782 734179

Email Address: m.a.featherstone@keele.ac.uk

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Tel Num: 01782 733898

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Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306



CONSENT FORM **(Interviews)**

Title of Project: An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire.

Name of Principal Investigator: Amy Jones

Contact Details: a.l.jones@keele.ac.uk

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | I agree to take part in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 | I agree to the interviews being audio recorded. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of participant	Date	Signature
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Researcher	Date	Signature
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CONSENT FORM
(Observations)

Title of Project: An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire.

Name of Principal Investigator: Amy Jones

Contact Details: a.l.jones@keele.ac.uk

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | I agree to take part in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 | I agree to the observations being recorded via handwritten notes. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of participant	Date	Signature
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Researcher	Date	Signature
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CONSENT FORM (For use of quotes)

Title of Project: An examination of people over 60 years' well-being in a de-industrialised community in North Staffordshire.

Name of Principal Investigator: Amy Jones

Contact Details: a.l.jones@keele.ac.uk

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

1 I agree for any quotes to be used.

2 I do not agree for any quotes to be used.

Name of participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature