

**Collective (Re)imaginings of Social Mobility:  
Insights from Place-based, Classed and  
Gendered (Im)mobility Narratives**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how social class, place-attachment, and gender are interconnected within narratives of social (im)mobility, shaping the horizon of participants' trajectories. Situated within a predominantly white, working-class urban suburb in south Wales, the thesis demonstrates how alternative value practices are constructed and maintained in ways that differ from the dominant social mobility narrative. Social mobility has been a key social policy concern over the last twenty years, spanning across political parties. Constructed as a 'problem' for the working-classes, many policy approaches have focused on the widening of educational opportunities to promote social mobility. This forms part of the dominant social mobility narrative that encourages self-improvement. Previous qualitative research in this area has explored working-class experiences of social mobility largely through access to Higher Education. Where this study differs from previous research is in its focus on alternative narratives and how value is constructed outside of the narrow conceptualisation of social mobility and 'success'.

The study adopted an ethnographic approach to explore social mobility narratives, including observational insights from the community, creative and visual techniques, interviews with community workers, and family interviews inside the family home. The participants recruited spanned the generational ladder, ranging from age four to eighty. Employing a narrative-discursive approach to analysis, the findings demonstrate how identities and narratives were constructed intersubjectively. The thesis argues that classed, place-based and gendered identities were inextricably interwoven in the construction of an alternative social mobility narrative. Narratives of fixity as opposed to mobility were dominant, with classed gender norms shaping trajectory choices. As participants' narratives demonstrated divergence from the dominant social mobility narrative, the thesis argues that the current, narrow concept of social mobility needs re-imagining. To be able to recognise the value inherent in working-class communities, social mobility needs to incorporate a wider range of value practices and focus on mobility as a collective, rather than individual, endeavour.

# Declaration and statements

## DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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*This thesis is dedicated to my Dad who I lost during my first year of doctoral study.  
I hope I have done you proud.*



# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### *1.1. Introducing the research*

Social mobility is a term that is habitually used by social commentators, academics, politicians, and the general public. It is often unquestionably assumed to be a ‘good thing’ to strive towards. Understandings of social mobility are entangled in narratives of self-improvement, doing better for yourself, and an upward move in social class location. This thesis explored the social mobility narratives of residents in a working-class community, and how place-based, classed and gendered identities intertwine within these narratives.

In this study, social mobility narratives were explored through a myriad of methods, including ethnographic insights from the community, creative and visual techniques, interviews with community workers, and family interviews inside the family home. Participants were therefore from a range of generational groupings, spanning from aged four to eighty. Class was understood, in this thesis, as dynamic, relational, intersectional and situated in the everyday. The narratives constructed across the fieldwork illustrated messy and multiple readings of class and, despite ideas of a ‘classless society’, they confirmed that class is very much present in how people understand their lives – highlighting its ubiquitous nature (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Savage et al 2015; Tyler 2015).

Class, however, cannot be considered in isolation. The thesis argues that place-based identities are inherently classed, and the findings reflect the dominance of place-based identities within participants’ mobility narratives. Attachment to place and the value attributed to place influenced participants’ mobility trajectories, as narratives of social fixity as opposed to social *mobility* were constructed. The thesis documents how gender and class intersect within mobility narratives, particularly the maintenance of appropriate working-class masculinities and femininities. For women in the study, a respectable, working-class femininity could be achieved through various domestic and caring responsibilities, inevitably impacting upon the direction of mobility narratives. The horizon of social mobility for the participants was therefore largely shaped by class, place, and gender, which I argue should lead to a questioning of the concept of social mobility as it is generally understood. The value attributed in working-class communities is often misrecognised, suggesting social mobility as a concept needs to be broadened to encompass a wider range of value practices. This is the core theoretical contribution of this thesis.

The research setting was a small, urban suburb called Hiraeth<sup>1</sup>, which is situated just outside of the south Wales city Pencaer. Using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), Hiraeth is categorised as one of the most deprived communities in Wales (Welsh Government 2017). This research moved beyond the minimalistic, deficit view of working-class communities by exploring residents' narratives of place and place-attachment using a narrative-discursive approach to analysis. The area has an array of interesting social and economic contrasts, and one of the reasons for choosing Hiraeth as the fieldsite for this study was the lack of recent research into social mobility situated in Wales (with some notable exceptions including Mannay 2011a; 2015a; Morgan 2015; and Ward 2016). Previous research in Wales has often focused upon ex-industrial valley communities in the south of Wales, with less attention given to those in the urban peripheries<sup>2</sup> (Blakely 2010; Walkerdine 2010; Ward 2016).

Drawing upon a wealth of qualitative research which has explored the intersectional nature of class, place, and gender, this study can be considered a contribution to this area. McKenzie (2015, p.14) notes the importance of work conducted within working-class communities:

Within the politics of social justice there needs to be an urgent address of how working-class neighbourhoods and communities are viewed, and... they should be represented in a more positive way and less as merely a utilitarian concern and/or a drain on society, in addition to the structural and distributional issues of inequality.

Female scholars in particular have highlighted the continual demand on working-class women to self-improve, documenting their struggle to maintain a respectable self (see Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Walkerdine et al 2001; Casey 2008; May 2008; Mannay 2015b). Somewhere between this work and the literature exploring qualitative experiences of social mobility (for example, Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Bathmaker et al 2016; Ingram and Abrahams 2016; Mallman 2018), I found resonance with my own social mobility narrative.

## *1.2. Motivations for researching social mobility*

If the government were looking for a poster girl for social mobility, I could be it. Growing up in a single-parent household with limited income, I fell neatly into the criteria for 'widening participation' programmes and schemes that encourage the academically able from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in education. Living in Gloucestershire, there were an abundance of grammar schools<sup>3</sup> in the area, and their success dominated (and continues to dominate) the school league tables of the county. After looking around several schools, my mum and I decided that the local grammar school was probably my best chance at gaining a high standard of education.

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<sup>1</sup> All place names are pseudonyms. The pseudonym 'Hiraeth' was chosen as it is a Welsh word meaning nostalgia, yearning, or longing. This word was pertinent to the findings of the study.

<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions here are Mannay (2011a) and Evans's (2016) work.

<sup>3</sup> Grammar schools are selective state schools which select pupils based on their performance in an entrance examination usually termed the 'Eleven Plus' exam.

Having passed my eleven plus examination, I started my secondary education at my nearest grammar school, full of apprehension and excitement. After making new friends and talking to peers, I began to feel this strange sense of dislocation, some form of social distancing from those around me, and I struggled initially to put my finger on what this was and what it meant. I was surrounded by people who not only had demonstrably more money than me, but their tastes were different, their experiences were different, and most obvious of all, their accent, appearance and demeanour were different. There were certain social protocols that came naturally to them that were alien to me. Despite this dislocation, I did well in grammar school. I was told I was to be part of the ‘Gifted and Talented’ programme and I was pushed to excel. Only after beginning to study Sociology at A-level<sup>4</sup>, could I put my finger on what had been niggling me in my five years at that school - social class.

I had never considered higher education but the school I attended pushed application to university. Feeling inspired from my A-level Sociology lessons and my newfound passion to shine a light on inequalities, I applied to study Social Science at university. This sense of social distancing and lack of belonging continued throughout my university education, what Bourdieusians may call a ‘disrupted habitus’ (Friedman 2014). I still feel it today as a working-class academic in a middle-class dominant field. Initially, I believed it was my responsibility to share my story to encourage others from disadvantaged backgrounds - if *I* could do it, there was no reason why anybody else could not. I have been a perfect example of successful social mobility, the success story (and evidence for Theresa May’s argument to reintroduce grammar schools across the country). But if social mobility was so great, why did I feel so displaced? Why was I one of only a handful of working-class students in my cohorts across school and university?

The further I progressed in my studies, the more I realised that this was not an individualised issue around motivation, encouragement, and perseverance. Rather, it was a systemic issue of class, dis/advantage and value. Social mobility as it is currently framed ignores systemic inequalities and has narrow understandings of what ‘success’ should look like. Therefore, my motivation for this thesis was to seek an understanding of working-class social mobility narratives, particularly for people who have not followed the dominant social mobility trajectory (usually entry into higher education and professional careers). I wanted to find a way to reconceptualise social mobility, so that it is no longer a narrow and individualised concept and has the ability to achieve socially just aims. As Reay (2013, p.661) contends, “a strong version of social justice requires much more than the movement of a few individuals up and down an increasingly inequitable social system”.

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<sup>4</sup> A-Levels, or Advanced Levels, are qualifications taken by students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. They follow General Certificates of Secondary Education or GCSEs.

### *1.3. Research background and aims*

Social mobility has been a central tenet of social policy with cross-party support over the last two decades (Lawler and Payne 2018). From ‘Education, Education, Education’, to the ‘Aspiration Nation’ and more recently Theresa May’s notion of ‘The Great Meritocracy’, social mobility has received significant political attention, notably with a focus on mobilising those who are ‘socially excluded’ and disadvantaged (Lawler 2018). The policy narrative claims that social mobility within the United Kingdom (UK) is falling, and therefore more support is needed to help those at the bottom work their way to the top. It can be difficult to critically research social mobility when many of its associated features (equal and fair access to opportunities, the opportunity to get on and get ahead, being able to do ‘better’ than your parents) sit so easily in lay understandings of social justice (Calder 2016; Littler 2018). After all, who would say they are against everybody having an equal opportunity to succeed in life? It is easy for political parties on the left and right to espouse this notion of social mobility, despite the vast amount of evidence to the contrary around the feasibility of equal opportunities to alleviate structural inequalities (Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014; Calder 2016; Littler 2018). Success within this understanding of social mobility is conceptually narrow, reduced to individual level of educational achievement, occupational position, and income. This thesis widens this conceptualisation, exploring collective understandings of social mobility and wider value practices beyond education and work.

In the first ‘State of the Nation’ report, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013b, p.1) claim that “it is part of Britain’s DNA that everyone should have a fair chance in life”, privileging a taken for granted, egalitarian assumption. The aim of this thesis is to highlight the productive, regulatory power behind this entrenched, common-sense understanding of social mobility, raising questions around the framing of social mobility and who is positioned as ‘problematic’. At a time where inequality is increasing in an age of austerity, the framing of issues such as social mobility serves a purpose - to maintain focus on certain sections of society whilst others go unnoticed (Reay 2013; Tyler 2013; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018). The ‘socially excluded’ become the target of social mobility policies, and people who are marginalised are encouraged to behave in certain ways to avoid becoming what Tyler (2013, p.9) terms ‘national abjects’ or figurative scapegoats for society’s ills. The stigmatisation and misrecognition of working-class communities becomes essential in the dominant social mobility narrative, as it seeks to place the blame for low social mobility on these communities’ shoulders rather than addressing larger systemic and structural inequities (Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). Social mobility in its current form can be seen as an enactment of stigma governmentality (Tyler and Slater 2018), and working-class communities have long been the target of discourses of stigma, shame and lack.

The stigmatisation of working-class communities is commonplace in popular culture, media, and policy discourse (Sennett and Cobb 1977; Lawler 1999; Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2015; Scambler 2018; Shildrick 2018). Whether it is the representation of the working-class ‘chav’ through the character Vicky Pollard in comedy series *Little Britain*; or the creation of ‘poverty porn’ with shows such as *Benefits Street* and *Life on the Dole*, working-class lives are portrayed as lacking both morality and value (Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2015; Shildrick 2018). These common tropes of the working-class or the ‘underclass’ as feckless and irresponsible provide justification for the regulatory practices used by the state under the umbrella of ‘social mobility’ to encourage self-improvement. The notion that the only way to be successful is to become socially mobile suggests that there is something wrong with individuals’ starting places, that there is a lack, and that value can only be accrued by leaving that way of life behind (Walkerdine et al 2001; Reay 2013; Littler 2018). It is this notion that this thesis aims to question – the deficit view of working-class communities. Through drawing upon the narratives of residents in a working-class community, I aim to demonstrate that value can be found within a variety of (im)mobility narratives, as I argue for the concept of social mobility to be widened on a collective level to incorporate a multitude of values and trajectories. As Tyler (2013, p.12) argues, “what many disenfranchised people actively desire is not *flight* but rather *anchorage*”.

Through the ethnographic approach taken in this research I was able to gain a rich understanding of how an urban Welsh working-class community constructs value, and the ontological security provided by constructing distinct notions of belonging and attachment to place. The focus on place, kinship and belonging within narratives appears to give traction to the idea that social mobility needs to be conceptualised collectively and relationally, as opposed to individually. It also calls into question what is meant by *mobility*, particularly when participants constructed a strong sense of anchorage to their community in their narratives, demonstrating social *fixity*. Gender also played an important role in how narratives were constructed, and the maintenance of a ‘relational sociality’ was often highly gendered. The intersectionality of class occurred throughout narratives as this thesis explores the everyday experience of class, and how boundaries of belonging and what can be deemed ‘respectable’ were constructed locally, intertwined with both place and gender. This study differs from other qualitative social mobility studies in that instead of documenting the *individual* experience of social mobility (see Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Lawler and Payne 2018), it is interrogating the very notion of social mobility and exploring how it is responded to and moulded by working-class residents. The research questions that guided data production and analysis are as follows:

- How do participants accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?
- What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants’ (im)mobility narratives?

- How do class and gender intersect within participants' (im)mobility narratives?

#### *1.4. Guide to the thesis*

Chapter Two, *Mapping the Political Ideology of Social Mobility: From New Labour to Conservative Governments*, critically evaluates the political discourse on social mobility over the last twenty years. It documents the increasing prevalence of social mobility within social policy in the UK, and the underpinning tenets to this policy – meritocracy and equal opportunities. I discuss some of the academic critiques of this approach that question the ability of such policies to be able to alleviate and address social inequality. The chapter then explores how social mobility is constructed as a problem within the political narrative, and what successive governments have perceived as the ‘solution’ – notably widened access to higher education. As this study is situated in the Welsh political landscape, the chapter also explores social mobility within the social policy context of a devolved Wales. The chapter concludes by situating the study’s first research question: ‘How do residents of a Welsh working-class community accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?’.

Chapter Three, *A Question of Measurement? The Conceptualisation of Social Mobility within Academic Literature*, situates the study within the academic literature exploring social mobility. The chapter begins by outlining the quantitative traditions of social mobility studies, before elaborating how qualitative studies have contributed to the field. Much of this chapter highlights the theoretical approach taken in this research as it discusses the conceptualisation of both social class and social mobility in the relevant literature, and how this has been adopted and adapted in this study. Through outlining how social mobility has been conceptualised, the chapter provides the rationale for the remaining two research questions: ‘What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants’ (im)mobility narratives?’ - and – ‘How do class and gender intersect within participants’ (im)mobility narratives?’.

Chapter Four, *Research Strategy and Methodology*, guides the reader through the complex, messy process of using a multi-method ethnographic approach to explore social mobility narratives. This extended chapter details the various dimensions of the research process and the reflexivity inherent in adopting an ethnographic approach built upon a social constructionist standpoint (Coffey 1999; Burr 2003). I argue that the data produced in this study is a co-construction between the participants and me, and there are reflections throughout the chapter about how my presence may have shaped the data.

The chapter maps out the research design and methodology before briefly introducing the fieldsite, Hiraeth, and the reasons behind anonymising the community. The fieldsite is not explored in much detail in this chapter, as Chapters Five and Six provide more detailed understandings of the community, drawing upon participants’ narratives. The chapter introduces

the participants, discussing issues of representation, validity and robustness in the study. I document the entry in, on, and out of the fieldsite, discussing how I gained access to the community, and the practical, ethical, and methodological issues experienced throughout the fieldwork process. Volunteering in the community, interviews with community workers, and interviews with families were the core components of the data production process. The final section of the chapter discusses the methods of data keeping and analysis. It describes why a narrative-discursive approach to analysis was most suitable in light of the research questions posed (Taylor 2010).

Chapter Five, *Introducing Hiraeth- Class, Community, Place-Making and (Im)mobilities*, investigates the importance of place within participants' narratives. The dynamic relationship between place and class is weaved throughout this chapter, demonstrating how place-attachment can impact upon mobility narratives and identity formation. The chapter details the development of Hiraeth and outlines the socioeconomic profile of the area. As Hiraeth ranks as one of the most deprived communities in Wales, it was part of the Welsh Government's 'Communities First' anti-poverty initiative, which this chapter documents. It draws upon interviews with Communities First staff in the area to highlight how the programme conceptualised the importance of place and community, and what this means in relation to social mobility.

The remainder of the chapter focuses upon participants' construction of place-attachment and belonging, utilising the analytical concept of the 'born and bred' narrative, as theorised by Taylor (2010). There were many aspects to constructing strong place-attachment including: the importance of keeping close to family and home; generational constructions of belonging; temporary mobilities and the road to home; and the construction of meanings-made-in-common. The aim of this chapter is to question the *mobility* aspect of social mobility, suggesting that dominant social mobility narratives ignore the value ascribed to place in working-class communities (Paton 2013; McKenzie 2015; Lang and Marsden 2017; Jeffery 2018).

Chapter Six, *Contradictions and Complexities - Troubled Place-Attachment and the Creation of Divisions, Distinctions and Boundaries*, builds upon Chapter Five by exploring some of the complexities within narratives of place-attachment. The chapter demonstrates the interrelated nature of place and social class, and how they are constructed, performed and produced in the everyday (Benson and Jackson 2012). It highlights how both community workers and residents constructed localised divisions and boundaries around belonging in the community. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the frustrations and contradictions inherent in place-attachment narratives, especially when the community is criticised, yet localised identities are defended. The chapter demonstrates that threats to the community can be perceived by residents as threats to their identities, which may induce shame and impinge upon residents' sense of respectability

(Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). The chapter concludes by suggesting that if social mobility is to be reconceptualised as a collective endeavour instead of an individual one, then investments must be made to maintain the 'containing skin' that holds the community together (Walkerdine 2010).

Chapter Seven, *Explorations of the Individualistic Selfhood Discourse- How Policy, Class and Gender impact upon Hiraeth Residents' (Mobility) Trajectories*, is the final findings chapter. It focuses on education and employment trajectories. As both education and employment are pivotal within the dominant social mobility narrative, the chapter critiques this individualising narrative by drawing upon the gendered and classed narratives of Hiraeth residents. The chapter begins by demonstrating how the Communities First programme arguably propagated an individualising, deficit approach to community development and therefore social mobility. It then explores the gendering inherent in working-class narratives as women's caring responsibilities influence their trajectories and reflect wider locally-held norms. Finally, the chapter focuses on how residents reject and distance themselves from the dominant social mobility narrative, and how value is constructed outside of this discourse. The chapter suggests that an alternative model of selfhood is present in Hiraeth that is based upon relationships to others, whereby fulfilment is often constructed in isolation from individualising notions of education and employment status.

Chapter Eight, *Conclusions and Reflections – The Contribution of this Thesis to Social Mobility Studies*, summarises and concludes the thesis by outlining its key features. Firstly, the chapter reflects on the three research questions, documenting what has been learnt about each of them throughout the thesis and reiterating the main findings. Secondly, the chapter situates this study's findings within the field of social mobility studies, questioning what this means for future research, and outlining some of the limitations of this study that could be addressed in further studies. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the political implications of this research and offers some suggestions for the direction of future social mobility policy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Mapping the Political Ideology of Social Mobility: From New Labour to Conservative Governments**

#### *2.1. Introduction*

This chapter casts a critical eye over the past twenty years of social mobility ‘talk’ within the UK. It argues that rather than seeing social mobility as a panacea to society’s fractured and divided nature, it may be more conducive to examine the productive powers inherent in such policy discourse. I begin by situating the pervasiveness of social mobility within the UK policy agenda, before exploring the prominence of ‘meritocracy’ and the notion of equal opportunities within the social mobility political literature. Next, I discuss how social mobility is psychologised as a problem for people in marginalised communities and question one of the political literature’s main solutions to ‘improve’ social mobility - increased access to higher education. The chapter then examines whether Welsh devolution has led to a change in the tone and direction of social policy in Wales and the Welsh Government’s approach to social mobility. In concluding the chapter, I situate my first research question: How do residents of a Welsh working-class community accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?

#### *2.1.1. The rise of social mobility on the political agenda*

Social mobility has been a key social policy aim over the last twenty years (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013; Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018). From New Labour’s focus on social exclusion and Blair’s inaugural speech from the Aylesbury estate in London in 1997, addressing the country’s ‘forgotten people’; to the coalition government’s hopes for an ‘Aspiration Nation’, social mobility has remained central to social policy regardless of the changing economic and political climate (Watt 2006; Minton 2017; Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018). This was demonstrated through Prime Minister Theresa May’s expressed dedication to addressing issues of social mobility and inequality within her term in office.

Delivering her speech, ‘Britain, The Great Meritocracy’ in September 2016, May made it clear that both social mobility and meritocracy were at the centre of her government’s aims to deliver a fairer society, which would place the UK as the ‘great meritocracy of the world’ (May 2016). Arguably, May’s speech attempted to locate the Conservative Party as the party of the ‘ordinary working class people’, and appeared to take Conservative policy in a new direction from her predecessor David Cameron:

I want Britain to be the world’s great meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow. I want us to be a country where everyone plays by the same rules; where ordinary, working class people have more control over their lives and the chance to share fairly in the prosperity of the nation. And I

want Britain to be a place where advantage is based on merit not privilege; where it's your talent and hard work that matter, not where you were born, who your parents are or what your accent sounds like.

(May 2016)

However, by December 2017, Alan Milburn who was championed as the 'social mobility Tsar' for his work as the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, had resigned due to the government's slow progress (Savage 2017). At the time of writing, political instability surrounding the negotiations of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union means the future of social mobility policy is unclear. Nevertheless, it is important to understand how the 'problem' of social mobility has been constructed in the political discourse over the last two decades, in the context of different governments, economic downturn and austerity, and political instability. The following section will begin to outline these discourses in relation to the ideology of meritocracy.

### *2.1.2. Meritocracy: The bottom line for social mobility and social justice*

As Littler (2018) notes, the word 'meritocracy' has a relatively short genealogical history. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to explore in detail how 'meritocracy' developed and became the linchpin of neoliberal governments' approaches to social mobility<sup>5</sup>, it is useful to explore two key tenets: Michael Young's (1958) dystopic work 'The Rise of the Meritocracy', and the metaphor of the 'level playing field'.

Young understood 'meritocracy' as a social system that categorises people based on a combination of their natural talent (or merit) and their individual efforts to succeed - often the core message of social mobility rhetoric (Saunders 2010; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Savage et al 2015; Littler 2018). An aspect of Young's work which is often overlooked is his damning disavowal of a 'meritocratic' society. Young argued that society would be fundamentally divided with a 'merited' elite at the top, and a disenfranchised 'unmerited' mass at the bottom. However, taking the idea of a meritocratic society at face value whilst disregarding Young's critique, meritocracy was valorised by New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997-2007). Blair's 'Third Way' approach to politics encouraged individual responsibility and risk-taking in shaping life outcomes (Walkerdine et al 2001; Walkerdine 2003; Skeggs 2004; 2005; 2011; Gillies 2005; Littler 2018).

This 'reflexive identity project' encouraging individualised projects of self-improvement was documented by Beck (1992) and most prominently Anthony Giddens (1998), who was influential in shaping Blair's neoliberal 'Third Way' politics (Littler 2018). Under Blair's government, both (neoliberal) meritocracy and social mobility were cemented as core social policy aims, enabling

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<sup>5</sup> See Littler's (2018) work for a closer analysis of the semantic mutations of meritocracy.

government to give the impression of addressing societal inequalities through a highly individualising discourse. The metaphors of government creating a ‘level playing field’ for meritocracy and a ‘ladder of opportunity’ for social mobility play(ed) an important role in the rhetoric on addressing entrenched inequalities.

Several advisory bodies have been responsible for reviewing the progress made on improving social mobility. These have included the ‘Performance and Innovation Unit’, subsequently the ‘Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit’, under New Labour that saw the publication of two influential reports titled *Social Mobility: A Discussion Paper* by Stephen Aldridge (2001) and *Unleashing Aspiration* by Alan Milburn in 2009 (Cabinet Office 2009). The latter became known as the ‘Milburn report’ and paved the way for Milburn to become the Chair of the ‘Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission’ (SMCPC hereafter) introduced in 2012 through the Coalition government’s flagship policy on social mobility headed by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. This advisory body was renamed the ‘Social Mobility Commission’ (SMC) in 2016<sup>6</sup>. Each year the commission produces a ‘State of the Nation’ report highlighting the country’s progress on improving social mobility. As outlined above, Milburn left his role as Chair of the commission in December 2017 due to lack of governmental attention on social mobility while the UK negotiates its exit from the European Union (Savage 2017).

In the earlier Aldridge report (2001, p.2), social mobility was described as “the movement or opportunities for movement between different social groups, and the advantages and disadvantages that go with this in terms of income, security of employment, opportunity for advancement etc.” which is underpinned by the premise of meritocracy. Academic definitions and measurements of social mobility are outlined in Chapter Three, however, this basic definition is useful to understand the political literature. Common across the political discourse is the positioning of the government as the enabler, but individuals take responsibility for their choices and actions (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2011; Conservative Party 2015). For example, the Milburn report (Cabinet Office 2009, p.40) states that “governments can equalise opportunities throughout life; but, in the end, social mobility relies on individual drive and ambition”. Similarly, the SMCPC (2015b, p.9) define social justice as “...about unleashing people’s aspiration to succeed”. This sentiment is echoed in the 2017 Conservative Party report *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* which states that “talent and hard work alone should determine how far people can go in life, whoever you are, wherever you are from” (Department for Education 2017, p.6). The government’s role is to ensure a level playing field by providing

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<sup>6</sup> The Commission was renamed under Theresa May’s Conservative government dropping the ‘Child Poverty’ element due to a failed attempt to redefine child poverty when it was announced that the government had not reached their child poverty benchmarks. See Cooper (2016) for more.

equal opportunities and the guarantee that there is space to climb up the social ladder based on effort and merit. There are several critiques of this approach.

These ‘meritocratic’ constructions of social mobility are all aimed at a particular subset of society - those at the bottom (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013; Calder 2016; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). I discuss how the political discourse works to manage those it deems to be ‘underperforming’ in section 2.2, however, these quotes illustrate how social mobility is constructed as an individualised problem, something for those from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve and overcome through raising their aspirations and working hard. This shifts attention away from those who are already in privileged social positions (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Brown 2013; Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014; Savage et al 2015; Calder 2016). Pearce (2011, p.5) argues that by focusing the definition of social justice solely on the disadvantaged in society, we are no longer looking at social justice as a yardstick for the whole of society, as ‘success’ and ‘mobility’ are to be achieved by those ‘at the bottom’. As Littler contends:

Indeed, notably, it is often the people who face significant disempowerment in terms of their resources and available choices who are most intensely incited to construct a neoliberal meritocratic self.

Littler (2018, p.172)

The political discourse of meritocracy ignores the fact that regardless of government attempts to make the playing field ‘level’ (such as pushing for better education and labour market opportunities for all), some simply start on rungs higher up the ladder due to their combinations of legitimate capital resources (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Fishkin 2014; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Calder 2016). Both Boliver and Byrne (2013) and Littler (2018) are critical of this neoliberal meritocratic metaphor of climbing the social ladder as this again frames social mobility as an individualistic achievement, ignoring any notions of solidarity across groups of people.

If we think of the board game ‘snakes and ladders’, to extend this metaphor further, what the political rhetoric appears to be offering are plenty of ‘ladders’ (although the top is out of reach for many people) but not many ‘snakes’ for those on the upper rungs to come down (Littler 2018). As the space at the top remains occupied by those in privileged positions, there is an apparent narrowing of the top, making social mobility problematic. For social mobility to improve, it is argued, there will have to be considerable downward social mobility to create a more equal society, which the political discourse does not communicate (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015; Calder 2016). For Reay (2013) and Bradley (2018), it is not enough to accept a handful of people managing to make their way up the social ladder against all the odds, there needs to be a redistribution of wealth across the social spectrum. However, social mobility is often packaged in such a way that suggests there is infinite room at

the top for everybody who strives to succeed (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2009; HM Government 2011; SMCPC 2013b; 2015b; SMC 2016; Department for Education 2017). This very notion is questioned by Lawler and Payne (2018) in their edited collection '*Social Mobility for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Everyone a Winner?*' - which is explored further in Chapter 3, section 3.3.

Much of the political discourse has focused its efforts on attempting to make the playing field 'level' and encouraging equality of opportunity as opposed to equality of outcome. As Littler (2018) highlights, equality of opportunity sounds open, exciting, and full of choices, as opposed to equality of outcome, which sounds predefined and deterministic. There is an argument that perhaps equality of opportunity and equality of outcome are inseparable, and that elements of both are essential in a fairer, more equal society (Calder 2016). Indeed, there are questions around how 'level' the playing field can be, especially when families are so influential in passing on advantages to their children (Fishkin 2014; Piketty 2014; Calder 2016). In a political era that encourages individualisation, risk-taking and undertaking 'reflexive identity projects', it is no surprise that equality of opportunity usurps equality of outcome in the political talk (Beck 1992; Giddens 1998; Walkerdine et al 2001; Walkerdine 2003; Gillies 2005; Skeggs 2005; 2011; Littler 2018). The Milburn report stated, "Equality of opportunity is a value cherished across our society and the political spectrum" (Cabinet Office 2009, p.42) and this acts as the linchpin for a truly 'meritocratic' society within the political social mobility rhetoric.

The 2013 State of the Nation report warned that "...stagnating levels of social mobility are a serious concern for the UK. They matter for reasons of fairness: every person should have equal opportunity to fulfil their potential" (SMCPC 2013b, p.7). Whilst the Conservative Party's 2015 (p.45) manifesto promised to "promote equal treatment and equal opportunity for all in a society proud of its tolerance and diversity". The cross-political focus on opening up a narrow range of opportunities, typically within education, arguably suggests that this is the only barrier standing in the way of a truly meritocratic and fair society (as well as individual effort). As I explore in section 2.3, this is questionable, as despite the massification of higher education, high levels of inequality remain intact (Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Littler 2018). Critics have argued that this approach to social mobility places attention on those who 'need' to improve through the widening of access to opportunities, instead of addressing some of the more implicit and embedded structural inequalities associated with neoliberal society (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013; Piketty 2014; Calder 2016; Bradley 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). The political discourse is powerful as the notions of equal opportunities and fairness are seen as essentially egalitarian. However, scholars have contended that total equality of opportunity is not only unattainable but also undesirable, arguing instead for a diversity of socially valuable opportunities (Sennett and Cobb 1977; Fishkin

2014; Calder 2016; Littler 2018). The political discourse continues to confine what we understand as ‘good’ opportunities.

One recent example of the trope of equal opportunities being used to address the ‘meritocratic deficit’ (Littler 2018) in UK society is Theresa May’s plans to extend grammar schools and selective education:

There is nothing meritocratic about standing in the way of giving our most academically gifted children the specialist and tailored support that can enable them to fulfil their potential. In a true meritocracy, we should not be apologetic about stretching the most academically able to the very highest standards of excellence.

(May 2016)

This is what Littler (2018) describes as a ‘neoliberal justice narrative’. May identifies that there are structural issues inherent in the education system that hold some children back from achieving their best, but instead of questioning these, the solution appears to be the extension of neoliberalism and competition. Littler (2018, p.100) argues that by identifying structural inequalities such as those relating to class, ethnicity and gender, but also being supportive of neoliberal capitalism and policies, politicians concur that “the solution for inequality is better inequality”. It was precisely the unequal tripartite system of education<sup>7</sup> that Young (1958) was satirically critiquing in *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. A system based on meritocracy arguably justifies inequalities and hierarchy, for those who are the most ‘merited’ rise to the top and are rewarded whilst those at the bottom deserve their lowly positions. Fishkin (2014) further notes that this concept of meritocracy, or what he names the ‘big test society’, will always produce unequal results as both effort and ‘talent’ are inseparable from circumstances of birth.

Scholars have queried how a combination of neoliberal notions of social mobility and a system based on ‘meritocracy’ could lead to an equal and just society (Pearce 2011; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Calder 2016; Bradley 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). Bradley (2018, p.81) argues that meritocracy “serves as a powerful legitimating mechanism for neoliberal capitalism”, a system which (re)produces large scale inequalities by encouraging individual competition over collective wellbeing. Although recognising some redeeming features of meritocracy, Littler (2018, p.221) comes to the radical conclusion that we should dispose of the term altogether as it has become ‘toxic’ and tautological. The narrow, individualistic notion of what constitutes merit within neoliberal society appears to place limits on the fairness and justness that can be achieved, despite the political rhetoric otherwise. One technique that further entrenches these inequalities is the

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<sup>7</sup> The tripartite education system was introduced by the 1944 Education Act which made universal secondary education freely available to all and subsequently led to the creation of three types of schools: selective grammar schools, technical schools and secondary modern schools. Today, most secondary schools are secondary moderns, also known as comprehensive schools, with 163 grammar schools still in existence in England and no technical schools although hardly any technical schools were ever introduced.

framing of the social mobility rhetoric around the psychological, developmental and parenting traits of those who are socially immobile. These issues will be explored in the following section.

## *2.2. Targeting underperforming populations: the psychologisation of social mobility*

A significant body of the political literature on social mobility has focused its attention on those who are the most marginalised and deprived (Gillies 2005; McKenzie 2015; Allen and Bull 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018; Tyler and Slater 2018). There has been concern over consecutive governments of a growing ‘underclass’, which they contend has halted social mobility due to individuals’ lack of ambition to enter the labour market and come off social welfare payments<sup>8</sup>. Often this is related to familial influence and poor parenting. The punitive approach to those in poverty through austerity cuts was heightened once the Conservative Party were back in power in coalition government with the Liberal Democrats in 2010 (Littler 2018). At this time, a more psychologising and stigmatising discourse began to circulate around the ‘character’ and personality ‘traits’ of working-class people and people in poverty, building upon previous governments’ vilification of the working-classes. This section will explore how social mobility policy has arguably constructed an individualising and pathologising discourse, which emphasises social mobility as the problem of people experiencing poverty. It examines the vilification of the ‘underclass’, the importance of character and personality traits, and the regulating of working-class parenting, drawing upon academic critique of this political approach.

### *2.2.1. The underclass ‘problem’*

When Tony Blair made his maiden speech as Prime Minister from the Aylesbury Estate in London in 1997, he made it clear that council estates were synonymous with worklessness, anti-social behaviour and crime (Tyler 2013; Minton 2017; Slater 2018). This led to a moral panic in the media of a ‘culture of worklessness’ (Tyler 2013) and what Slater (2018) terms ‘territorial stigma’, with council estates becoming known as ‘sink estates’. These were not areas where social mobility would flourish and arguably, the New Labour era marked the beginning of the most recent reincarnation of the ‘underclass’ with political discourse being concerned with the moral bankruptcy of those communities who are largely out of work and therefore stalling the country’s social mobility (Gillies 2005; Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2015; Littler 2018).

Whilst in opposition in 2008, the Conservative Party released a report entitled *Through the Glass Ceiling: A Conservative Agenda for Social Mobility* outlining the party’s approach to improving social mobility. The report claimed that the failure of social mobility in Britain “has been worsened still by the nature of our welfare state, which does not challenge individuals to achieve,

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<sup>8</sup> Social welfare payments refer to an array of payments that people can claim from the government if they are unable to, or are out of, work. They offer a ‘safety net’ for people on low incomes.

and instead leaves many people living life permanently at the bottom of the social ladder” (Conservative Party 2008, p.2). The report emphasised the role of generations of worklessness in stifling social mobility, claiming that “too many people do not aspire to succeed” and “have been stuck in a world of benefit dependency, worklessness and failure” (Conservative Party 2008, p.2). When they gained office in 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition published their policy document addressing social mobility which, although headed by the enthusiastic Liberal Democrat Nick Clegg as his ‘flagship’ social mobility policy, was no softer in the language used to describe those who are in ‘need’ of social mobility. The demonisation of those in poverty and disadvantage continued:

We have a group of people in our society who have become detached, unable to play a productive role in the workplace, in their families or in their communities. They are often trapped by addiction, debt, educational failure, family breakdown or welfare dependency.

HM Government (2011, p.11)

These, amongst other political documents, work to individualise poverty and disadvantage, as well as the responsibility for self-improvement (Tyler 2013; 2015; Lawler 2018; Shildrick 2018; Tyler and Slater 2018). Relying on theories of generations of worklessness, welfare dependency, and a growing ‘underclass’, these documents locate the ‘problem’ within the person, constructing stigmatising ‘deficient subjectivities’ (Tyler 2013). Tyler and Slater (2018) discuss how stigma is productive as it works to regulate behaviour through the inculcation of shame. This is what they term ‘stigma governmentality’. Both Carson (2015) and Horton (2013) have documented the symbolic violence of such a discourse, as those reliant on welfare benefits or seeking work navigate the shame that is publicly placed on people who are economically inactive. The Conservative Party’s manifestos in both 2015 and 2017 placed moralised importance on work, with an eye to restructuring the welfare system and capping benefits so that “you are rewarded for working hard and doing the right thing” (Conservative Party 2015, p.3). This stigmatisation continues despite the Prime Minister’s ‘neoliberal justice narrative’ as welfare reform is introduced and payments reduced (Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018).

This political discourse arguably constructs a deficit model of the working classes and the ‘underclass’, identifying them as the cause of low mobility rates and their own social position (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Reay 2013; Tyler 2013; Shildrick 2018). Scambler (2018) explains how stigma can be weaponised so that those who are the ‘stigmatisers’ infer blame, or what he describes as ‘heaping blame onto shame’. It becomes their own responsibility to improve their position, ignoring the difficulty of structural barriers such as the state of the economy and the labour market (Tyler 2013). The reduction of social mobility to individual work ethic and effort also works to “objectify human subjects, reducing people to being little more than neoliberal commodities” (Jones 2016, para 15). This notion of the ‘underclass’ has been theorised

by many right-wing thinkers including Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and more recently, Saunders (2010) and Perkins (2016). There is a strong tendency in their work to link belonging to the ‘underclass’ with levels of intelligence and personality defects, and I explore how this influenced the social mobility political literature in the next subsection.

### 2.2.2. *The construction of psychological deficit*

The political discourse both constructs social mobility as an individualised problem, and ‘psychologises’ the problem of social mobility by linking it to a range of psychological, behavioural, cognitive and social development problems (Tyler 2013; Jones 2016; Allen and Bull 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). From the Milburn report in 2009 and New Labour policy, to publications from the SMCP, and most recently the policy strategies of the various permutations of the Conservative government – there is discussion of behavioural and developmental traits such as motivation, confidence and character (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2009; SMCP 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2015a; Paterson et al 2014; Department for Education 2016; Richards et al 2016). There has been an increased importance placed on ‘character’ and ‘resilience’ traits, which are seen as essential to measure and develop if children are to succeed and become socially mobile (SMCP 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2015a; Paterson et al 2014; Department for Education 2016). In a policy document outlining how education can unlock social mobility, the Department for Education states:

A 21st century education should prepare children for adult life by instilling the character traits and fundamental British values that will help them succeed: being resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure, and how to collaborate with others at work and in their private lives.

Department for Education (2016, p.94)

The growth in discussion around developing ‘character’ and ‘resilience’ skills can be linked to the publication of the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* (Paterson et al 2014), which was produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility (Allen and Bull 2018; Lawler 2018). The manifesto explicitly states that “character and resilience are major factors in social mobility” (Paterson et al 2014, p.6) and both ‘traits’ affect how well you can succeed at school and in work. The usage of the word ‘trait’ places this approach firmly within the realm of psychology, personality and personhood (Allport 1937). Much of the political literature borrows phrases from psychology such as ‘traits’, ‘cognitive skills’, ‘behavioural problems’ and ‘neural development’ and this is evident in the rise of what Rose (1998) calls the ‘psy disciplines’. These have implications for how we regulate and understand ourselves and others, and the psy disciplines are tied up within a matrix of political power that aim to ensure we become the ‘right’ kind of selves (Rose 1998; Gillies 2005).

This psychological focus is centralised in the Conservative government’s education policy, with the emphasis on character skills development and bounceback-ability leading to “academic success, happiness and wellbeing” (Department for Education 2016, p.95). Jenson and Tyler (2015, p.481) document a shift in social policy, as the welfare state used to be considered as a “cradle to grave safety net for citizens”, whereas now a more anti-welfare common-sense has emerged where resilience and independence are encouraged. This shift conceptualises the welfare state as a ‘trampoline’, offering minimal provisions to encourage citizens to bounce back from adversity (Conway and Norton 2002, p.534). Believing in your ability to achieve and having continued perseverance are the suggested remedies to social mobility concerns. The manifesto directs policymakers to encourage “the development of Character and Resilience throughout the population” (Paterson et al 2014, p.5, authors’ capitalisation). This suggests that character and resilience can be inculcated across the population, which introduces an interesting dynamic between the individual and the state, displaying the link between what Tyler and Slater (2018) describe as neoliberal governance and stigmatisation.

These calls for behaviour modification and measurement can lead to the subjugation of bodies (Foucault 1991c, p.262) and governmentality. By the body and subsequently, the mind and personality being directly involved in a political field, governments can propose a range of techniques aimed at the monitoring and self-improvement of populations (Foucault 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; Skeggs 1997; Rose 1998; Foucault 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Clarke et al 2003; Walkerdine 2003; Rabinow and Rose 2006; Rose 2007; Blackman 2008; Tyler 2013; Jones 2016; Tyler and Slater 2018). This is what Foucault referred to as ‘biopower’, which includes the surveillance, monitoring and discipline imposed on populations by the state (Foucault 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; Rabinow and Rose 2006). This psychologisation, or what Jones (2016) calls ‘neuroliberalism’ of personality traits, encourages a moral responsibility of the individual to conform to what has been politically defined as the ‘norm’ for success and social mobility in society. If you are deemed as not meeting these norms, you can become ‘othered’ and pathologised, not only affecting the personhood and sense of self of that individual, but also working as a scapegoat for society’s problems within the political discourse (Foucault 1991c; Rose 1998; Tyler 2013; Jones 2016; Allen and Bull 2018; Shildrick 2018). This disregards the experiences of those who are ‘othered’ as they become further problematised and oppressed (Jones 2016).

The construction of a deficit view can arguably have an impact upon the selfhood of those who are the target of the political discourse. As the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* claims:

There is a growing body of research linking social mobility to social and emotional skills, which range from empathy and the ability to make and maintain relationships to application, mental toughness, delayed gratification and self-control.

Paterson et al (2014, p.4)

It becomes easy to see how ‘lacking’ such skills could lead to the internalisation of blame and failure (Allen and Bull 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018), particularly when young people in the UK have a strong, individualist understanding of merit (Baker 2016; Warikoo 2018). This could be damaging and may create “further problems for individuals by undermining their sense of self, denying their identity, experience and locating the problems, regardless of their origin and who is responsible for them, in themselves” (Jones 2016, para 12). This narrative also ignores issues of unequal access to opportunities and resources and the limits of neoliberal meritocracy by suggesting that if you develop ‘resilience’ you can succeed if you try hard enough.

The *Character and Resilience Manifesto* directly highlights the “importance of behavioural and psychological factors in the intergenerational transmission of inequality” (Paterson et al 2014, p.14), again suggesting an individualisation of poverty and disadvantage (Shildrick 2018). The rise of behavioural psychology, as the new ‘expertise’ for monitoring and disciplining underperforming populations, moralises the discourse around social mobility that is utilised as a pseudoscientific justification for government policy (Foucault 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; Rose 1998; Jones 2016). By shifting the blame and responsibility onto individuals to improve their ‘character’ and ‘resilience’, the political discourse focuses on controlling and fixing these individual maladies rather than addressing wider social inequalities in society (Allen and Bull 2018; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018). This is where public discontent is focused and where ‘psychopolitics’ can alienate and marginalise those on the edges of society even further (Jones 2016). Lawler (2018, p.132) argues that this approach works to naturalise social class by instead talking about character, personality, aspirations and values. The construction of the deficient subject in the political discourse is then arguably both a distraction from wider societal issues and a justification for the implementation of stigmatising and moralising ‘character’ improving policy. As explored in the following section, the locus of these policies often lies in the family and efforts to ‘improve’ working-class parenting.

### *2.2.3. Regulating working-class parenting*

Many psychological and developmental ‘defects’ are positioned as originating in the (working-class) family. Gillies (2005) documents how New Labour policies, such as Sure Start, aimed at supporting the ‘socially excluded’ are designed to ‘improve’ parenting among the working-class. This approach works to morally reify middle-class values as working-class families are constructed as ‘excluded’ and therefore outside of the moralistic norm, perceived as ‘lacking’. Such policies often involve parenting classes/support which Gillies (2005) argues further entrenches the demonisation and marginalisation of working-class families, as the ‘right’ style of parenting entails having access to middle-class capital resources. This approach was echoed in the Conservative Strategy for Social Mobility in 2008, which claimed that “the roots of the failure of social mobility in Britain lie first and foremost within families and individual households”

(Conservative Party 2008, p.2). The Milburn report extended this by arguing that “...good parenting is the foundation for a mobile society and that parents and families should be better valued and supported” (Cabinet Office 2009, p.31). Subsequent political discourse around social mobility has also placed emphasis on the early years and parenting skills despite the eradication of the Sure Start policy under the coalition government (HM Government 2009; Paterson et al 2014; SMCP 2014; 2015a). For Littler (2018), this approach has become more demonising and punitive towards the working-class since the Coalition government of 2010 through to the Conservative administration in 2018.

Previous to the publication of the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* (Paterson et al 2014), the Milburn report suggested style of parenting has a crucial psychological impact on children’s abilities as “parenting is strongly correlated with a child’s psychology and behaviour, which in turn impacts their later educational and employment outcomes” (Cabinet Office 2009, p.29). This linkage between child development and parenting ability has since become pivotal in social mobility discourse, which describes parenting as “the single most important factor influencing a child’s overall life chances” (Paterson et al 2014, p.20; also echoed in HM Government 2009; SMCP 2014; 2015a). This has provided justification for the suggestion in both the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* and the SMCP’s annual *State of the Nation 2014* report for the government to introduce a national parenting programme to improve parenting skills (Paterson et al 2014, p.8; SMCP 2014, p.5). Aligning with the discussion about the underclass and the psychologisation of social mobility (previous two sections), this discourse constructs an individualistic deficit view of working-class parenting, suggesting that if those parents just improve their skills, they will improve the psychological and behavioural traits of their children and thus their ability to be socially mobile (Gillies 2005; Reay 2013; Lawler 2018). This ignores the unequal distribution of resources across families, especially in relation to economic and cultural capital (Fishkin 2014; Calder 2016).

Reay (2013) disputes this political framing, arguing instead that the single most important factor that influences children’s life chances is familial income, not style of parenting or psychological traits. The focus on parenting arguably is another form of stigma governmentality, where the behaviour of populations who appear to be ‘underperforming’ can be managed and altered to help them be ‘successful’ and socially mobile (Tyler and Slater 2018). Typically, such political emphasis on parenting and social mobility is focused on the most marginalised and poorest in society, devaluing working-class culture as middle-class values are framed as morally acceptable and legitimate (Skeggs 1997; Gillies 2005; Reay 2013; Lawler 2018). The problem of social mobility is framed as rooted in underperforming parents, instead of structural barriers that entrench inequality (Gillies 2005; Reay 2013; Lawler 2018). Parents are encouraged to improve

their parenting skills, often with the aim of improving their children's behaviour and attitudes towards education - one of the 'drivers' of social mobility explored in the following section.

### *2.3. Learning equals earning? Education as the 'solution' to improving social mobility*

Originating from the influential 1944 Education Act, and subsequently spanning from New Labour through to 2019's Conservative Government, is the notion that education has the power to improve social position and therefore increase social mobility. The massification of higher education in particular has been positioned as crucial to improving social mobility because "in a knowledge-based economy, education is the motor that drives social mobility" (Cabinet Office 2009, p.63). The expansion of the higher education sector led to the Conservative Party's claim in their 2015 manifesto that "last September more people headed off to university than at any time in history" (Conservative Party 2015, p.33). Their commitment to improving social mobility through education policy was cemented in 2017 with the publication of *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A Plan for Improving Social Mobility through Education* (Department for Education 2017). Despite cross-party commitment to widening access to higher education over the last two decades, the UK has still seen spiralling levels of income inequality (Reay 2013; Piketty 2014; Savage et al 2015; Littler 2018). Therefore, it is questionable whether such an individualised focus on education can improve 'social mobility', especially when the limits of neoliberal meritocracy are considered. In this section, I explore the commitment of successive governments in championing education as the main driver for social mobility; the economic rationale behind this focus; and the class ceiling barrier to 'reaching the top'.

#### *2.3.1. Education, education, education?*

In 1997, Tony Blair was quite clear about the Labour Party's commitment to '*education, education, education*' (Savage et al 2015). Although beyond the scope of this review to document the expansion of the higher education market<sup>9</sup>, it is important to highlight the continued support of subsequent governments for the potential of higher education to make the UK more socially mobile. In 2009, the Labour government stated that "...education is a key driver of social mobility" (HM Government 2009, p.6), and claimed that their schemes such as 'Aimhigher'<sup>10</sup>, which were designed to 'raise' aspirations, had seen "over 50% of young people from all social classes say they aspire to go to university" (p.58).

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<sup>9</sup> See Brown et al 2011; Savage et al 2015 and Bathmaker et al 2016 for more on higher education expansion.

<sup>10</sup> 'Aimhigher' was a New Labour policy introduced in England in 2004 before being discontinued under the Coalition government in 2011 which encouraged widening participation in higher education of non-traditional students. This included helping students who were the first in their family to apply to university and those from disadvantaged communities. It consisted of an array of initiatives where educational institutions and organisations worked in partnership to encourage higher education entry.

The Milburn report claimed that increased spending on education is associated with increased levels of social mobility (Cabinet Office 2009, p.16) but warned that “the aspiration gap needs to be closed if social mobility is to take hold” (p.51). This ‘aspiration gap’ refers to the difference between children whose parents are ‘professionals’ compared to children whose parents are in semi-skilled occupations. The report argues that fewer children with parents in semi-skilled occupations aspire to a professional career in comparison to children whose parents are already ‘professionals’. Arguably this ignores the social and economic barriers that block some children’s hopes of reaching their aspirations and the ensuing performativity of aspirations as children learn to adapt them to become more ‘realistic’ (St Clair and Benjamin 2011; McInerney and Smyth 2014; Calder 2016; Harrison 2018). The focus of the Milburn Report was mostly on access to the professions, which Milburn argued are also the key to unlocking social mobility in the UK (Cabinet Office 2009, p.16). This message shaped future SMCPD publications and government policy documents, with the emphasis on widening participation and access to higher education and professional careers, whilst also addressing some of the ‘low’ aspirations of those from disadvantaged backgrounds (HM Government 2011; SMCPD 2013b; 2015a; 2015b; Department for Education 2016; Richards et al 2016; Department for Education 2017).

In 2009 the Labour government pledged to remove any ‘financial, cultural or aspirational’ barriers to accessing good education (HM Government 2009, p.7). By the time of the Coalition government in 2010, more emphasis was being placed on the aspirations of those from disadvantaged backgrounds - “The education system should challenge low aspirations and expectations, dispelling the myth that those from poorer backgrounds cannot aim for top universities and professional careers” (HM Government 2011, p.6). The SMCPD (2015a, p.18) positioned educational expansion as a “chance to make the top of British society more meritocratic”, also linking higher numbers of professional level jobs to increases in social mobility (SMCPD 2013b). As explored in section 2.1.2, it is questionable whether being more ‘meritocratic’ can lead to a fair and just society. This discourse commodifies university education as it is often only valued in terms of the financial ‘return’ gained, instead of the intrinsic, personal development value of investing in education. There are criticisms of this evangelical approach to education as the cure-all for social mobility and inequality. Many scholars have questioned the impact of higher education expansion in making the UK a fairer, more open society; the limited scope of social mobility policy which focuses solely on those ‘at the bottom’; and the notion that people from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower aspirations (St Clair and Benjamin 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Fishkin 2014; McInerney and Smyth 2014; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Harrison 2018; Littler 2018).

Even though there are more students than ever before entering higher education, this does not appear to have affected social mobility rates<sup>11</sup> or levels of inequality (Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Piketty 2014; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Littler 2018). Brown (2013, p.681) states that sociology's 'inconvenient truth' is that previous improvements in social mobility were not due to the opening up of higher education and education legislation, but due to a changing occupational structure as the UK moved away from manual manufacturing work to a more service-driven economy. It is also argued that although absolute numbers of those who are socially mobile have increased, an individual's relative chance of becoming socially mobile has stagnated (Aldridge 2001; Paterson and Iannelli 2007; Brown et al 2011; Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Piketty 2014). Goldthorpe (2013, p.441) suggests education has had a limited effect on the overall rate of social mobility, and Reay (2013, p.661) argues that "a strong version of social justice requires much more than the movement of a few individuals up and down an increasingly inequitable social system". Arguably, the influence of widening access to higher education on overall social mobility and social equality levels in the UK has been overstated in the political discourse. There are also issues around the number of graduate jobs that are available and the 'class ceiling', which limits how far to the top one can rise (see section 2.3.3).

The social mobility discourse around education often frames social mobility as a problem for those in lower social classes to overcome whilst also inferring that if they just raised their aspirations and put in the effort, they would see the results. Brown et al (2011) refer to this as the 'neoliberal opportunity bargain'. For Loveday (2015), this political framing positions middle-class universities as 'creditors' to whom working-class students are indebted. Education researchers have persistently addressed the accusation of low aspirations amongst working-class students, with working-class students being just as ambitious as their middle-class counterparts (St Clair and Benjamin 2011; Reay 2013; Archer et al 2014; McInerney and Smyth 2014; Evans 2016; Harrison 2018). It has also been questioned whether this higher education trajectory is even desirable or accessible for everyone, as it defines success in such narrow parameters (Fishkin 2014) and ignores entrenched structural inequalities such as those around class, ethnicity and access to resources (St Clair et al 2013; Archer et al 2014). As this trajectory is often presented in the political discourse as the main route to social mobility, it becomes constructed as the moralistic, right way to 'self-improve', lowering the value attributed to other trajectories (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Skeggs 2011; Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014; Bowers-Brown 2016; Friedman 2016a; 2016b). This discourse of lack has been widely critiqued (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine 2003; Pearce 2011; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013; Tyler 2013; Loveday 2015;

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<sup>11</sup>Some critiques of the social mobility political discourse are steeped in a tradition of measuring social mobility. Chapter Three explores measurements of social mobility and why these can be problematic.

Bathmaker et al 2016; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018), and Payne concisely describes why focussing on ‘lower’ social classes is problematic:

While we are offered policies designed to increase the mobility of the lower classes, there are no mirror image proposals to reduce the absolute inter-generational immobility of the most advantaged classes. Because mobility is recast as a problem of the lower classes, the position of the advantaged ceases to be relevant for public discussion. The discourse renders it improper to discuss enforcing a break-up of the inherited advantages of the rich and powerful. Re-distribution of wealth or social advantage have no place on the politicians’ agenda.

Payne (2012, p.68)

As discussed in the following section, the preoccupation of politicians is arguably the maintenance of economic growth in an era of (instable) global neoliberal capitalism, as opposed to seeking fairer distribution of societal resources.

### *2.3.2. Economic growth, labour markets and global competition*

A key justification for the concentration on higher education is the changing nature of the labour market. It is argued that to satisfy the growing demand for skilled and professional workers, it is essential to expand higher education so that the country can provide a skilled workforce that will aid economic growth (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2009; HM Government 2011; Department of Education 2016). The political literature emphasises that we are now situated in a global market of skills, with UK graduates competing with those from a multitude of other countries (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2009; Department for Education 2016). This is what Brown et al (2011) termed ‘the global auction’ of talent. The Milburn report was optimistic in 2009, stating that there “is no fixed set of high-quality jobs, as the evidence points to a rapidly rising number of professional opportunities in the years ahead” (Cabinet Office 2009, p.45) whilst then Prime Minister Gordon Brown claimed, “this is an economy in which the knowledge and skills of people are now the most important resource as well as our best chance of social progress” (HM Government 2009, p.3). The economic argument for promoting education as the ‘solution’ to social mobility hangs on the premise that UK skills levels are low compared to other countries and need raising to improve prosperity in post-financial crash Britain<sup>12</sup> (Conservative Party 2008; Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2009; HM Government 2011; SMCP 2013a; 2013b; 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> The 2008 global financial crash was a worldwide crisis of the banking system instigated by deregulation which resulted in banks taking excessive financial risk. The shock of the crisis was felt worldwide and to avoid the collapse of the financial system, many governments bailed out the banks. The crash subsequently led to a depression and economic downturn affected the global economy. Many countries, such as the UK, entered a period of economic austerity and recession where government spending has been severely reduced. See Piketty (2014) and Raworth (2017) for more information.

Commentators claim that this exponential increased demand for skilled labour has been severely overstated as we are faced with a situation of an oversupply of graduates and limited graduate-level jobs to offer them, added to that the increased competition from non-UK graduates (Brown et al 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013). This creates a situation Brown (2013) terms the ‘opportunity trap’ where the inflation of undergraduate degrees makes them less valuable, and so further achievements are needed to stand out in the positional competition. Rather than endless room at the top for all of those who succeed in higher education, there is now social congestion (Brown 2013) or a ‘bottleneck’ (Fishkin 2014) as graduates scramble over the opportunities available and use their cultural, economic and social capital to get ahead (Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Abrahams 2017). These critiques illustrate the narrowness of ‘success’ in the social mobility discourse. Several publications have also highlighted the fact that focussing on the professions ignores the situation at the bottom of the labour market where we see increases in low-skill, low-pay jobs and in-work poverty (Pearce 2011; SMCPC 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2015a; Richards et al 2016). Much more of this low-skill, low-pay work is on offer compared to professional occupations, as the UK economy becomes more reliant on lower-end service sector work.

The economic rationale for sustained massification of higher education, which is concerned with economic growth and the ‘waste’ of our citizens’ potential, reduces people down to individual cogs in the machine of neoliberal capitalism (Tyler 2013; Frayne 2015; Jones 2016; Bradley 2018; Lawler and Payne 2018; Reay 2018). Not only are qualifications commodified, so are people, as the government tries desperately to sustain unregulated capitalism in a period of uncertainty (Reay 2013; Raworth 2017). This individualistic, capital-accruing selfhood discourse distracts attention away from examining society-wide inequalities, as people are told to only be concerned with their own progress, with ‘good progress’ incorrectly being synonymous with good economic growth and prosperity (Pearce 2011; Skeggs 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Reay 2013). Relying on economic growth as a justification is pertinent post-financial crisis, where it is argued that neoliberal meritocracy continues to oil the gears of a failed capitalist system, often at the expense of those experiencing the most hardship (Reay 2013; Bradley 2018). Lang and Marsden (2017, p.10) question policy that focuses on employment and economic growth, citing the example of London as a city which has both high growth and employment yet still suffers from severe poverty and high levels of inequality. Opposed to individualism, they instead argue for a place-based, community approach to improving prosperity and wellbeing, something which I look at in more detail in Chapter Five, section 5.4. Next, I explore how inequality persists despite the government aiming to create a ‘level playing field’ and ‘equal opportunities’.

### 2.3.3. *How to get ahead: the class ceiling, soft skills and capital resources*

Even though consecutive governments have celebrated more young people entering higher education, deeply rooted inequalities that impact future career trajectories persist. This was recognised by the SMCP in its 2015 *Bridging The Social Divide* report which described Britain as ‘elitist’ for the overrepresentation of people from private schools in top jobs (SMCP 2015a, p.5). Degree inflation and a saturated labour market means that more is expected from candidates to stand out from the crowd; and “...having an exemplary academic record is no longer enough” (Cabinet Office 2009 p.69).

This has seen an emphasis on ‘soft skills’ as opposed to the ‘hard skill’ of obtaining a qualification (Brown et al 2011; Brown 2013; Bathmaker et al 2016; Allen and Bull 2018). ‘Soft skills’ include elements of a person’s demeanour and personality such as: work ethic, time management, communication skills, character and resilience, determination and grit, and extracurricular activities that may help build ‘character’ (Cabinet Office 2009; HM Government 2011; Paterson et al 2014). Methods of getting ahead such as work placements and internships are problematic due to their largely unpaid nature, as only certain types of people can apply for such placements (Bathmaker et al 2013; Bathmaker et al 2016; Abrahams 2017). Many of the academic critiques of the class ceiling and the reliance on soft skills come from a Bourdieusian perspective discussing these inequalities in terms of capital resources (Bourdieu 1984). If you have enough financial resource (economic capital), know the right kinds of people (social capital), and have the correct cultural tastes and demeanour (cultural capital), you will be able to ‘play the game’ of individual social mobility better (Bathmaker et al 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Friedman et al 2015; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016).

The SMCP has shared its concern about access to the top professions, even stemming back to Alan Milburn’s first ground-breaking report in 2009 entitled *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions* (Cabinet Office 2009). In 2017, the SMCP, now known as the SMC, even employed the work of sociologists Friedman et al (2017) to highlight the prevalence of the class ceiling and pay gap at the top of society. Friedman et al (2015) established the presence of the class ceiling when they demonstrated disadvantage within professional occupations, as those who had been the most mobile were often paid less than their colleagues from higher class origins. Much of the class ceiling work has suggested that people in the top professions from lower social class backgrounds are less likely to want to progress and obtain promotions, due to a clash in habitus and a lack of sense of belonging (Friedman 2014; Friedman et al 2015; Friedman 2016a). The Bourdieusian literature suggests that there is a cultural, implicit barrier that can stop working-class professionals from wanting to progress if they feel they lack the appropriate cultural and social capital to get ahead, often not wanting to be perceived as ‘getting above their station’ (Bathmaker et al 2013; Savage et al 2015; Abrahams

2017; Mallman 2018). Many of these professions, they argue, are dominated by a middle-class implicit value system. The class ceiling can be seen as evidence to suggest that widening access to higher education and creating a seemingly ‘level playing field’ has not reduced class inequalities for those who do attempt to be socially mobile through higher education. As Fishkin (2014, p.5) notes, the outcome of every competition is the input for the next competition, and so there is a need to mitigate inequalities at every stage of the trajectory. Widening access to higher education in itself is not enough.

The opening up of higher education means we now see what Brown (2013) describes as social congestion. There are many graduates with degrees and so new methods of filtering out who are deemed ‘better’ for higher level jobs are required. Both Savage et al’s (2015) work on the Great British Class Survey<sup>13</sup> and Bathmaker et al’s (2016) work on the Paired Peers project<sup>14</sup> helped to illuminate how certain types of institutions place graduates in better stead for jobs because of their prestige and reputation. As universities have been marketised and competition increased, degrees become positional goods where students from universities that are ranked higher are seen as preferable to those from lower ranking universities (Brown et al 2011; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Boliver et al 2018). Within this there is another class element, as those more prestigious universities have a much higher intake of middle and upper-class students, compared to those ranked lower which may have lower entry requirements. Therefore, as Bathmaker et al (2016) and Callender and Dougherty (2018) suggest, higher education has itself become a stratified system, where those with the capital advantages still manage to get ahead and secure their advantage in higher education.

Needing to stand out from the competition has led to a focus on ‘soft skills’ which the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* describe as “at the very heart of the drive to improve social mobility” (Paterson et al 2014). Linking back to the discussion of character and resilience in section 2.2.2, the emphasis on ‘soft skills’ arguably implies a moralised, middle-class value system or habitus is required to get ahead (Lawler 1999; Brown 2013; Allen and Bull 2018). Embodied cultural capital or habitus such as your accent, the way you dress, and the way you communicate, all need to be of a certain, middle-class standard for you to be considered professional and legitimate (Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Friedman et al 2015). Scholars argue that there is often a worry of pretence or being ‘found out’ when working-class people are in middle-class fields (Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Ingram and Abrahams 2016). Other class disadvantages such as working-class students being unable to afford to take on unpaid internships and having fewer social capital

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<sup>13</sup> The Great British Class survey is one of the largest, most recent attempts at gaining survey data on social class in Britain. I explore it further in Chapter Three.

<sup>14</sup> The Paired Peers project worked with pairs of students from a new university (University of the West of England) and an elite university (University of Bristol) to explore the experience of attending either type of university as a working-class or middle-class student.

resources<sup>15</sup> means that middle-class graduates are usually better positioned for higher level places in the labour market compared to their working-class counterparts (Bathmaker et al 2013; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016).

Those aiming for the ‘top’ of society from working-class families are often still closed off from ‘elite’ positions<sup>16</sup>, and whilst widening participation measures are important to encourage those from all backgrounds to have an opportunity to work in any profession, this individualistic social mobility focus does not address society’s entrenched social inequalities (Bathmaker et al 2016) and has a very narrow understanding of success and value (Fishkin 2014). Government social mobility policy has placed much attention on higher education being the driver for social mobility, but the academic literature suggests that class inequalities are omnipresent throughout the higher education system and as a result, in society more widely. The individualistic social mobility discourse has many flaws, one of them being the assumption that attending university will lead to a guaranteed, fulfilling social mobility trajectory.

It is also important to look at social policy within the Welsh context of devolution to explore whether the dominant narrative around social mobility and self-improvement is as prominent in a nation that traditionally has a more socialist and collectivist ethic.

#### *2.4. Clear red water: The role of Welsh devolution on social policy in Wales*

Having explored the centralised Westminster government’s policy approach to social mobility, this section will outline the context of devolution. As this research is situated in Wales, it is important to understand the policy climate within a devolved Wales and how this might differ both rhetorically and practically to Westminster. The road to devolution in Wales began with the 1997 referendum that showed a slim margin of support for Wales to become a devolved nation. This led to the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the formation of the National Assembly for Wales with the first election of Assembly Members (AMs) in 1999 resulting in a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. Unlike fellow devolved nation Scotland, Wales only gained secondary legislative powers, limiting Wales’ legislative power until the Government of Wales Act 2006 where it became possible for Wales to make their own primary legislation (Morgan 2006; 2007; Williams and Mooney 2008).

The drive for devolution was situated within the broader agenda of New Labour in Westminster that had a focus on the modernisation of public services via neoliberal, choice and competition-

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<sup>15</sup> Abrahams (2017) also documents how some working-class graduates who do have social capital resources are less willing to use them in order to ‘prove’ themselves as worthy of their positions.

<sup>16</sup> Careers in areas such as journalism, academia, medicine, and law are considered ‘elite’ in the Milburn Report (2009).

driven policy approaches, or the ‘Third Way’ approach (Mooney et al 2006; Williams and Mooney 2008). Devolution was seen as a method of ‘empowering’ localities to improve their public services, although the extent to which this was/is made possible is debatable (Mooney et al 2006; Andrews and Martin 2010). Despite devolution, there are several key policy areas which are still determined by the centralised Westminster government, notably the structure of welfare payments and foreign policy (Mooney et al 2006; Morgan 2007). This section will explore how much divergence there has been between the Welsh Government and Westminster, before taking a closer look at the economic positioning of Wales, the extent of poverty, and the Welsh Government’s approach to social mobility.

#### *2.4.1. A different way of governing? Divergence from Westminster*

In his 2002 speech denouncing the New Labour government’s approach to public services, Welsh Labour leader and soon to be First Minister of Wales Rhodri Morgan made clear that there was ‘clear red water’ between Welsh Labour and the New Labour government in Westminster. In this speech, Morgan claimed:

Our commitment to equality leads directly to a model of the relationship between the government and the individual which regards that individual as a citizen rather than as a consumer. Approaches which prioritise choice over equality of outcome rest, in the end, upon a market approach to public services, in which individual economic actors pursue their own best interests with little regard for wider considerations.

(Morgan 2002)

It was elucidated in policy documents from early in the devolution process that the Welsh Government wanted to pitch itself on a different philosophical footing to Westminster politics, with Welsh rhetoric emphasising the importance of the collective, and of socially democratic values (Mooney et al 2006; Adamson 2008; Williams and Mooney 2008; Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016). There was resistance to the UK government’s approach to public services reform, with much more emphasis being placed on community involvement and engagement in Wales, especially in relation to addressing issues of inequality, opportunity, and poverty (Adamson 2008; Andrews and Martin 2010; Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016). Rees and Chaney (2011) argue that before devolution, Wales had a poor history regarding equalities and so the first term of the National Assembly saw legislation passed that promoted both human rights and equalities. The approach of the Welsh Government to social policy appeared to differ from Westminster with a more collaborative, social justice and equality focus.

Instead of treating individuals as neoliberal consumers, the Welsh Government vowed to treat individuals as active citizens, which became enshrined as a statutory requirement through the concept of partnership working (Morgan 2007; Bristow et al 2008; Williams and Mooney 2008; Andrews and Martin 2010; Dicks 2014). Partnership working under the ‘three thirds’ partnership

model strictly required public, private and third sector representation with the goal of promoting equality of opportunity. This came into fruition under the ‘Communities First’ programme, seen as a radical counterpart to England’s New Deal for Communities programme as it offered a fresh, citizen-focused approach to tackling poverty and regeneration using a non-prescriptive area-based policy (Adamson 2008; Dicks 2014). I explore Communities First’s relationship with social mobility in the following section and in Chapters Five and Seven, but for now it is important to highlight that this form of governance was considered different from Westminster politics because of its more inclusive, open and accessible nature, with the aim of re-engaging citizens with the political system. The extent to which this has been achieved has been debated (Chaney 2002; Laffin 2004; Morgan 2007; Bristow et al 2008; Dicks 2014).

Scholars have questioned the nature of the Welsh Government’s divergence from Westminster politics, suggesting that despite the rhetoric, many differences in policy occurred due to differences in population density within Wales and to Welsh Labour’s appeasement of the Liberal Democrats during their coalition government from 1999 to 2002 (Laffin 2004; Andrews and Martin 2010). It is suggested that instead of strong, ideological distancing from Blair’s New Labour government, practical differences within Wales led to policy divergence, with the Welsh Government actively avoiding confrontation with Westminster in its first term, although more divergence was pursued in its second (Laffin 2004; Andrews and Martin 2010). Health and education illustrated the effects of devolution, with policies introduced such as free breakfasts for school children, free prescriptions, and subsidised university fees for Welsh students studying in Wales (Morgan 2006; Andrews and Martin 2010).

One key difference introduced by the Welsh Government was the performance management of public services such as health and education. Instead of a competition-based, top-down management approach focused on meeting targets and performing in league tables, local governments were entrusted to ensure that services run optimally<sup>17</sup> (Morgan 2006; Andrews and Martin 2010). This rejection of New Labour’s model of choice and competition was mainly due to the sporadic spread of services and population over Wales’ terrain, deeming a competition-based approach unamenable (Andrews and Martin 2010). It has been argued that due to how Welsh representation operated pre-devolution (with a Welsh Office representative within Westminster), the Welsh Government lacked confidence and skill in designing policies that differed from the ‘Whitehall template’ (Morgan 2007). Overall, there is some dubiousness over the extent and success of the Welsh Government’s divergence from Westminster, especially when “residents in Wales had received the worst services after allowing for socio-economic and

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<sup>17</sup> With the clear exception of the reincarnation of the Communities First programme in 2012 which following a spending scandal, became monitored through Results Based Accountability (RBA) and answerable to the Welsh Government. See Dicks (2014) and Chapters Five and Seven for more details.

demographic factors, spend, and past performance” during the first five years of devolution (Andrews and Martin 2010, p.928). One area where devolution was expected to make a substantial difference was the economic position of Wales, especially in relation to employment, poverty and life quality.

#### *2.4.2. The economic positioning of Wales: Poverty, employment and social mobility*

The campaign for devolution was fought on the notion that it would lead to greater economic success and the potential for an ‘economic dividend’ (Morgan 2006; 2007; Andrews and Martin 2010). Unlike in Scotland where the devolution campaign was strongly driven by the nationalist politics of the Scottish National Party, in Wales there were fears that propagating the nationalist argument would only cause Labour supporters to defect to Wales’ nationalist party, Plaid Cymru (Morgan 2006; 2007). This ‘one-partyism’ within Wales therefore led to higher expectations being placed on the Welsh Assembly to perform economically, despite initially having fewer constitutional powers than Scotland. Research has queried the ability of devolution to create an ‘economic dividend’, yet devolution in Wales was expected to bring prosperity to a nation which was, and is still, desperately struggling following rapid deindustrialisation (Morgan 2006; 2007; Andrews and Martin 2010).

Research into the labour market within Wales has highlighted the nation’s struggle to recover from recession and the loss of heavy industry which began in the 1980s (Morgan 2006; Adamson 2016; Lloyd 2016). This induced high levels of unemployment and led to the labour market suffering from chronic job shortages and an oversupply of low-quality and low-paid jobs (Felstead 2009; Dicks 2014), with roughly a quarter of Welsh workers in low-paid jobs (Lloyd 2016). Devolved policy towards the issue of employment did differ from Westminster with the ‘One Wales’ vision for skills and employment seemingly recognising that Westminster’s mass education approach is not the solution to the economic problems within Wales (Felstead 2009). Having said this, university fees for Welsh students studying in Wales were subsidised as an attempt to encourage the academically-able to remain in Wales (Morgan 2006). It is questionable how successful the ‘One Wales’ vision has been in producing an economy based on high-skilled, high-quality jobs as the rising education levels of the Welsh population have exceeded the availability of high-quality jobs, with many in jobs that they are over-qualified to do (Lloyd 2016). This qualification mismatch is a concern for Wales and its economy, demonstrating not only the limitations of devolution to have a significant impact on the structure of the economy (perhaps due to the amount of funding the Welsh Government receives from Westminster), but also the constraints placed upon Welsh citizens trying to move out of poverty’s grips.

As previously mentioned, the Welsh Government's approach to tackling 'social exclusion' included spatial programmes of community development aimed at increasing the engagement of both individuals and communities within society, typically with an employability focus (Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016). Communities First<sup>18</sup>, the flagship area-based policy aimed to target poverty and regeneration, was one of the main policy initiatives of the Welsh Government focused on social mobility, despite the relatively low-profile of social mobility within Welsh policy agenda (SMCPC 2013b). The poverty-focus of the Welsh Government drives social policy initiatives although many are akin to (and outlive) English policies<sup>19</sup> (Adamson 2008; Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016). The SMCPC noted the poverty-driven policy agenda as opposed to a direct social mobility focus, praising the Welsh Government's flagship Communities First programme:

Tackling poverty in deprived areas: for example, through the Communities First programme focusing on improving the quality of life in the most deprived areas of Wales to help make it easier for families to take steps out of poverty, and helping to raise the aspirations of whole communities and to involve residents in developing their own local solutions.

SMCPC (2013b, p.118)

Arguably, social mobility became an implicit aim of the Communities First programme when couched as a policy that aimed to improve and raise the aspirations of both individuals and communities, although lacking the explicit language of social mobility that dominates Westminster policy. This becomes pertinent when looking at Dicks' (2014) evaluation of the then thirteen years of the programme, where she describes the shift from an active citizenship approach to community activation. The programme originally celebrated for its partnership working and community engagement became a prescriptive, target-driven programme which needed to show clear financial accountability. The focus, Dicks (2014) argues, became less about the power of the collective and more about managing the 'risky' behaviour of individuals. As I explore in Chapter Seven, this meant that Communities First began to reflect closely the neoliberal rhetoric surrounding social mobility that was highlighted earlier in this chapter, with a focus on improving 'underperforming' populations. Despite devolution initially offering a different rhetoric, a 'clear red water' between Wales and Westminster, with a sense of a more collaborative and collective approach to social policy, the same policy narrative has eventually emerged. This narrative situates social mobility as an issue of individual self-improvement often in relation to employability, ignoring the structural problems of the labour market and economic insecurity (Lloyd 2016), and people's lives and connections outside of work.

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<sup>18</sup>Communities First ran from 2001 to 2018 across Wales. For more detail about the development of the Communities First programme, see chapters Five and Seven.

<sup>19</sup>For example, Flying Start and its English equivalent Sure Start, an early years policy focused on the development of young children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## *2.5. Lessons from the social mobility policy agenda: A Conclusion*

This chapter introduced the notion of social mobility and how it is constructed and problematised within the political discourse. I have been careful not to get caught up in defining social mobility as it is notoriously difficult to define (as I will explain further in Chapter Three) and the political literature has a limited grasp on academic definitions of social mobility<sup>20</sup>. What this chapter has demonstrated, however, is that political discourse on social mobility is characterised by individualism, which propagates a particular kind of self as being conducive to social mobility and progress (Skeggs 1997; 2004; 2011; Walkerdine 2003; Gillies 2005; Lawler 2018).

I have evidenced the ways in which social mobility rhetoric hinges upon the idea of ‘meritocracy’ and the equality of opportunity; and outlined some critiques of this position, namely that meritocracy legitimises inequality (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Littler 2018). I then explored the idea that social mobility discourse has become psychologised, focusing on working-class ‘lack’ through the construction of the ‘underclass’; use of psychological terminology such as ‘character traits’; and the regulation of working-class parenting.

The chapter questioned one of the policy discourse’s big solutions to social mobility - the expansion of higher education. I argued that there is not infinite ‘room at the top’ for everybody and illustrated how social class inequalities are systemic in the higher education system. Finally, I introduced the context of Welsh devolution and examined whether the socially democratic and collectivist ethic of Wales has impacted upon the Welsh Government’s social policy approach, especially around disadvantaged communities and social mobility. I suggested that despite promising rhetoric and some policy divergence, social policy surrounding poverty and social mobility still echoes the dominant, individualistic narrative propagated in Westminster policy.

One of the main concerns about the policy approach to social mobility is that it is assumed that social mobility in this narrow, individualised form can equate to social progress and justice (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014; Calder 2016; Lawler 2018; Littler 2018). This chapter has questioned the ‘neoliberal justice narrative’ and demonstrated how stigmatising policies aimed at policing the behaviour of the working-classes are distractions from wider structural inequalities such as economic and class inequalities (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Reay 2013; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018). Much of the talk about class is obscured and naturalised in the political literature with terms being used such as character, aspirations, values and background, all of which have arguably been constructed within a moralised framework (Lawler 2018). The failure of the political discourse to consider the wider picture

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<sup>20</sup> See Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; and Goldthorpe 2013 for a more thorough analysis of governmental understandings of social mobility.

suggests that caution should be taken in assuming that social mobility will contribute to making UK society fairer.

I demonstrated that the overly individualistic understanding of social mobility within the policy literature is very much focused on education, income and occupation. Not only is much of the literature targeted at young people, it also reduces people down to the sum of their labour, ignoring life and value outside of work (Pearce 2011; Skeggs 2011; Frayne 2015). It also disregards collective wellbeing and relationships to others as it is encouraged to only focus on individual trajectory (Aldridge 2001; Pearce 2011; Brown 2013; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). As Pearce (2011, p.8) argues, “people aspire to more than just the chance to get their child off to university and up the social ladder: they are interested in their standard of living, quality of life and strength of their social bonds”. To understand how people living in a Welsh working-class community make sense of this dominant social mobility narrative, this research asks: How do residents accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative? This question underpins the findings Chapters, Five and Six, and is directly addressed in Chapter Seven with its explicit focus on ‘traditional’ mobility narratives (those focused on education and work).

The political literature ascribes value to one trajectory, entering higher education and the ‘professions’, but it is unclear where this leaves those who either cannot access this, or do not want to pursue this trajectory (Sennett and Cobb 1977; Fishkin 2014). With policy focusing on aspiration and aiming to help working-class families to strive to ‘do better’, it devalues their current position and way of life as not enough and something to be escaped from (Lawler 1999; Skeggs 2011; Reay 2013; Calder 2016). The chapter explored many of the stigmatising effects of social mobility policy and how value is attributed to middle-class as opposed to working-class values (Skeggs 2011; Reay 2013; Tyler 2013; Shildrick 2018). For working-class people who do attempt to become socially mobile via higher education, their trajectories often entail further inequalities and discomfort (Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Savage et al 2015; Friedman 2016a; Ingram and Abrahams 2016). Although there is cross-party commitment to tackling ‘social mobility’, attempts so far have arguably not resulted in a more equal and fair society.

Having explored the political discourse in detail, the next chapter examines the empirical study of social mobility and its conceptualisation. I introduce the quantitative origins of social mobility studies, before considering how qualitative mobility studies have contributed to the field more recently. The chapter addresses key theoretical issues underpinning this research such as how both social class and social mobility are conceptualised. Through evaluating the approach of both quantitative and qualitative traditions within mobility studies, I justify my approach to social mobility by drawing upon the key theoretical literature that underpins this thesis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **A Question of Measurement? The Conceptualisation of Social Mobility within Academic Literature**

#### *3.1. Introduction*

As discussed in Chapter Two, many social mobility scholars have critiqued governmental reports for their lack of engagement with the academic literature around what constitutes social mobility and how exactly we can measure and understand it (Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013). Even within the academic literature, there are an array of approaches that can be used to study social mobility such as exploring income measures, occupational level, social class or educational level, often making intergenerational comparisons. Following an era where some argued we had seen the ‘death’ of social class (Beck 1992; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Giddens 1998), questions of social mobility measurement are even more pertinent for contemporary mobility researchers.

Indeed, the assumption that social mobility is measurable and that social mobility ‘rates’ are comparable over time holds certain epistemological presuppositions about the nature of social mobility. As Lawler and Payne note (2018, p.3) “social mobility has been staked out as a field in which quantitative analysis of large-scale data is the research method of choice”. In recent years, however, there has been a growing qualitative tradition within social mobility studies, which has explored the subjective experiences of social mobility, often drawing upon a Bourdieusian framework (Friedman 2014; Friedman et al 2015; Loveday 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Bowers-Brown 2016; Ingram and Abrahams 2016; Reay 2018). Social mobility studies are continually developing, often employing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

This chapter aims to outline the development of the quantitative tradition within mobility studies, bringing this up-to-date with an understanding of the current status of social mobility in the UK. It then discusses the introduction of qualitative research, with a particular focus on the reliance of Bourdieusian theory in this area. Following this, I begin to grapple with the sticky issue of social class and how it is theorised in both quantitative and qualitative social mobility research, before outlining how social class is understood in this study. I conclude the chapter by unpicking the normative notions of social mobility that are used in the academic literature, suggesting a reconceptualisation of social mobility. This provides a rationale for the research questions underpinning this study: What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants’ (im)mobility narratives? - and - How do class and gender intersect within participants’ (im)mobility narratives? I then outline the theoretical framework adopted in this study and lay the foundations for the original contribution this research will make to social mobility studies, which will be articulated in the following chapters.

### *3.2. Quantitative foundations: The origins of today's consensus view on social mobility in the UK*

There is a long tradition of quantitative sociological research into social mobility in the UK, most notably the work of Glass (1954) on male social mobility. More recently, the work of what has been described as the 'Nuffield paradigm' stemming from John Goldthorpe and colleagues' work at Oxford University has been influential (Goldthorpe et al 1980; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015). Using the class schema that Goldthorpe devised in the 1970s, the Nuffield Mobility Study used surveys to look at male intergenerational social mobility and the rates of absolute and relative mobility between social classes. The Goldthorpe class schema was based on occupational groupings and became the foundation for what is now called the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, or NS-SEC (Savage et al 2015). The findings from the Nuffield Mobility study have been supported by more recent sociological work and they present a different narrative to that communicated in the political discourse around social mobility.

It is important to have an understanding of two of the main types of social mobility that are measured in quantitative mobility studies, absolute social mobility and relative social mobility<sup>21</sup>. Absolute social mobility refers to the absolute numbers of people from a social group who move to different social positions/groups from their position of origin (usually deemed their parents' position). UK trends suggest that absolute mobility did rise sharply in the post-war golden years, although it now appears to be levelling off (Goldthorpe et al 1980; Aldridge 2001; Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015). Relative social mobility refers to the comparison of chances of those from different social groups being able to move to different social positions/groups. This measure appears to have remained constant over time in the UK, neither rising nor falling, and is arguably a good indicator of the social fluidity in a given society (Aldridge 2001; Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013).

In addition to these two measures, there is intragenerational social mobility, which represents the measure of social mobility over an individual's life course; and intergenerational social mobility, which is more frequently used in political and academic literature and compares social mobility across generations, usually parents (fathers) and children (sons) (Aldridge 2001; Pearce 2011; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015). The main message from this quantitative sociological research is that absolute numbers of people becoming socially mobile is slowing down, whilst relative chances of people becoming socially mobile have stayed stable, despite the peak in the absolute numbers. This is a far cry from the moral panic about declining social mobility rates that

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<sup>21</sup> I should note that this is a simplified engagement with the social mobility measurement literature. For more about the specifics of quantitative measures of social mobility, see Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013; Savage et al 2015.

is presented in the political literature. However, this evidence base presents a problematic conclusion, suggesting that social fluidity across classes has not increased over a long period of time which challenges preconceptions that the UK is an ‘open’ and ‘fair’ society (Goldthorpe et al 1980; Aldridge 2001; Paterson and Iannelli 2007; Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Piketty 2014).

Much of the sociological work surrounding UK social mobility has been neglected in the political literature in favour of a study by a group of economists which suggested that social mobility has rapidly declined (Blanden et al 2001; 2004). While economists traditionally focus on earnings and movements in income distribution as a measure of social mobility, sociologists have tended to focus more on movement across both occupational and class structures, and how inequality is perpetuated through these structures (Aldridge 2001; Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013). Interestingly, despite these well-established social mobility measures and trends highlighted in the quantitative sociological research, the Blanden et al (2001) study did not use these measures conventionally. Their work compared two age cohorts using data from two British birth cohort studies (the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort Study) and compared the social mobility rates of those born in 1958 and 1970 by constructing a variable entitled ‘family income’ (Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013). Their findings concluded that social mobility in the UK is in decline in comparison to other advanced countries and these findings usurped previous sociological findings within the political discourse (Payne 2012; Goldthorpe 2013). The researchers themselves have since questioned the quality of data surrounding intergenerational earnings, which appears to weaken the validity of their conclusion (Blanden et al 2001; 2004; Goldthorpe 2013, p.435; Savage et al 2015). This constant refuting of the common trope that social mobility is in decline has been a feature of quantitative social mobility research over recent decades.

Whether we are looking at economists’ or sociologists’ research on the measurement of social mobility, there are several limitations of the quantitative approach that warrant exploration. Payne (2018) argues that we need to see alternatives to the typical ‘two generations, seven social/occupational classes’ approach to researching social mobility. One of the biggest concerns of these comparative measures is that they often fail to account for changes in both social and occupational structure (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Piketty 2014; Friedman and Savage 2018; Lawler and Payne 2018; Payne 2018).

For example, it can be argued that the increase in absolute rates of social mobility in the post-war ‘Golden Age’ were mainly due to a time which saw the opening of the top of the occupational structure, as demand far outstripped supply for professional and managerial roles; economic growth was at its all-time highest levels; and career progression was not reliant on holding a

degree (Goldthorpe et al 1980; Aldridge 2001; Paterson and Iannelli 2007; Brown 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Piketty 2014; Calder 2016). There was also a decrease in inequality in this period as the post-war economy led to the destruction and re-distribution of assets held by the wealthiest in society (Piketty 2014). The opening at the top was soon to narrow, however, as these ‘golden years’ after both world wars increasingly began to seem like an extraordinary blip - the result of a disastrous, destructive, and unstable few decades of war and economic depression (Brown et al 2011; Piketty 2014).

A further social change has been the position of women in the labour market (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Payne 2018). Most of the traditional quantitative sociological research focused on the comparative mobility rates of men, comparing fathers and sons (Glass 1954; Goldthorpe et al 1980). Therefore, recent critics have suggested that social mobility studies need to explore gender differences between men and women’s opportunities for social mobility and their experiences (Boliver and Byrne 2013; Payne 2018). Society is not static and treating it as a constant when comparing different generations ignores some of these important societal and social changes (Friedman and Savage 2018; Lawler and Payne 2018). Additionally, the reliance on just two cohort studies from 1958 and 1970 in the mobility literature limits the ability to be able to make far-reaching statements about the rates of (income) social mobility in the UK (Goldthorpe 2013).

Many critiques of the quantitative tradition in social mobility studies have been centred around questioning the notion that social mobility is inherently a ‘good thing’ to experience, which is suggested in Goldthorpe’s own qualitative findings<sup>22</sup> (Goldthorpe et al 1980; Lawler 1999; Skeggs 2011; Boliver and Byrne 2013; Reay 2013; Friedman 2014; Bradley 2018; Chapman 2018; Payne and Lawler 2018; Reay 2018). This has led to the development of a qualitative approach to researching social mobility, which has focused on the everyday, cultural and social experiences of being socially mobile. This qualitative work adds to the social mobility literature through exploring subjective experiences of mobility, often drawing upon the theoretical work of Bourdieu.

### *3.3. Introducing experience: The contribution of Bourdieusian research to mobility studies*

In the opening chapter of *Social Mobility for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Everyone a Winner?* Lawler and Payne (2018, p.2) state:

One of our interests is in the extent to which mobile people *experience* [authors’ emphasis] mobility as an unalloyed joy, when they have to ‘dissociate’ themselves from one class and adjust to life in another. While we would not wish to see ‘habitus’ and ‘cultural capital’ becoming established as a narrow new dominant paradigm, we suggest that newer

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<sup>22</sup> See Friedman (2014) for a detailed critique of Goldthorpe et al’s (1980) qualitative research on a subsection of the large sample from their quantitative work.

conceptualisations of class, based on Bourdieusian insights about capitals, cultures, and habitus, can offer fresh insights into mobility outcomes.

The qualitative approaches to researching social mobility in Lawler and Payne's (2018) edited collection draw largely upon Bourdieu's theoretical work, particularly the dissociative role of cultural capital and habitus in experiences of social mobility (Bradley 2018; Friedman and Savage 2018; Gardner et al 2018; Mallman 2018; Reay 2018). However, qualitative mobility research began earlier than this, often seen as originating within cultural feminist work that draws upon Bourdieu's theories such as Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (1999). To appreciate Bourdieu's influence in qualitative social mobility studies, it is important to define two key concepts: habitus and capital. In their book arguing the importance of Bourdieusian theory to contemporary sociological research, Burke et al (2016, p.2) define habitus as "norms, values and dispositions inculcated via the family, education and to a lesser extent the environment", and capital as "particular resources that individuals have access to which can be invested or exchanged for goods – tangible or otherwise". There are three types of capital, economic, social and cultural, and these can be used to situate people within hierarchical social spaces. A fourth capital, symbolic capital, refers to prestige and positive recognition through attributes such as authority and charisma (Reay 2004; McKenzie 2016). Symbolic capital is usually recognised when a high volume of 'legitimate' economic, social and/or cultural capital has been accrued. I will discuss in closer detail the theorisation of social class in mobility studies in section 3.4, but for now it is important to be familiar with what Burke et al (2016, p.2) term Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'.

As qualitative social mobility research is not concerned with *measuring* social mobility, the term 'social mobility' is rarely explicitly defined or operationalised. Much of the work in this area aims to uncover the everyday experiences of social mobility and the messy and complicated practice of adjusting to a new social location. This approach utilises methods such as ethnography, narrative approaches and in-depth interviews (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Bathmaker et al 2016; Friedman 2016a; Mallman 2018). For example, Lawler's (1999) work draws upon interviews undertaken with seven white British women who originated from working-class families but now locate themselves as middle-class. Similarly, Friedman (2016a) utilised a lifecourse interview technique with thirty-nine upwardly mobile respondents from the UK Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Project. Both Lawler (1999) and Friedman (2016a) use Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain the painful experience of participants' social dislocation, often using the term 'disrupted habitus' or 'habitus clivé' to describe the incongruence between the class positioning inscribed on the self from class of origin, and new class positioning following social mobility.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, in new social fields such as higher education or professional workplaces where disrupted habitus is often experienced, there is concern by those who are upwardly mobile about being 'found out' to be an outsider or being accused of pretentiousness

(Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Friedman 2014; Ingram and Abrahams 2016; Mallman 2018). However, Ingram and Abrahams (2016) have argued that experiencing a disrupted habitus does not always have to be a painful experience, instead advocating the occupation of an adaptive ‘third space’, which allows for greater reflexivity and the preservation of habitus origins.

Although not focused explicitly on social mobility, some earlier longitudinal qualitative research has examined gender and social class, particularly how notions of a dominant self-improving discourse were responded to by both working and middle-class women. Both Skeggs (1997) and Walkerdine et al (2001) demonstrated how working-class women attempted to defend themselves against fears of not being ‘good enough’ or ‘failing’ when following certain life trajectories. Mothering and caring were often essential to creating a ‘respectable’ self, whilst proving they were ‘okay’ and ensuring they ‘had enough’ to sustain their families were often the prime ambitions of the working-class mothers in these studies (and other studies which explore gender and class such as Gillies 2005; Casey 2008; May 2008; and McKenzie 2015). The pathologisation and othering of the working-class will be explored in more detail in the next section, however, it is important to highlight the impact of such rich, qualitative research in bringing women’s experiences of class and life trajectories to the fore, even though social mobility was not the primary focus.

Walkerdine et al (2001, p.38) recognise the value of Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts in understanding class as, “Bourdieu’s theorisation of social class highlights the sensitivity of our cultural antennae to the qualitative, subjective, micro-distinctions through which social class location is expressed and understood”, however, they draw upon a psycho-social approach. Skeggs (1997, p.10) draws directly from Bourdieu’s theoretical tools and develops them by warning that the different types of capital “are essentially metaphors” and that Bourdieu’s work fails to bring out the “affective aspects of inequality” relating to class, gender and sexuality. Issues of exclusion, othering, and what constitutes ‘value’ underpin these qualitative inquiries, which are pertinent when considering who is the focus of the social mobility discourse and who has access to the resources to become socially mobile (Sennett and Cobb 1977; Skeggs 1997; 2004; 2005; 2011; Lawler 1999; 2005; Walkerdine et al 2001; Walkerdine 2003; Tyler 2013; 2015; McKenzie 2015; Morgan 2015).

One key area where Bourdieu’s work has had an influence is the study of education and social mobility. A body of work around the aspirations of young people has drawn upon Bourdieu’s capitals as a way of analysing the dynamic formation of young people’s aspirations and what helps or hinders their success (Archer et al 2014; Bathmaker et al 2016; Bowers-Brown 2016; Evans 2016). Other work has focused explicitly on higher education as a vehicle for social mobility, using Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and capitals to analyse the differing experiences

of both working-class and middle-class students (Loveday 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016; Abrahams 2017). Loveday's (2015) work specifically questions the notion of the middle-class university being the 'creditor' to working-class students, providing them with the 'correct' capitals to succeed. In her research, Loveday found a certain scepticism towards the deficit view of working-class culture, as participants stated they were not trying to 'escape' their origins or to become middle-class through their participation in higher education.

The way working-class and middle-class students use their capital resources in the labour market also differs as Abrahams' (2017) work shows. In her research, Abrahams (2017) demonstrates that working-class students are less likely to use any of their social capital linkages to get ahead as they felt the need to prove themselves as belonging in a field where their habitus may not be aligned. In contrast, middle-class students were more willing to use their social capital know-how to get ahead and get a foot in the door of their desired career, relatively unencumbered by habitus disruption. There has also been longitudinal work focussing on the bigger picture of getting in, on, and out of higher education and the impact of this on social mobility trajectories. Bathmaker et al's (2016) book focuses on the findings of the Paired Peers project, which followed working-class and middle-class students in both the University of the West of England (UWE, a new university) and the University of Bristol (an 'elite' university). Using Bourdieu's theoretical tools, the research is an example of how higher education is socially stratified so that those with 'legitimate' capitals can get ahead whilst others struggle. As highlighted in Chapter Two, section 2.3.3, it is arguably about being able to 'play the game' correctly in order to succeed (Bathmaker et al 2013; Goldthorpe 2013; Friedman et al 2015; Savage et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016).

Although there is a strong association with the theoretical work of Bourdieu and qualitative social mobility studies, it may be time to question this dominance. Skeggs (2011) argued that Bourdieu's theoretical framework fails to address the affective aspects of inequality experienced in relation to class, gender and sexuality:

What Bourdieu cannot explain is the formation of any sort of personhood with value for those who are the source of labour, the non-propelling future-accruing subject with the wrong capitals, those who cannot access the fields of exchange to convert, accrue or generate value for themselves. For Bourdieu these subjects appear with negative capital, as lack, deficit, a void of value.

Skeggs (2011, pp.501-502)

As Skeggs (2011) contends, Bourdieu's theory can easily work to attribute those without the 'legitimate' forms of capital as lacking and deficit. Crompton and Scott (2005) also argue that using Bourdieu's theory alone is inadequate as there needs to be both a cultural and economic appreciation of class. The issue of hierarchy and class stratification in relation to Bourdieu is explored in closer detail in the next section. One of the key critiques of the qualitative social

mobility tradition more widely is that despite its theoretical critiques of social mobility, such as the notion of needing to ‘escape’ your current social positioning and the devaluing of working-class culture, it still does not really question normative understandings of social mobility (Skeggs 2011; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). The focus of much of the research explored in this section is on *individuals’* difficult experiences of social mobility, still buying into the notion that social mobility is an *individual* responsibility and experience. The attention given to education and employment again exemplifies this individualistic experience suggesting one maps out their trajectory in isolation from their relationships to people and places. I will extend this critique further when I argue for a reconceptualisation of social mobility in section 3.5. However, this section has begun to problematise a tradition that has been highly reliant on the theoretical work of Bourdieu, and which does not forcefully question the foundations of individualistic and compartmentalised notions of social mobility.

### *3.4. The elephant in the room: The place of class in social mobility research*

In the discussion so far, both qualitative and quantitative approaches appear to understand social mobility as a movement in social location, or more specifically, social class. It is essential to understand how social class is conceptualised and theorised not only in social mobility research, but more broadly within sociology. In his pursuit to make class a distinctive and scientific category isolated from other influential characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, Goldthorpe worked carefully to produce a more nuanced social class schema than the previous Registrar General’s schema (Savage et al 2015). With a focus on occupation and income, Goldthorpe developed previous social class categorisations by moving beyond the simplistic manual/non-manual worker distinction, creating more class groupings and including a self-employment category. The work of Goldthorpe (Goldthorpe et al 1980) and the creation of the NS-SEC class classificatory system has been highly influential in quantitative approaches to measuring social class and thus social mobility, as it operationalises class as a measurement of occupational categorisation. For Payne (2018, p.22) this approach sees social mobility as a labour market process, and as Savage et al (2015) acknowledge, this comes at the expense of not appreciating the intersectionality of class and issues of morality that are tied up with class.

Providing a historical lens on the moralisation of social class, Skeggs (1997) and Walkerdine (2003) explain how class distinctions have been pertinent since the Victorian era. Walkerdine (2003) describes how class became tied up with morality at the time of Charles Booth’s mapping of poverty and crime in London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century where certain areas were associated with squalor and moral deprivation. Similarly, Welsh scholars have documented the history of discourses surrounding poverty, morality and lack within Wales, particularly around the position of women in Welsh society (Jones 1991; Aaron 1994; Beddoe 2000). When taking a qualitative

approach to social mobility it is therefore not enough to see class as solely a measurement of occupational level as class is not an objective, economic category (Walkerdine et al 2001). Class is arguably subjective, tied up with an array of moral norms and values, and is not only experienced in the workplace as the NS-SEC classification suggests (Skeggs 1997; 2004; Walkerdine et al 2001; Tyler 2015).

Taking a more subjective approach, it can be argued that class is experienced in the everyday and is relational and dynamic. Sennett and Cobb's (1977) influential work on American blue-collar workers demonstrated the hidden injuries of class and how class is tied up with emotion and the everyday. Workers evaluated their value and 'worth' in comparison to others whose positions in society were revered. Sennett and Cobb noted the emotional pain associated with class difference in America in what they term the 'injurious game of achievement'. They concluded that there is a need to move away from a pyramid of achievement towards more diverse understandings of success. This work has underpinned many qualitative researchers' conceptualisations of social class and social mobility (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Friedman 2016a; Lawler and Payne 2018).

When it comes to understanding class, qualitative research has argued that class does not just consist of empty positions within a hierarchy that are waiting to be filled (Lawler 2005). It is important to remain critical of classificatory class analysis as such classificatory systems can work to reproduce inequalities when the values underlying the classification are not questioned (Skeggs 1997; Tyler 2015). As Tyler (2015, p.507) states:

The most effective forms of class analysis are concerned not with undertaking classification per se, but rather with exposing and critiquing the consequences of classificatory systems and the forms of value, judgements and norms they establish in human societies.

Whichever way class is conceptualised, it will always be embedded in the interests of the theorist conducting the research (Skeggs 2004). The use of class as a collective analytical category did however lose its dominance within sociological research, at the time where post-modern scholars were emphasising how post-industrial society was becoming more individualised, coinciding with the era of 'Third Way' politics and 'reflexive modernity'<sup>23</sup> (Beck 1992; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Giddens 1998). As social class was no longer deemed a relevant concept when seeking to understand societal inequalities, it was the individual, not social class grouping, that became the analytical category of interest (Bottero 2004; Gillies 2005; Savage et al 2015). Beck has described class as a 'zombie category', a type of analysis that lives on even though class is 'dead' (Beck and Willms 2004). Social class analysis therefore became outmoded and dropped off the sociological agenda although it has recently resurged (Gillies 2005; Savage et al 2015; Tyler 2015). The exception to this decline was the work by feminist scholars, as noted above, who

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Two, Section 2.1.2 for more information on reflexive modernity and 'Third Way' politics.

highlighted the salience of the everyday experience of class in women's lives (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Walkerdine et al 2001). Even though class fell out of favour in both sociological and lay understandings of society and inequalities, its reproductive powers continue to take hold, even if class identities are explicitly rejected (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Savage et al 2015; Tyler 2015). Both Skeggs (1997) and Tyler (2015) note how class is experienced as a struggle against classification, as classification carries certain connotations of morality, value and worth.

For the purpose of this study, I will be drawing upon these culturally-informed theories of social class that emphasise the dialogic and discursive formations of class, as well as its relationality and intersectionality with other characteristics such as gender and place. This approach also taps into the issue of morality and class, particularly the attribution/misrecognition of value (Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2005; 2011; Evans 2006; Bradley 2014; McKenzie 2015; 2016). The construction of what is deemed 'respectable' and what is deemed as 'other', or a form of 'disgust' in a process of distancing, is important in this research as I aim to understand how social class manifests within the social (im)mobility narratives of my participants. The work of scholars such as Lawler (1999; 2005), Skeggs (1997; 2004; 2011) and Tyler (2013; 2015) has therefore influenced the approach taken in this study. Although Bottero (2004) has argued that these more implicit and cultural approaches to class move the attention away from class as a collective and the need for class consciousness, I do not agree with her assertion that this leads to an individualised, hierarchical system of differentiation. As I explain in the next section, I will be looking at how social class is entangled in what Skeggs (2011) terms 'relational sociality', which constructs notions of belonging and togetherness, as opposed to individualised understandings of social class and social mobility. Although social class was not explicitly acknowledged on an individual level by most participants, its inherent nature helped to construct local values and a sense of anchoring to the community in which they lived. Both Walkerdine et al (2001) and Skeggs (1997; 2005) note the ubiquitous nature of class although recognise that defining class is increasingly difficult.

In a recent attempt to define class and create a new class schema, placing class firmly back on the (quantitative) mainstream sociological agenda, Mike Savage and colleagues worked with the findings from their Great British Class Survey (GBCS from herein) which they state was the UK's biggest survey on social class (Savage et al 2015). Through drawing upon a Bourdieusian perspective, the aim of the GBCS was to remedy some of the previous critiques aimed at Goldthorpe's class schema and NS-SEC, by constructing class as the sum of not only a person's economic capital, but also their social and cultural capital. This led to the creation of a new seven-class categorisation system and an argument that sociologists should be focusing more of their attention on studying elites rather than the middle-classes, although there has been some criticism of how Savage et al (2015) define 'elite' (see Mills 2015). Savage et al (2015) use the high

numbers of respondents<sup>24</sup> to the GBCS as evidence of the UK's quiet obsession with social class. Although drawing upon a wider cultural understanding of class using Bourdieu, there are many issues with appropriating Bourdieusian theory to create a social class schema (Bradley 2014; Latimer and Munro 2015; Mills 2015).

One critique of the findings from the GBCS is similar to Skeggs' (2011) critique of Bourdieu in the previous section. Bradley (2014) notes that this approach to understanding social class is gradational as opposed to relational because it categorises based on accumulation and possession of the three capitals, rather than understanding the relationships between differing classes. Both Skeggs (2005) and Bradley (2014) suggest this may be a product of the consumer culture of the UK where 'middle-class possessive individualism' is dominant. Latimer and Munro (2015) critique this further by suggesting that it is important to see culture as 'world-making' rather than reduced to individual ownership.

Linking back to Tyler's (2015) assertion that it is important to question classificatory systems to avoid reproducing the inequalities inherent within them, Bradley (2014) is critical of the limited conceptualisation of cultural capital within Savage et al's (2015) work. Bradley argues that the distinction between popular and high culture appears old-fashioned and that many of the activities that working-class communities engage in were simply missing in this analysis of cultural capital, therefore positioning working-class culture as lacking. By constructing a hierarchy that deems certain activities as 'higher culture' than others, there is already an implicit ascription of value given to particular activities (namely those more 'middle-class' activities). This critique has been applied to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital more widely as what is seen as legitimate capital, or what Bourdieu terms symbolic capital, is only accessible to certain types of people, whilst those without such capitals can appear as lacking (Skeggs 1997; 2004; 2005; 2011; Lawler 1999; 2005; Tyler 2015). Despite this ambitious, contemporary attempt to define and conceptualise class through a multidimensional Bourdieusian approach, there are limitations to using such a capital-possession perspective. The approach to class taken in this study is arguably more nuanced and localised, focusing instead on the relational aspects of class, and how people map out and understand themselves and their community through constructions of belonging and othering. This contrasts with the more quantitatively-informed approach of Savage and colleagues (2015) and therefore requires a reconceptualisation of what is understood as 'social mobility'.

### *3.5. Reconceptualising social mobility: Locating the contribution of this research*

Having explored in detail how both social class and social mobility have been understood within political discourse and sociological literature, I will now explain how social mobility has been

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<sup>24</sup> See Mills (2015) for a critique of the GBCS's self-selecting sample and the demographics represented.

conceptualised within this study. As explained above, I am arguing for an approach to social class that is situated in the everyday and is localised, dynamic, spatial and relational, and this requires a reworking of the traditional individualised notion of social mobility. The intersectionality of class means that it is difficult to explore class in isolation from other factors such as place and gender. Two key absences from the sociological understandings of social mobility are the role of place-attachment and (gendered) relationality. Therefore, this research is aiming to answer two key questions: What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants' (im)mobility narratives? And: How do class and gender intersect within participants' (im)mobility narratives? I will now explain the importance of these questions and the need to widen the understanding of social mobility.

Social mobility discourses often ignore attachment to place, community, and the people within that community when encouraging narratives of movement and improvement. Consequently, it is important to understand how such attachments may impact upon narratives of social (im)mobility. Exploring the dynamic, performative relationship of both class and place can enable an understanding of processes of belonging and exclusion within a community (Watt 2006; 2009; Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013; McKenzie 2015; Morgan 2015; Jeffery 2018). The construction of places of belonging and exclusion can tell us about meaning-making and value amongst particular groups of people. For example, Watt (2009) and Benson and Jackson (2012) demonstrate the relational and dynamic aspects of social class by exploring how middle-class residents construct boundaries and distinctions to maintain their attachment to place. As explicit class identities are often rejected, place-based identities can help illuminate social class identities and inequalities (Skeggs 1997; Paton 2013, p.86).

In the Welsh context, Morgan (2015) discusses the negotiations of subjectivity amongst female working-class mature students who are very much embedded in classed relational, cultural, historical, geographical, and temporal contexts. Utilising a psycho-social approach, Morgan demonstrates the importance of both belonging and othering in the difficult subjectivity negotiations associated with female working-class social mobility. The work of Paton (2013), McKenzie (2015) and Jeffery (2018) demonstrates how working-class communities construct place-attachment and how value is attributed within working-class communities, especially those at risk of regeneration and displacement. This will inevitably have an impact upon mobility trajectories as residents anchor themselves and their identities to their community.

Place acts as an arena in which to compare and construct yourself in comparison to others around you (Mannay 2015a, p.111). Taylor (2010, p.15) argues that place has two functions as both an identity resource and an identity mirror. Often attachment to place is constructed over generations as families anchor themselves to a particular community and have strong kinship ties within the

locality (MacDonald et al 2005; Taylor 2010; McKenzie 2015). Notions of what is valuable and what is respectable are tied up within a form of relational sociality present in a community (Watt 2009; Skeggs 2011; Benson and Jackson 2012; McKenzie 2015; Walkerdine 2016). Attachment to place, place-making, and the relationships formed within a specific locality are therefore tied up intimately with class (and gender, as I explore next). With a dominant social *mobility* discourse that encourages social and often physical movement, I am seeking to find out more about social fixity as constructed through place and class identities, and the impact of this upon (im)mobility narratives and life trajectories.

It is hard to ignore the gendered nature of roles in both the family and the community, and how this reflects within mobility narratives. Much of the feminist research I have discussed in this chapter has explored the social mobility experiences of working-class women and their attempts at 'self-improvement' (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Walkerdine et al 2001; Morgan 2015). This has helped to demonstrate the interconnected nature of both gender and class and how this can impact upon social mobility narratives. In this literature and more widely in gender studies, there has been a large focus on the gendered roles of working-class women both within the home and the community (see a wide range of literature including: Davidoff 1976; Pilcher 1994; Skeggs 1997; Dempsey 2000; Warren 2003; Hollway 2006; Casey 2008; May 2008; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Mannay 2015b; 2016).

Common across much of this literature is the idea that working-class women are trying to construct acceptable, respectable femininities and situate themselves as respectable caring selves with much value attributed to the feminine caring role. This role is transmitted across generations as women are central to holding together families and the caring relationships within both families and communities. This is often known as a form of relational selfhood (Skeggs 2005; 2011; Hollway 2006; Walkerdine 2010; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Studdert 2016). Walkerdine's (2010) research in a Welsh post-industrial community demonstrated that the maintenance of a 'gendered affective community' is central to providing consistency in a time when traditional masculine roles are under threat. Also situated in Wales, Ward (2016) discusses how working-class boys in a post-industrial community manage to construct acceptable forms of masculinity in a community that has a deep-rooted industrial history. This literature highlights the importance of gendered roles within (Welsh) working-class communities and the intersection of gender not only with class, but with kinship, a sense of belonging, and communal maintenance. This research aims to understand whether this form of (gendered) relational selfhood is salient within the chosen community and how gender and class, alongside kinship ties and community, impact upon social mobility narratives. This also ties into the broader research question outlined in Chapter Two: How do residents accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?

What this study seeks to question is the individualising nature of the dominant social mobility discourse, which both the political discourse and sociological literature appear to unquestionably accept. Instead of advocating the ‘neoliberal project of the self’ and highlighting the ways that this needs to be made more accessible to people from working-class backgrounds, I am suggesting an opening up of the concept of social mobility, reconceptualising it as a collective rising instead of an individual one (Boliver and Byrne 2013; McKenzie 2015; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). This requires a re-evaluation of the value attached to a multiplicity of opportunities and trajectories (Sennett and Cobb 1977; Fishkin 2014). Instead of using the traditional approach of conceptualising social mobility as a movement in income or occupational grouping; or using a more Bourdieusian model to understand social mobility as an accumulation of capitals, I am exploring collective (im)mobility based on an understanding of the self as relational (Walkerdine et al 2001; Skeggs 2005; 2011; Walkerdine 2016; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018).

It would be epistemologically incompatible with the approach taken to this research to assume that social mobility is an objective entity that can be measured, which is why a more subjective, qualitative approach is used to understand social class and its intertwining relationship with place and gender when exploring mobility narratives. Although I have not explicitly defined social mobility, this research infers a breaking down of the term into two parts. I argue that the ‘social’ of social mobility should refer to the importance of community, place-making and attachment, belonging, and kinship. ‘Mobility’, I argue, should refer to the movement and improvement of an entire community where the focus is on investing in collective mobility as opposed to individual mobility. This reconceptualisation of social mobility is the underlying argument and main overarching theoretical contribution of this thesis. The idea of collective mobility was arguably what underpinned the original vision of the Welsh Government’s anti-poverty initiative ‘Communities First’. However, as I explore in Chapter Seven, this vision became progressively more about individuals than about communities.

### *3.6. Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have outlined the development of social mobility studies within sociology in the UK, first by exploring the quantitative tradition and its conclusions around UK mobility rates; then discussing the more recent development of qualitative social mobility research, which is largely influenced by the theoretical work of Bourdieu. I have critically explored both traditions and how they conceptualise not only social mobility but also social class, using these critiques to develop the theoretical position taken in this research towards social mobility and social class. I have concluded the chapter by reconceptualising social mobility, outlining why my research questions are important, and the original contribution that this research makes to the field of social mobility studies.

What I have aimed to demonstrate in this chapter is the theoretical challenges of researching social mobility, especially when the aim of knowledge production is to classify and define - as is the case in quantitative mobility research. The qualitative tradition, however, also struggles theoretically with the dominance of Bourdieusian theory and an individualised approach to understanding experiences of mobility (usually examining experiences of higher education). What I argue is that both traditions fail to explicitly question whether social mobility is something that should be strived for in its current, individualised nature. The approach this research takes therefore concerns a widening of the concept of social mobility, which is situated within the local, everyday, dynamic relations in one specific working-class community. I argue that social mobility needs to be considered on a collective level as opposed to solely an individual one (Boliver and Byrne 2013; McKenzie 2015; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). I also suggest that social mobility discourses ignore the role that place-attachment, place-making, gender relations and kinship ties may play in mobility narratives. This line of argument underpins the three findings chapters, Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

As being socially mobile is often associated with a movement of social class, it has been important to outline how I have theorised class within this study. I have paid attention to the intersectional nature of class, drawing upon culturally-informed theories of class that highlight its intersectionality and relationality, especially with gender and place (Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2005; 2011; Benson and Jackson 2012; Tyler 2013; 2015; Jeffery 2018). In Chapter Four, I explain how I understand the dialogic and discursive formations of class within participants' narratives. The aim of this conceptualisation of social class is to go beyond the limits of quantitative measures of class and the limits of a Bourdieusian capital-accrual model of class (Skeggs 2011; Tyler 2015). I have taken a nuanced and localised approach that focuses on the relational aspects of class in the everyday, and how people understand themselves and others through their discursive constructions of boundaries demarcating who belongs, what is valuable and what is respectable (Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2005; 2011; Evans 2006; McKenzie 2015). It is through this approach that I aim to illuminate how class, and its intertwined relationship with place and gender, feature within the mobility narratives of participants in this study. The next chapter will explore in detail the methodology and methods used in this research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Research Strategy and Methodology

#### *4.1. Introduction*

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the practicalities and complexities of utilising a multi-method, ethnographic approach to understanding social mobility narratives. As this research adopted a social constructionist, discursive approach, I argue that the data created is co-constructed with the participants, inextricably weaving me into the research process (Burr 2003). This chapter is necessarily reflexive, as I situate myself across the multiple research encounters that included community fieldwork, interviews with community workers, and interviews with families inside their homes. The multi-faceted methodological approach taken required a lengthy chapter, which could reflect upon the multiple stages of getting in, on and out of the field. The chapter aims to guide the reader through my research journey, drawing upon fieldnote reflections throughout to highlight some of the methodological complexities encountered along the way. The messiness and detail provided in this chapter reflects the intricacies of situating research in the everyday meaning-making of participants, whilst providing clear rationale for how the research strategy was suited to answering the research questions posed in Chapters Two and Three.

The chapter begins by mapping out both the methodology and design underpinning the study, before introducing the fieldsite and some ethical issues surrounding the anonymisation of the area. The introduction to the research site is minimalistic as the best way of understanding a community arguably involves listening to the narratives of those who reside there. Therefore, Chapters Five and Six describe the community in much richer detail, drawing upon the participants' narratives.

The next section introduces the participants, who are community workers and local families, and discusses the issues of representation, validity and robustness of this study. This leads to a section describing entry into the research site, documenting my role within the community as a volunteer and reflecting upon experiences in the field.

The chapter then gives considerable attention to the creation of data in interviews, documenting the practical, ethical and methodological issues experienced. I describe how I used ethnographic interviewing techniques and the impact of my positioning as an English researcher in a Welsh locale. The chapter addresses some of the challenges of conducting research within family homes and evaluates the use of visual methods with both adults and children. It then briefly describes how I negotiated my way out of the field and explains the methods of data keeping and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes by drawing the sections together and providing a pathway to the first findings chapter.

## *4.2. Research methodology and design*

Research questions, methods and analysis are all intertwined and influenced by the researcher's preferred methodology, including their epistemological and ontological assumptions. This section will highlight the study's design, methods and methodology, and why these were most appropriate for addressing the research questions.

This research was a small-scale, in-depth, multi-method, qualitative study of one community influenced by various ethnographic works (Skeggs 1997; Williamson 2004; Evans 2006; McKenzie 2015; Ward 2016). An ethnographic approach was undertaken, entailing fourteen months in the field and the collation of a vast range of fieldnotes, participant observation, interviews, and visual methods. With the aim of exploring how narratives of mobility are constructed and intertwine with notions of place-attachment, social class and gender within a working-class community, the use of a variety of methods was deemed appropriate to understand these constructions across differing settings, within the home and the community. The research questions this study sought to attend to are:

- How do participants accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?
- What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants' (im)mobility narratives?
- How do class and gender intersect within participants' (im)mobility narratives?

Interview data were generated from interviews with both community workers and families (see Appendices A and B). Although often criticised as being an overused method that mimics society's obsession with a confessional 'interview society', this does not stop the construction of these accounts from being of analytical interest (Atkinson and Delamont 2006). Story-telling is a device used by people as a way of organising and constructing events and subsequently, subjectivity (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Skeggs 1997; Wetherell 1998; Edley 2001; Kraus 2006; Taylor 2006; 2010). Subscribing to a social constructionist, discursive approach, this research derives from the premise that there are no singular 'truths' or reality, and that narratives produced within the interview setting are essentially intersubjective performances of identity work influenced by social and cultural context (Edley 2001; Atkinson and Coffey 2002; Nightingale and Cromby 2002; Burr 2003; Atkinson and Delamont 2006; Taylor 2006).

The accounts garnered in this research should therefore not be seen as an insight into the inner psychological lives of the participants, but as a co-construction produced between the participants and researcher within the given context. These accounts provide interesting analytical insights not only into participants' subjectivities, but also my own, in response to the discursive positioning and the larger social meanings that are drawn upon (Taylor 2006). This approach was adopted to

illuminate the construction and negotiation of social mobility within narratives, and how social class, place, and gender feature in these constructions by participants.

To provide a more rounded view of the community and the families involved, fieldnotes from participant observation at community events, and after interviews, were recorded. To add a different, more relaxed dimension to family interviews, visual methods were also used (including drawing for children, the use of maps of the area, and the showing of photographs). Fieldnotes were not incorporated, however, to provide external ‘truths’ or additional weight to interview data. Coffey (1999, p.1) calls for researchers to be more reflexive in their practice by recognising that “...fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity *work*” [author’s emphasis] and even throughout researchers’ reflexive accounts, subjectivity and narratives are being constructed in a certain way based on the researcher’s interpretations of the world (Burman 1997; Coffey 1999; Burr 2003; Atkinson and Delamont 2006). The same stands for visual artefacts produced, none of which provide an authentic ‘true’ representation of participants’ voices (Mand 2012; Mannay 2013b). When representing and analysing the data, it was therefore important to bear in mind not only the social and cultural context that the data was created in, but also the subjective positioning of the researcher. There may be multiple ways to read the data, but by being transparent, I will clearly explain how I reached my interpretations.

#### *4.2.1. A note on the use of the visual*

Often researchers who use visual and creative methods are attempting to create more participatory research where participants are actively involved in influencing the shape and design of the research project, usually with the aim of giving voice to marginalised groups (see for example: Packard 2008; Woodley-Baker 2009; Mannay 2010; Gillies and Robinson 2012; Johnson et al 2012; Lomax 2012a; Mand 2012; Brady and Brown 2013; Smith 2019). Although some visual and creative methods were used in this research, this work was neither inherently participatory nor a ‘visual’ study. Three child participants produced visual artefacts, but with adults it was more the showing of photographs and pointing to places on a map of the community that aided the interview process. Therefore, the amount of visual data produced was relatively small.

Despite the unstructured and loose approach to the research encounter, my agenda as a researcher still ultimately influenced what was produced both orally and visually in the research setting (Luttrell 2010; Lomax 2012a; Mand 2012; Mannay 2013b). The purpose of using these visual approaches in the research encounter was mainly a strategy to make the session engaging and interesting, rather than an attempt at making the research participatory or to ‘give voice’. However, using visual techniques provided a way to animate the narratives being told, aiding the participant-researcher interaction.

### 4.3. *The research site: Hiraeth, a forgotten suburb*

This section introduces the research site to the reader and provides rationale for why this particular research site was chosen. I also return to the theoretical relationship between place and class. There is scant detail about the community of Hiraeth presented here because ultimately the best narratives of Hiraeth come from those who live there, and these are explored in Chapters Five and Six. Being a ‘double outsider’ was pertinent to my positioning within the community, and I explain how many personal characteristics, such as nationality, influenced the research encounter. This section concludes by discussing an important ethical dilemma around anonymisation, and I justify why I deemed it appropriate not to reveal the identity of the fieldsite.

#### 4.3.1. *Why Hiraeth?*

*Perhaps this does not sound very alluring. Perhaps these often marginalised people do not appear at first glance to have a great deal of interest about them. But even dingy semis on outer-ring estates can have sunflowers growing in their gardens (Abrams 2002, p.2).*

The area of Hiraeth<sup>25</sup> was decided upon due to its overlooked and under-researched status both within academia and community development work within Wales. Hiraeth contrasts with many marginalised areas, which are hyper-stigmatised and consistently represented negatively. For example; Byrne, Elliott and Williams 2016’s work on Merthyr Tydfil, and Lomax’s work in a deprived community in England 2012a; 2012b. Hiraeth is essentially a forgotten suburb that has many complexities including spatial, classed and economic divides. Drawing upon Abrams’ analogy (2002, p.1), if the people of Hiraeth were houses, they “would be parked on some 1960s outer-ring estate, ignored and forgotten”.

It is essential not to ignore the intimate linking between place-based identity and social class. As I explored in Chapter Three, place-based attachment can be seen as an expression of class identity and class inequalities, and by looking through a place-focused lens, we can explore the relational and neighbourhood aspects of social class (Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013, p.85). Place-based identities allow for the expression of typical class-based identities without explicit class identification (Skeggs 1997; Paton 2013, p.86). Both class and place-based identities are arguably interwoven and dynamic, often drawing upon notions of respectability and value within a relational sociality (Watt 2009; Taylor 2010; Skeggs 2011; Benson and Jackson 2012; McKenzie 2015; Walkerdine 2016). Mannay (2015a, p.111) recognises place as “an arena where people are actively engaged in a process of constructing themselves through the complexities of difference and similarity”. Therefore, place is an important feature in the formation of identities and is pivotal to understanding social (im)mobility narratives.

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<sup>25</sup> The reasons for anonymisation are discussed in section 4.3.3 *A note about ethics*.

The aim of this research was to move beyond the minimal understandings of Hiraeth, and to illuminate the area with residents' accounts about their local community. This research provided a rare opportunity for those who live and work in Hiraeth to tell their stories. Through these stories, it is hoped that a richer understanding about everyday experiences can be gained and more can be learned about the construction of mobility narratives. A single site was chosen because it allows for a level of richness and complexity that would not have been possible if I had focused on multiple localities. In fact, through conducting this research I have found that even a single site is really a multiplicity of socially meaningful locations.

Hiraeth is a predominantly Welsh, white working-class community, and as the political social mobility discourse focuses on the 'lack' of the working-classes, it was essential to see how such a community responds to this discourse, which helps to answer the research questions posed. Hiraeth is an urban suburb of the south Wales city Pencaer<sup>26</sup>. Being in a Welsh locale allowed an exploration of mobility narratives within a devolved context, as opposed to much mobility work that is often focused within England.

On a more practical note, Hiraeth was easily accessible, and there was a clear opening to spend a consistent amount of time in the area. There was a need for volunteers in the community and this was advertised around the time I was looking to begin fieldwork. Being only a short bus ride away, it meant I could get to Hiraeth at short notice for any volunteering opportunity. Despite its proximity on public transport, there was a spatial distance between myself and the research site, allowing for reflection and space between the fieldwork and the fieldnotes. I explore the consequences of being an outsider to the community in the next section.

My motivations behind choosing to study Hiraeth are also linked to my research interests more widely. As a working-class academic, my academic interest is working-class representation and social justice. Having been a potentially 'good example' of working-class social mobility, I had a desire to explore others' narratives, and how they construct their accounts to appease (or not) the wider social mobility discourse. Having left my family home, I was intrigued to talk to people who had done the same in the name of mobility, and those who have not. Experiencing the beginning of my mobility narrative in England, I wanted to use this research as an opportunity to learn more about mobility in Wales. Therefore, Hiraeth met this requirement as a strong, traditional, working-class community within Wales.

This section offered the reader an initial introduction to the research site. In Chapter Five, given its emphasis on place-attachment and belonging, there will be a detailed description of Hiraeth drawn from participants' narratives. This will explore the historical development of Hiraeth, its

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<sup>26</sup> This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the area.

demographics, and its designation as a 'Communities First' area. This foundation will support the presentation and analysis of participants' accounts, visual productions, and researcher fieldnotes, which centralise the importance and meanings of place.

#### *4.3.2. The 'double outsider'- Being an English researcher situated outside of Hiraeth*

Interviews with both community workers and families were impacted by who 'I am'. As soon as I speak, I am clearly demarcated as not being Welsh. My accent is from South-West England and this automatically places me as an 'outsider'. This became apparent through conversations I had with participants in subtle ways, such as talking to Communities First staff about devolved anti-poverty programmes and legislation, or when families talked about their children's Eisteddfod and St David's Day celebrations. These are all things that are not necessarily familiar to me, as somebody who is from outside of Wales, and it was difficult to identify with some participants' stories. Not only am I not Welsh, but I also did not live in Hiraeth, placing me as a 'double outsider' (Folkes 2018b). I do not have the shared experience of being brought up in a Welsh family and I also had no experience of what it is like to live in Hiraeth daily. When participants asked me where I lived, and I told them, I almost felt guilty as I lived in what could be described as one of the more 'desirable' places to live in Pencaer, leafy with a range of independent shops and cafes. It again marked me as someone 'not from round here'. One participant, Roger, who was also English, used our mutual English identity as an outlet for his experiences of 'not being Welsh', looking to me to reaffirm his perceptions. Therefore, my positioning as a 'double outsider' (or not, as was the case with Roger) affected how participants situated not only me, but themselves in relation to me, and their presentation of self.

This is not to say that there were no positives to being a 'double outsider'. Much qualitative research that utilises ethnographic methods has discussed and questioned the usefulness of the 'insider/outsider' dichotomy, and how we can make 'the familiar strange' when we are insiders, and what strengths being an 'insider' may bring (see Skeggs 1997; Mannay 2010; McKenzie 2015; Ingram and Abrahams 2016). However, being an outsider meant that participants were much more willing to explain the simpler, everyday things to me in more detail. For example, when talking about specific areas, roads or shops, I often had the locations described to me. It was assumed that because I am not from Hiraeth, I would not know the local nuances of the area. This was useful as participants provided me with rich, thick descriptions of the community.

I did not feel that I was in any way treated negatively due to my outsider positioning, as all participants seemed happy to share stories with me. I was often asked why I had chosen to research Hiraeth, to which I (truthfully) answered that the area had often been overlooked and under-explored in academia. This therefore may have helped participants to feel that their stories were

important and worthy of sharing. Having distance from the community I was working in provided many benefits, and perhaps people felt comfortable talking to me because it was unlikely that I would see them or people that they know regularly. As Ingram and Abrahams (2016) draw on Bhabba's concept of the 'third space', it could be argued that as I picked up more local knowledge from my time spent in the community, I came to occupy a 'third space'. I was not entirely an outsider, but I could not identify as an insider as somebody who lived away from the area (Roberts 2018; van den Scott 2018).

Nationality and locality aside, there were clearly other characteristics that influenced how I was situated by participants. The fact that I am female, white, in my twenties, degree-level educated, and consider myself to be working-class all impacted upon how I was received by participants, and how I responded to and presented myself to participants. I was particularly cautious when talking about education, jobs, and aspirations with participants because I did not want to appear to be promoting a particular trajectory based on the choices I had made. Recognising this, I wanted to connect and share with participants, so that they could understand that I do not have 'privileged views of the world' (Ingram and Abrahams 2016). Ingram and Abrahams (2016) question whether it is possible to be educationally successful and working-class. I strongly believe that it is possible, as to say otherwise is to let the middle-classes maintain ownership over the realm of education. Having said this, I was aware that participants who had not attended university may have felt uncomfortable talking about their experiences to someone who has. I had to ensure that I listened and supported participants' stories carefully, without judgement, so that they felt comfortable.

One method of making participants feel more at ease was to share some stories about my background and family. For instance, I spoke to two mothers, a teaching assistant and a dinner-lady, who were very happy with their jobs as they fitted well around childcare commitments, meaning they could spend more time with their children at home. I shared with them that my mother did the same when I was growing up and so I could appreciate the value placed on family life over career. Similarly, when participants shared stories about financial concerns, I felt I could emphasise as struggling for money was normalised during my childhood and subsequently as an adult in higher education. It was important to recognise that as a researcher I could not be an unbiased observer but was in fact co-constructing stories with participants. It was a reciprocal process, and something Clendon (2007) talks about in her work with mother/daughter dyads where she used a more participatory interview style with some participants, sharing information about herself with them. I am not claiming that my experiences and stories were the same as participants', or that they negated the wider differences between us, but I hoped that sharing some information about myself with participants enabled them to realise that I was not there to judge them; and that I was not just another 'out-of-touch' researcher.

#### *4.3.3. A note about ethics and the research site*

It may seem contradictory to refer to Hiraeth as a ‘forgotten suburb’ and claim that I am giving participants the opportunity to voice their stories when in fact, I am anonymising the area. This has not been a decision made lightly, and the contradiction occurred to me through data creation as I explained to participants that it was their opportunity for Hiraeth to be heard whilst also promising anonymity in return. The reason for anonymisation lies in the fact that Hiraeth is a small suburb, and there are people who have taken part in this research whose roles in the community are important to mention but would also leave them open to recognition if a pseudonym for the area was not used. Furthermore, some of the data that has been created has been of a much more sensitive and distinct nature than expected and having spoken to members of the same family separately, it may have been easy for them to recognise other family members in the research if the community was named. I therefore deemed it necessary to anonymise the area as well as the participants to protect from recognition, as this was essentially what was promised to participants when they signed the ethics consent forms (see Appendices D to I).

As this study aims to develop social mobility theoretically, I have decided that naming the area does not necessarily bring a new element to the research. Of course, it means care must be taken when describing Hiraeth, as obvious nuances will allow for recognition, and in a way, some nuance is lost by not being able to speak openly about identifiable features of the community. Despite this, the protection of participants’ identities is paramount, and I did not want to compromise their trust. Although participants may have agreed if I had suggested not to anonymise the data, once that information is openly available, it cannot be reclaimed (Brady and Brown 2013). Some participants were professional community workers, so it was important that their accounts were not recognisable and cannot hinder them in any way. Despite anonymisation, there is a lot to be learnt from Hiraeth that may be relevant when researching other working-class communities, although clearly no two communities are the same.

When describing the area (see Chapter Five), I have been deliberately vague with statistics and information to keep the area anonymous. I have attempted to keep some of the distinctive features of the community in the account without revealing its identity although this has been a considerable ethical dilemma. I do not want to appear to be silencing another working-class community or be accused of assuming that all working-class communities are homogenous and therefore naming the area is not necessary. I have endeavoured to be thoughtful in the descriptions and analysis, and I recognise that no anonymisation can be infallible.

My choice of pseudonym for the area is the Welsh term Hiraeth. This means a longing, yearning, or nostalgia for something, and I chose this as it was a central theme in the data produced. With older residents, there was nostalgia for a time when Hiraeth was more traditionally seen as a

village surrounded by rolling countryside; for younger residents there was a yearning for more things to do and more opportunities within the area. Common across all ages was the centrality of and longing for continual nearby familial support. Accordingly, 'Hiraeth' seemed to be appropriate for this research site. Despite the controversial decision around anonymisation, this pseudonym does not reduce the importance of participants' narratives but allows a level of protection that can be seen as a minimum when taking part in certain types of research.

#### *4.4. Introducing the participants*

This section introduces the participants and explains the rationale for sampling, how the sample was chosen, and the various merits and limitations of this approach in relation to the research aims. I highlight the issues of representativeness, validity, and robustness and how these are addressed within this research. The demographic details of the participants and the specificities of the data, including interview length and visual data created, are summarised for the reader in the appendices (see Appendices A, B and C). Discussions of ethical protocol will be woven through the following sections. However, it is important to make clear from the outset that fieldwork only commenced after approval was given by the Social Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. Furthermore, all the associated information sheets and consent forms designed for participants are included in the thesis (see Appendices D to I), and all references to participants use pseudonyms.

##### *4.4.1. Community worker interviews*

All the interviews took place after a period of ethnographic fieldwork and observations in various locations in the community - these fieldwork activities will be discussed and elaborated on in section 4.5. However, after a steady six months in the field, based mainly in the community 'Hub' (explained below) and with the Communities First team (explored in more detail in Chapter Five), I felt confident I had made appropriate links with various staff members to approach them about taking part in interviews. I was fortunate that one Communities First staff member, Ian, was supportive of my research and negotiated interviews with five other Communities First staff members (Abi, Alex, Harriet, Johnny and Lucy) as well as himself, spanning across the three different project areas. I knew Anna (neighbourhood development librarian) and Jane (Hub officer) well from my volunteering role in the Hub. I also contacted Father Paul, a local priest, to arrange an interview as his church is active in the community. Finally, I interviewed Tanya, a local youth leader. Initially, her participation was in response to my Facebook advert on the Hiraeth community page looking to recruit families. After beginning the interview and finding out about her role in the community, I took the opportunity to explore this further.

Using opportunity and snowball sampling provided essential contextual information about Hiraeth, which is why it was best to conduct community worker interviews before starting family

interviews. Appendix A provides details of the ten community worker participants, their role within the community, and the length of the interviews. Interviews with community workers were relatively short (ranging from eighteen minutes to just over an hour) as I was often taking time out of their working day, so brevity was necessary. Overall these ten interviews generated six hours of audio material and 64,852 transcribed words. Demographic information such as age and ethnicity were not recorded for the community workers, however, all participants were white. I will discuss ethnicity and the apparent lack of non-white participation later in this section.

The priority of these interviews was to speak to a variety of people who worked for Communities First and those who worked in the Hub (a community space and library provided by the local authority). The project work done here aimed to engender a sense of community and strengthen communal bonds, and to improve the prospects of individual community members. Therefore, Communities First and the Hub played a part in the actualisation of mobility, class, and place-based narratives as espoused by the Welsh Government. Interviewing workers provided an insight into these narratives and how they relate to the everyday struggles that the community faces.

#### *4.4.2. You have been warned – lowering expectations for family recruitment*

During fieldwork in the community, I had multiple conversations with community workers about the research and how it was developing. I told them I was looking to recruit families and welcomed any suggestions of people who may be interested. In response, I was warned that it would be extremely difficult to engage with families in Hiraeth. Often these warnings came from a place of frustration, where community workers had tried to get families involved in their projects to little or no avail. An example of this is illustrated in the following fieldnote:

She called me to discuss and she was honest in saying that she really struggles in her work to engage both parents and children, and that no matter how hard she tries, they just don't get involved. She insisted she wasn't trying to be pessimistic, but it is just a feature of the area that it is notoriously difficult to engage with families.

(Fieldnote from a telephone call with a School Outreach Worker 08.02.2017)

There was one main reason for wanting to work with families. From the interviews with community workers, I learnt that many families stay in Hiraeth for generations and I wanted to examine this attachment to place. Interviewing families therefore helped meet the aims of the study- to explore the construction of social (im)mobility narratives and the intersection of place, class and gender. Following conversations in the field, I was expecting a struggle to find participants, which is what ensued. My initial idea was to recruit families from the 'creative space' after-school club I had been running in the Hub. This proved to be difficult due to low attendance and most of the children being old enough to walk to and from the Hub on their own or with a friend.

I took a pragmatic and opportunistic approach to recruiting participants utilising a variety of methods. I contacted local churches and gained the contact details of two families who have been worshipping in Hiraeth for decades, resulting in five participants (Rosemary, Charles, Diane, Jeremy and Kathryn). One of the community worker participants, Alex, who lives in Hiraeth and is also a trustee of a local charity, proved to be a crucial participant. After months of emails back and forth, roughly six months after the initial interview with her at work, I managed to interview Alex and her young daughter, Lexi, at their home. Alex provided me with the opportunity to volunteer with the local charity of which she is trustee, attending community consultation meetings and trustee meetings, which led to me meeting two more families, totalling in eight more participants (Michael, Tracy, Lucy, Roger, Maureen, Lesley, Peter, George). After posting my first advert on two community Facebook groups, I received enthusiastic responses from three different people which led to a further nine participants (Phil, Lisa, Rob, Brendan, Chloe, Adam, Anne, Carwyn and Mary). A few months down the line when I was still searching for participants, I posted again in the most used Facebook group and received one final participant, Tanya. A full account of the twenty-five participants' demographic information, including age range, marital status, number of children, occupation, type of housing and housing area is available in Appendix C.

However, making arrangements with people was a difficult and lengthy process over a period of eight months. It was often a frustrating waiting game, constantly checking for responses to emails and messages and sending reminders. Through Facebook, I had several occasions where potential participants were enthusiastic to take part but did not have the time to meet in person. Two women wanted to take part but were restricted by childcare commitments. Another mother I met over Facebook asked me to send some questions so that she could type answers and send them back to me. I also met a nurse whilst I was volunteering at a local after-school club who was excited to take part in the research but unfortunately, we could never negotiate a time and date. This appears to highlight the strain on energy and time that working-class femininity has on these women, as they endeavour to meet their (caring) responsibilities both inside and outside of the home (Skeggs 1997; Evans 2006; Mannay 2015b; Mannay 2016).

#### *4.4.3. Who is represented and who is not?*

As recruitment was such a drawn-out and difficult process, I simply could not afford to be too restrictive in my sampling. Overall, I spoke to nine families over thirteen separate interviews, with a total of twenty-five participants and over twenty hours of audio-recorded material. The sample size is small. However, talking to various family members ensured generational breadth, ranging from primary school children to retired pensioners. I included two participants who I interviewed individually without the opportunity to arrange further interviews with other family members, but these interviews offered nuanced accounts of community and family life in Hiraeth.

One family interviewed consisted only of one generation, an elderly couple. Of all the other families I interviewed, I managed to interview two if not three generations of the family.

Participants over seventy were overrepresented (eight out of twenty-five), mainly because they were retired and had more available time to meet. No participants were between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Many of the interested women who responded on Facebook would have addressed this absence but unfortunately, they did not have the time to meet within the timeframe of the study. A further feature of the sample is that all participants except one were homeowners. This leads to questions about whether the sample are indeed 'working-class'. Having already outlined the approach taken to theorising social class in Chapter Three, I will briefly reiterate it here. Categorising people based on discrete indicators such as employment and housing often ignores the dynamic and relational nature of social class as a site of political struggle (Lawler 2005; Tyler 2015). Being reliant on stratification methods ignores the very fact that scholars are actively (re)producing the hierarchies they are describing (Tyler 2015, p.499). Therefore, this research looks at class as it occurs intersubjectively and in relation to others. A contextual explanation for the dominance of homeownership is Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' scheme<sup>27</sup> in the 1980s which allowed many working-class families to buy their council homes (see Appendix C for further demographic information about the participants). However, this research aimed to take the theorisation of social class beyond these simplistic indicators.

Furthermore, as Communities First struggled to engage with those on the margins, there was little chance that snowball and opportunistic sampling techniques would engage 'hard-to-reach'<sup>28</sup> populations. Therefore, I had to accept that the sample may not be representative of the experiences of those on the margins of society, who find themselves in dark and unforgiving times following the expansion of austerity across public services. It would be a stretch, however, to label the sample 'middle-class' based on the crude distinction of home ownership. I will explore constructions of class and the associated complexities further in findings Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

I was acutely aware from the interviews with community workers of the reputations and distinctions appropriated to different areas of Hiraeth by residents. I wanted to ensure that participants represented a variety of areas within Hiraeth, which was achieved, and I will discuss these local meanings and boundaries in Chapters Five and Six. There was an even split between participants living in solely privately-owned housing areas and mixed (privately-owned and

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<sup>27</sup> The 'Right to Buy' scheme was introduced by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher through the Housing Act 1980. It allowed council tenants to purchase their council property at heavily reduced rates, reducing local authorities' housing stocks. See Minton (2017) for more.

<sup>28</sup> 'Hard-to-reach' is a term often used in government policy to indicate groups who 'fail' to engage with service provisions offered. This term can be considered controversial as it stigmatises certain groups, blaming them for their lack of engagement. I use quote marks to denote my scepticism of this term.

council-owned) housing areas. This provided a range of accounts based in a variety of localities in Hiraeth.

Twenty-three out of twenty-five of the participants were Welsh, with fifteen participants being born in Hiraeth or in the neighbouring suburb of Hendre. The remainder either came from another suburb of Pencaer, or another Welsh town. Eleven participants were male and fourteen were female. This is important as one of the research aims is to explore how gender intersects with mobility narratives.

As illustrated in Appendix C, the majority of participants were married, with one participant divorced, and two older participants widowed. This seems to reflect the current ONS (2011) census data which shows that being married is the most common living arrangement at almost forty-five per cent of Hiraeth's population. Despite the common moral panic around the increase in single parents, typically in marginalised areas (Tyler 2013), this accounts for less than ten per cent of households in Hiraeth. The only divorced participant, Phil, shared custody of his daughter with his ex-partner but was not her sole caregiver. It is interesting to note that none of the families who took part were cohabiting, and only two families had at least one partner who had been married previously.

#### *4.4.4. Addressing ethnic homogeneity*

All participants were white and over ninety per cent of residents in Hiraeth are white (ONS 2011). It was not an active choice only to recruit white participants, as invitations to take part in the research were open to all. However, the lack of non-white residents at community events was noticeable in Hiraeth. The significantly lower proportion of ethnic minorities in Hiraeth could be due to its distance from inner-city, industrialised areas where migration has always been high (Anonymous 2002; Anonymous 2003; Anonymous 2014). Place-attachment which leads to families remaining in the area for generations may also have influenced migration figures. It is this continuity and attachment to place, and how this influences mobility narratives, that this research examines.

Arguably the lack of non-white residents attending community events could be a reflection on the failure of community-based projects to involve these communities. It was not my intention to silence those from ethnic minority backgrounds and I recognise that ethnic minority families in Hiraeth will have alternative narratives and experiences to those constructed by my all-white sample. This absence could be addressed in future work, although due to the low figure of non-white residents in Hiraeth, ethics around anonymisation would have to be carefully considered.

#### *4.4.5. Representativeness, validity, and robustness*

As this was a small-scale, qualitative study adopting an ethnographic approach, this is reflected in the sample size. However, the amount of data produced in the interviews, alongside ethnographic fieldnotes, provided the richness and detail required to attend to the research questions. The study was not aiming to be representative of the narratives of all Hiraeth residents. There are, nevertheless, analytical insights to be gained from the small selection of narratives constructed for this research. There may be some similarities between Hiraeth and other forgotten, deprived communities, although we must be cautious when making such comparisons and generalisations, as there are always social, cultural and historical differences in context. That is not to say that we cannot draw out interesting findings, which may be pertinent to other areas with similar characteristics, however, this should be done with caution and would necessitate further study.

Despite the homogeneity of certain characteristics of the sample, the data created varied considerably and there were a diversity of mobility narratives that were influenced by social class, place, and gender. Often the issues of homogeneity were reflections of the wider community. The sample may well be skewed towards those who are more engaged in their community or who share specific characteristics, but there was limited scope to reach people beyond this participant sample.

As the notions of generalisability, representativeness, reliability and validity tend to be more dominant in quantitative paradigms of research, qualitative research often struggles to fit into this 'scientific criterology' (Mason 2002, p.38). These concepts appear to suggest that there is one correct way of knowing the world and that we can create universal truths, which is antithetical to the epistemological foundations of this research (Burr 2003; Blaikie 2007). It is essential to display transparency and robustness to ensure quality, rigour and trustworthiness of the research (Mason 2002; Marshall and Rossman 2006). It is hoped that this chapter goes some way towards providing transparency, making it clear how the research was conducted and how it reached its findings.

#### *4.5. Getting in and getting on: Community fieldwork*

This section guides the reader through the process of getting into the field, and documents some of the practical and ethical complexities that arose once in the field when engaged in a regular volunteer role. This section aims not only to provide a description of the community fieldwork undertaken, but also includes reflexive insights into some of the emotion work inherent in the research process.

#### 4.5.1. *'Creative space' and consistent inconsistency*

Having spent little time in Hiraeth and with a limited understanding of the essence of the community, I thought it would be advantageous to have a consistent volunteering role in the area, as this has been an effective method in previous ethnographic work (see Blakely 2010). Naively believing that the community 'Hub' would be the beating heart of community life, I registered my interest in volunteering with both the Hub staff and Communities First staff (whose offices were based in the Hub) in August 2016. Following a short informal interview, and a subsequent DBS check<sup>29</sup>, I agreed to help coordinate a weekly afterschool club held in the Hub. Every Wednesday from four o'clock Anna and I facilitated the 'creative space' group, which grew out of a previous creative writing group. Targeted at children aged eight plus, the idea was for the group to be a space where children could be creative and free, outside of the rules and pedagogy of the school walls. This included creative writing, crafts, and drawing, with the small amount of resources we had available to us. We would often base our activities around upcoming holidays and events, and the vast majority of children who came along were girls, nearing the end of primary school (aged nine to eleven).

Anna had a good relationship with the girls as part of her job involved visiting the local primary schools and promoting library services. There were a handful of core attendees who came along most weeks, although attendance was relatively poor throughout. At our peak we had ten children, at our trough, no children. Originally, I thought the club would provide an opportunity to meet parents and to recruit families as participants. However, this was limited as most girls were trusted to walk home alone or with friends, due to the Hub's close proximity. The wavering attendance and commitment to the club led to its decline in May 2017. I reflected on this in my fieldnotes, and how it affected me not only in my capacity as a researcher, but as a volunteer:

I stood outside the library for about half an hour waiting for the girls who usually attend to arrive. I felt awkward, like a spare part, and like I didn't belong there.

(Fieldnote, 12.10.2016)

Instability and inconsistency were instilled into the group from week one, when Anna disclosed to me that in the following month (October 2016), she would be taking three months annual leave. After telling the group before she left that from the following week I would be in charge and that they should do everything I say, I felt pressure to ensure that the group continued and thrived. Following her absence, numbers dropped significantly and some of the core attendees had not returned. When regular attendees were not turning up, I felt both disappointed and frustrated. Anna's replacement, John, worked with me to try and revive the group, but it was clear that Anna

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<sup>29</sup> DBS or Disclosure and Barring Service provides employers or voluntary organisations with criminal record checks for those applying for roles.

was the linchpin to its success. Following Anna's return in January, it felt as though the momentum was back to recreate the group and make it successful again. This was short-lived when by April 2017, Anna went on secondment in another library and subsequently gained a new job. John stood in initially but then acquired a new job in a different area. This provides just one example of the impact that high staff turnover and lack of consistency can have on community members' trust and turnout at community-based events. It takes time to establish links and relationships, and these are lost rapidly when key staff members move on and out of the community.

#### *4.5.2. Positionality and ethical issues when working with children*

When volunteering at the 'creative space' group, I ran into several issues relating to both positionality and ethics. It is pertinent to highlight these issues to demonstrate the often-unpredictable nature of fieldwork and how important it can be to think on your feet (Delamont 2009). It was important that I did not come across to the children as an authority figure. Even thinking about what to wear was important. Christensen (2004) documents this dilemma in her work with children within a school. Although before Anna's departure she informed the girls to do "everything I say" (05.10.2016 Fieldnote), I felt it was vital not to be seen as a teacher, and that the club should be a safe space away from the school environment.

This was problematic as the girls often followed school 'rules' in their creations, bringing similar difficulties that researchers often experience in school settings (Christensen 2004; Gillies and Robinson 2012; Mand 2012). When one girl asked if she should write some LOs, I was thoroughly confused. It was not until Anna told me that LOs stands for learning objectives that I realised the extent to which the school pedagogy was ingrained. My desire to not be considered as an authority figure was tested at times, especially when the girls were being disruptive and seemed to be purposely causing trouble. Despite this, I always left it down to the Hub staff to reprimand bad behaviour, as I did not think this was in my remit as a volunteer.

It was difficult to explain to the children exactly who I am and what my role was. When helping out at a family adventure day in the local primary school, children often referred to me as 'Miss' which made me feel uncomfortable in terms of my role and responsibility. In the 'creative space' club, I was introduced to the girls as a friend who is from Cardiff University who will be helping out. Navigating my role as a researcher, volunteer, and subsequently with events that followed, responsible adult, was difficult. There were some worrying and disturbing incidents at the 'creative space' club where I felt a strong responsibility to ensure that the girls' welfare was protected. However, there were always at least two Hub members of staff on hand to deal with such issues, and in my role as a volunteer, it was not my responsibility to act on such occurrences. Even so, as a volunteer, and as somebody who has two nieces the same ages as these girls, I was

often concerned. This is just one example of the emotional labour that goes into fieldwork (Hochschild 1983).

#### *4.5.3. Further volunteering roles*

Alongside my role in the ‘creative space’ group, I volunteered with Communities First at various events including GCSE results day<sup>30</sup>; job fayres; mental health awareness day; family adventure day in the local primary school; half term events; and due to the unfortunate timing of this research, scribing consultation meetings around ‘what is next’ after Communities First has ended<sup>31</sup>. This allowed me to understand how Communities First worked institutionally and how it engaged with the community, and to also get to know staff and community members better. I spent time volunteering within the Communities First offices, which helped me gain an insight into the operational running of the organisation. Again, attendance at events was extremely hit and miss, which may have been a reflection on the outreach work being done, but also the community’s trust and engagement with community projects. Sometimes there was a lack of communication, clarity and organisation, especially when working with partners in the community (such as the local primary school). Despite Communities First being present in the community since 2008, long-lasting community development work and strong community relationships were threatened by the fragility of funding support for the programme, although arguably the programme’s aims were more individual-focused, despite a community rhetoric (see Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016).

Outside of the Hub and Communities First, I also attended the Hiraeth history society, which led to me gaining access to the largest archive collection of historic photographs and memorabilia relating to Hiraeth. This enabled me to develop a much richer understanding of many aspects of community life dating as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as recent as 2003. When participants discussed elements of continuity and change over their time in Hiraeth, this historical insight helped me, as an outsider, to better understand participants’ stories.

To learn about everyday community life outside of ‘official’ programmes such as Communities First, I became part of an online community group, which shared local information and concerns. Additionally, I worked with a local charity who acquired an ex-council building and were consulting with the community about what they would like to see the building used for. The charity also put action groups together for various local issues such as a Neighbourhood Watch group<sup>32</sup>, a litter pick group, and a community events group. Being the minute taker at events and

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<sup>30</sup> In the UK, General Certificates of Secondary Education are compulsory qualifications taken in specific subjects by pupils aged fourteen to sixteen

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 5, section 5.2.4 for more information on the Communities First programme and its ending.

<sup>32</sup> Neighbourhood Watch groups are resident-led organisations that focus on crime prevention in the community, often in conjunction with community policing initiatives.

meetings allowed me to observe first-hand the community at work. To understand younger people's engagement in the community, I assisted at the local Scouts group, which in contrast to the 'creative space' club, was extremely well attended and hence over-subscribed. The main point of interest here is that in comparison to Hub or Communities First run events, these community events had a much larger turnout and interest, both online and in person.

#### *4.5.4. Fieldwork reflections*

Being involved in a variety of community organisations and volunteering opportunities for well over a year had a positive impact not only on the richness of the fieldwork, but on me personally. It was a rewarding process, and I felt appreciated and as though my engagement benefitted the community to some extent. I was fortunate to meet some truly inspirational and warm people. This extract from my fieldnotes is just one example of many reflecting the rewarding aspects of helping in and working with the community:

One girl asked if I visit other libraries or just this one, I said just this one, and she said, 'this library is lucky then.' This made me feel happy, like I was doing something worthwhile for the young people in the community and making some friends.

(Fieldnote 07.12.2017)

Communities First worked alongside SPICE time credits<sup>33</sup> and so for every hour you volunteer, you earned a time credit which can be spent at a variety of attractions across the city. Although I felt guilty about accepting such a gesture, I gifted my time credits to some participants later in the research process. Volunteering allowed me to build relationships with members of the community from a variety of backgrounds. There was nothing more fulfilling than being recognised by community members when out and about in the community, and also being able to share and exchange local information. I developed relationships with both community members and community workers, learning more from them as time went on. Hub and Communities First staff members took a genuine interest in the research and would ask for updates on my progress. Being an active volunteer for fourteen months added a certain richness to my understanding of Hiraeth as a community, more than could have been achieved through conducting interviews alone.

However, once described to me as the feeling of being at a party that nobody has invited you to, fieldwork was at times uncomfortable, awkward, exhausting and messy (Delamont 2009). Introducing yourself at a local residents' meeting when you do not live in the area was one notable awkward memory. But spending time in a multitude of spaces in the community over a long period of time allowed me to see first-hand what community life is like in Hiraeth, what daily struggles residents have to deal with, and what residents are most proud of. There was certainly

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<sup>33</sup> SPICE provided a system for organisations and individuals to exchange their skills and time for access to local activities. It aims to join up a variety of organisations within a community. It has recently been rebranded as Tempo, see [www.wearetempo.org](http://www.wearetempo.org) for more.

no lack of community spirit in Hiraeth, despite its forgotten, overlooked status within academia and community work. It seemed that locality and space were important as the strongest pockets of community tended to flourish in a small number of informal community settings, where community members were in control. The Hub is a much-under-utilised space, despite being the nearest 'community centre'. I am cautious not to overstate my knowledge of Hiraeth, but volunteering opened my eyes to the many contradictions and nuances present in the craft of weaving community and a sense of belonging in a largely forgotten yet marginalised area.

#### *4.6. Ethnographic interviewing as method*

The aim of this section is to reflect upon the process and practicalities of individual interviewing with community workers. Interviews with community workers were a first step to finding out more about the community of Hiraeth, documenting some of the area's nuances, strengths and struggles. The data created in these interviews had a predominant place-based focus, especially amongst the Communities First staff members, as Communities First was the Welsh Government's place-based policy aimed at community development and tackling social isolation. As I argued in Chapter Two, the implicit aim of the Communities First programme was arguably to improve the social mobility of deprived communities such as Hiraeth. These interviews therefore provided necessary insights towards answering the research questions: How do participants accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative? – and, what role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants' (im)mobility narratives?

##### *4.6.1. Insights from community workers*

As discussed in section 4.4., I interviewed local community workers to hear their perspectives on their work and the challenges faced within Hiraeth. To avoid appearing as though I was interrogating them, which is common for staff who are answerable to Welsh Government targets and scrutiny, I deliberately kept interviews loose and unstructured. These were arranged just before the announcement from the Welsh Government that Communities First was to be phased out by March 2018 (Arad Research 2017). By the time the interviews took place in March 2017, this news was still fresh, and staff were uncertain what it would mean for their jobs. In the months to come many staff members had been made redundant.

It is unfortunate that this research happened to cut across a period of uncertainty and redundancy for many community development workers. Such a period of uncertainty arguably reflects how community development work is treated by government, who are looking for quantifiable, fast results, something which is difficult to deliver in this type of work (Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016; Arad Research 2017; National Assembly for Wales 2017). I was able to gain an overview of what staff, partners, and community members thought of Communities First through attending several consultation meetings that addressed what worked, what did not work, and what should follow

after the programme ends. The interviews I conducted with staff before this consultation, however, were not focused on evaluating the programme. The loose aims of the interviews were to find out more about the area, their job roles, and what challenges the community of Hiraeth faces. Not only did I interview six Communities First staff members, but also two Hub staff members, the local Church in Wales parish priest and a youth leader, as discussed in section 4.4.

#### *4.6.2. Practical interview difficulties*

There were several practical difficulties of conducting interviews with community workers. Interviews conducted with Communities First staff took place at the Communities First offices at the back of the Hub. These offices are notoriously difficult to access, as entry is policed by a buzzer entry system. This lack of visibility and challenge of entry makes accessing the Communities First staff unwelcoming, which is problematic for reaching out to members of the community. Getting in, however, was not the only issue.

Following a noisy first interview in the staff breakroom, I decided that the rest of the interviews should be conducted in the Hub as it may be quieter. The Hub is essentially set-up like a library, with a reception, computers, bookshelves, a children's reading area, and a separate community room and interview room. As these separate rooms are used mostly for advocacy services, I conducted the remainder of the interviews in the main library space, on the (only) seating area which is located outside these rooms. This proved difficult as it appeared this seating area acted as a waiting area for the advocacy services being provided, and so it resulted in many people standing and waiting nearby, potentially being the unknown listener to the interviews. This may have made the staff members feel uncomfortable, as in such a public space there is a lack of privacy. For a space which is supposed to be the main council-funded community 'centre' in Hiraeth, the lack of seating and tables is conspicuous. The only other seats available were desk chairs for the computers. At one point, I was asked by a man coming out of the interview room if I was waiting for money advice, to which I politely declined. Finding a suitable space to talk was a difficult task.

Eventually I concluded that noise and interruptions were going to be part and parcel of interviewing community workers in their places of work, which are also public places. The Hub is a space which often hosts events for children, including the 'creative space' club that I was running, and so children being noisy or even coming over to say hello were common occurrences. When interviewing Jane, a Hub officer, it was late one afternoon following 'creative space' club and she was the only member of staff present and so was responsible for the running of the Hub. We had two girls left in the Hub who had attended the club and we were the only remaining people in the building. At times when conversation lulled, it was not uncommon for the girls to interrupt or to comment on what Jane was saying to me. This interruption of the known other

meant that Jane's privacy was severely affected, perhaps limiting what information she decided to share with me. Interviews in public spaces therefore not only compromise the participants' privacy, but also the researcher's ability to be able to actively listen and construct the conversation with the interviewee (Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 2012).

As Ian had been keen to arrange the Communities First staff interviews for me, I went along with his plan as I was grateful for his help. Ian arranged for me to conduct five one-on-one interviews over the two hours before my 'creative space' club. Because I knew I was taking time out of their working day, I agreed as I thought this may be the only opportunity to access staff members. Naturally, interviews overran as conversations took different paths due to the unstructured approach. Not wanting to cut people off mid-speech, I had to finish the session having only completed three interviews as I did not want to be late for my 'creative space' club. Luckily, Ian was open to me doing a revisit in which I completed the remaining interviews. I was very aware that I was taking the staff from their work, although many saw this as a pleasant interruption to their day. I was fortunate that Ian had managed to organise for staff from across the programme's three main projects to speak with me, however, because he was the one who approached the staff members and arranged the interviews, I had no say over who was chosen and why. Nevertheless, this was the compromise I had to make in exchange for Ian's help as a core gatekeeper.

#### *4.6.3. Interview work beyond the practical*

Conducting interviews requires work both on the side of the researcher and of the participant (Kvale 1996; Mason 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2012). Some of my work as a researcher occurred before the voice recorder was activated and consisted of making sure the participant knew exactly who I am and what I am doing, giving the opportunity for them to ask questions, and trying to make the atmosphere friendly and informal, often incorporating small-talk beforehand. Building rapport through informal chats before the interview was essential to ease the formality of the situation (although arguably, this was re-established once the recorder was switched on). Often termed 'the waiting field' (Mannay and Morgan 2015), this period pre-interview led to finding out new and interesting information, such as common interests, upcoming events, or the sharing of connections for further potential participants. These pre-interview conversations appeared to help participants feel comfortable and at ease talking to me.

During the interviews, one of the biggest concerns when talking to Communities First staff was that I could not always ascertain whether they were talking solely about Hiraeth. The Communities First cluster<sup>34</sup> that Hiraeth belonged to also covered five other suburbs of Pencaer,

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<sup>34</sup> The shift towards a 'cluster' approach within Communities First occurred in 2012 and is documented further in Chapter Five, Section 5.2.4. It involved the grouping together of disadvantaged communities with community workers spread across all communities within their specific cluster.

each with their own nuances and social challenges. The nature of the population, the types of poverty experienced, the local facilities available, and the amount of engagement with Communities First are just some examples of how each area in the cluster may vary. As staff worked across all areas in the cluster, it became unclear at times whether what was said was pertinent to Hiraeth. Despite my unstructured interviewing method, sometimes it was necessary to clarify that I was correctly understanding what was being said.

That is not to say that stories about working across the whole cluster were not relevant or of interest. Some staff told me that they did not have much experience of working in Hiraeth specifically but were more than happy to talk more generally about their roles. Often staff were conscious and worried about not ‘giving’ appropriate information despite the reassurance that all information is of value. This is another consequence of taking an unstructured approach, as often participants go off in their own direction, then leading them to worry that what they have said has not been useful. There was a fine balance to maintain between asking for clarification on some points and not appearing to suggest that any information not specifically about Hiraeth was irrelevant. Hopefully by providing reassurance and encouragement, all participants felt that their contributions were meaningful and useful. This is essentially what researchers subscribe to when using an unstructured approach (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

One final issue that I had not previously considered before conducting interviews amongst colleagues concerned ethics and confidentiality. Inevitably, everybody who worked for the cluster knew everybody, even across the different teams. One essential part of community development work is that connections are made across different projects and teams to provide a joined-up approach (Welsh Government 2013a; 2013b). Additionally, as all staff worked from one office based in Hiraeth, this meant that even if people did not know each other very well personally, they were all aware of each other and their roles. This led to difficulty as I often wanted to offer reassurance to interviewees by telling them that other colleagues had said similar things. Clearly, this is an issue of confidentiality as previous participants had agreed to take part in the research on the proviso that their information is kept confidentially and securely. Similarly, when participants asked me directly if a colleague had said something about the topic, I had to ensure that I did not let slip what another participant had told me. In these situations, it was essential to play dumb rather than revealing what others had said. This was a difficult issue to manage, especially when you know that participants know each other, but even so it is vital to follow the correct ethical procedures (Mannay and Creaghan 2016).

#### *4.6.4. A new approach - The walking interview*

As I took a flexible approach to interviews, especially as I was utilising an unstructured approach, I was thrilled when Father Paul, the local priest, decided he wanted to do a walking interview.

The church is hundreds of years old and it was undergoing major restoration works which Father Paul had explained were going to be highly beneficial for the community. He thought it would be easier to document what was happening to the church by walking around it and highlighting the various developments. This method of conducting an interview was much more engaging and sensory than typical interview methods as you are navigating the space and can touch and see what the participant is referring to (Moles 2008; Ross et al 2009). It also takes the pressure off both the participant and the researcher as compared to ‘typical interviews’, it is much more physically engaging and less intense than sitting opposite each other in an interview setting. I have not gone into depth here about walking interviews as it only accounted for this interview, but nevertheless I felt it pertinent to mention because it offers a different dimension to more traditional interviewing techniques<sup>35</sup>. Another dimension to the fieldwork process was conducting interviews with families inside their homes, which I turn to next.

#### *4.7. Intrusive presence: Entering the family home*

The following section reflects on the experience of entering families’ private spaces and being the intrusive outsider in the family home. When entering family homes to conduct interviews, it was important to remember that families had other priorities and commitments beyond the research encounter. Often participants had plans following the interview such as shopping or taking the children out, and so it was important to be courteous and make sure I did not overstay my welcome. One participant, Michael, was still eating his dinner when I arrived which made me feel intrusive despite his reassurances that it was his fault he was running behind schedule. This section draws upon fieldnote reflections to highlight what can be learned from researcher ‘intrusion’; how to ensure reciprocity in the research relationship; and the difficulty of explaining my role as a researcher to participants.

##### *4.7.1. Domestic, caring and house ‘work’*

When approaching and entering people’s homes I was careful to be observant of the appearance, from the front garden and house-type, to the layout of rooms and general ambiance of the home. All bar one of the families were homeowners, mostly owning semi-detached homes or bungalows. In my fieldnotes I kept rich descriptions of each home so that when I re-read the notes, I could remember exactly what the home was like. My first observation was the immaculate nature of the homes I visited. It was clear a lot of pride went into making houses feel homely, yet neat and clean, which is epitomised by this reflection from my fieldnotes:

They were so lovely and welcoming, I asked if I should take off my shoes, and Rosemary said “no, don’t be silly, this is a home not a house”.

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<sup>35</sup> For further information see Moles (2008) and Ross et al (2009) for examples of how research projects have utilised mobile methodologies.

(Fieldnote 11.05.2017)

I always offered to take off my shoes in every home I went to although nobody asked me to. This was essential as a sign of respect when entering a private space, which is usually off limits to researchers. In particular, the women of the families I spoke to took great pride in keeping a good home and housework was often implicitly seen as a woman's responsibility. Cleaning is often used as a method of achieving a respectable and acceptable working-class femininity by distancing the self from 'dirt' and a discourse of lack (Skeggs 1997; Evans 2006; Mannay 2015b; Mannay 2016). One woman, who I met through volunteering at an after-school club, was keen to take part in the research although unfortunately we never found a time that was suitable for both of us. However, when discussing the idea of arranging an interview she was greatly concerned that I may judge the appearance of her house. As she worked nights as a nurse, I had nothing but admiration for her dedication to housework, which is highlighted here in this fieldnote excerpt:

She said twice to me: please don't judge my house, it's a right tip, you don't do housework for one day and it looks like ten people have come over and trashed it!

(Fieldnote 02.10.2017)

This shows that the 'double shift' still seems to play a part in some Welsh mothers' lives, as they juggle both domestic and paid work, attempting to not let one slide because of the other. As Mannay (2016, p.82) notes, "in public life there has been a shift in the visibility of women in Wales, but behind closed doors many women remain physically, psychologically and symbolically embedded in a never-ending stack of dirty dishes."

The general appearance of the home was not the only evidence of this gendered division of labour. Clendon (2007) notes the importance of being flexible when interviewing mothers with caring responsibilities, and often my 'rupture' into the family home coincided with women's domestic practices. For example, throughout the interview with married couple Michael and Tracy, Tracy was listening out for the babies in case they needed attention. Emptying dishwashers, feeding babies, ironing clothes, making lunchboxes, calling the doctor for a poorly child, dropping children off at school - all are examples of the domestic and caring responsibilities women were doing previous to or following my 'rupture' and intrusion. These 'spaces previous to' the interview taking place can reveal a lot about women's roles and responsibilities, and garner intriguing data outside of the 'official' interview method (Mannay and Morgan 2015).

#### *4.7.2. Reciprocity and contribution*

It is important to highlight the reciprocal nature of research, especially when being let into people's homes. I have discussed being respectful in the space, but it is also vitally important to be respectful within the interview encounter itself. As I was co-constructing narratives with participants, it was essential to find the correct balance between speaking and listening (Kvale

1996; Mason 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2012). As Christensen (2004) notes, the ethnographer should not be dominating the conversation. Often there were opportunities for me to share stories or information, which I did, but I was also cautious to be respectful when participants were talking and take a 'back-seat' when stories were being told.

It is important that the researcher is alert, actively listening, and supportive of participants sharing their stories. Often, I spent long periods of interviews adding the occasional 'mm' or 'yeah', allowing participants to express themselves without interruption. At times where conversation was stilted, I would then speak more and share more to get the conversation flowing again. This reflects the natural ebbs and flows of conversation (Goffman 1967) and by no means did I think that by not talking much at times that I was a 'neutral' researcher. Sometimes it was difficult to maintain a conversational flow, but this was one of my responsibilities as a researcher.

Giving something back to participants is often discussed, as the research process can seem as though participants are merely used for their stories and experiences (Kvale 1996). In an attempt to 'give back' to participants I evoked a variety of methods, depending on their appropriateness. For one young family, it seemed appropriate to gift them time credits (see section 4.5.4) as these can be used as entry for a variety of family activities and attractions. I only received a limited number of time credits therefore it was not an option to provide them for all participants. For a couple of participants, I returned the favour by volunteering my time. This included volunteering at an after-school group, minute-taking for a local charity's annual general meeting and trustees meeting, and transcribing interviews for a community consultation. With older participants, often the experience of having an attentive listener to talk freely to was greatly enriching, with many people thanking me for being a good listener and for the opportunity to reminisce and reflect on their lives (Kvale 1996, p.128). It may seem unfair not to treat every family equally, but all families were different. In all cases, I was courteous and grateful, thanking participants for taking time out of their days to speak to me, and assuring them that everything they have said has been of great help.

#### 4.7.3. “What is it you’re doing then?” – explaining the researcher role



Figure 1: Chloe's drawing of things inside and outside of the home that are important to her, including me (depicted with a '?' on my head).

It was not always easy to explain to participants what my research is about, and what it means to be a sociologist. I discussed how I was interested in family and community life in Hiraeth but ran into further difficulties when participants asked about my degree or subject area. They were keen to know what gaining a PhD would mean for my career, what I hoped to do when I finish, and what my role as a PhD student entailed. When explaining that I was interested in community work, many participants thought I was training to be a social worker. Explaining the work of a sociology PhD student is difficult, and I was anxious not to be perceived as an interfering and judging ‘other’ (such as the assumed role of a social worker). Often participants found it hard to understand why I would be interested in their everyday lives, and parents struggled to explain to their children what I was trying to do. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 where Chloe depicts me with a question mark above my head. It was a difficult job explaining ‘who I am’ and making sure that participants did not feel that my already intrusive presence was in some way an ‘official’ observation or judgement. Ethically, it was vital that participants understood what the research was about, what was expected of them, and what would be done with the data. This information was provided in the information and consent materials (see Appendices D, E, F, G), however, there was a need to carefully discuss and expand on this written summary.

#### 4.8. Beginning the family interview process

This section documents in close detail the unstructured, ethnographic interviews undertaken with families living in Hiraeth. Unstructured interviews were deemed most appropriate as they allowed

participants to take the interview in whichever direction they wished. This brought up a range of topics including significant life events, family relationships, routines and responsibilities, and ambitions and vision for the future (Weller 2012). These were all explored within the context of everyday activities whilst also reflecting on life in the local community. The interviews were therefore appropriate for learning more about participants' mobility narratives and how notions of class, place and gender intertwine within them- directly addressing the research questions posed by the study.

This section guides the reader through the various components of the interviews undertaken with families. I discuss some of the strengths and challenges of managing family interviews, before detailing some of the key ethical considerations that arose during the family interview process. Visual and creative methods used with both children and adults are then explored with attention given to the ethics of handling visual data. The section closes by drawing upon fieldwork reflections from 'the waiting field' (Mannay and Morgan 2015).

#### *4.8.1. Family interview management*

I conducted a mixture of family interviews with multiple family members at the same time (eight family interviews) and individual interviews with separate family members (five interviews), consisting of nine families overall (see Appendix B). Having discussed some of the strengths and weaknesses of individual interviews in section 4.6, I will now discuss some of the positives and challenges of conducting family interviews, by which I mean an interview consisting of two or more family members at one time.

One advantage of conducting family interviews is that you can see the family dynamic in action as family members bounce off each other and contribute to each other's stories (Clendon 2007; Grant et al 2017). Often there were cases of stories being corrected or questioned by other family members, and it allowed for some participants to be reminded of previous events, jogging their memories and collectively constructing their versions of events. The unstructured nature of the interviews allowed families to take the interview in whichever direction they wished, going on large tangents and telling a variety of different stories. However, it was difficult to manage an interview with many participants. The largest interview consisted of three generations of the same family, one grandmother, two parents, and three children, all in one room at once. This is an exceptional example, as most interviews only consisted of two or three family members, but when more participants were added to the mix it was very difficult to stop people talking over each other and to hear what people were saying. It was also challenging to keep track of names and stories and so required good and careful listening. Often there were interjections by family members and although this was frustrating, it said something about the family dynamic and relationship as they co-constructed their stories.

The information garnered from family interviews is different to that from individual interviews (Clendon 2007; Grant et al 2017). The presence of other family members inevitably influences what kind of information is shared (Mannay 2013b). This was not necessarily a weakness because it provided a window into the family dynamic. Seeing how different generations interacted and the relationship between children and adults was always interesting to observe. It was often difficult to tap too deeply into individual biographies yet stories about milestone family events such as holidays, having children, and moving home provided an abundance of information. Asking about the community was a topic that everybody could contribute towards and often gleaned an insight into the everyday lives of the family. As interviews were unstructured, no two were the same and a variety of topics were covered over a substantial amount of time (interviews usually lasted between an hour and a half and two hours). I did not want to be constrained by a pre-existing interview schedule (Mannay 2010); and the aim of conducting family interviews was not to garner in-depth, personal accounts pertaining to specific set questions, but to construct pertinent, everyday accounts around family life, values and community.

However, because of the unstructured nature of interviews, some participants wanted to ensure they were saying 'the right thing' and that their 'answers' were sufficient. Their assumptions about the interview process, perhaps based on previous experiences of interviews, were centred around expecting to answer a list of questions. There was an expectation that the researcher would take control of the interaction (Weller 2012). When I explained that I had not prepared a list of questions and that I just wanted to chat informally, this perturbed participants who were anxious to know if they were sharing the correct kind of information. Constant reassurance was required for participants to feel confident in what they were sharing. When arranging interviews, I deliberately shied away from the word 'interview' as I did not want it to seem 'official' or formal. I told participants that I was interested in finding out a little more about their lives and community. An example of participants' assumptions in action came when I chatted with Alex and her young daughter Lexi who was under-five. Alex purposely distanced herself from Lexi and I as she felt that she might influence Lexi's answers. Alex had assumed that by keeping her distance it would create 'better' data. Further on in the same interview, I encouraged Alex to speak alongside her daughter as it offered a great insight into the parent-child relationship.

Once participants started talking, the interviews tended to flow naturally. As McKenzie (2015, p.6) notes:

Anyone who has done qualitative research will know it is very difficult to get a succinct answer from a working-class respondent. It is much easier and more interesting to listen to 'their story' from the very beginning, and to see where it goes.

#### *4.8.2. Ethical considerations when interviewing families*

Much of the pre-interview 'work' helped to build rapport with participants and to explain exactly what the study was about and allowed time for questions. This went according to plan except for in one interview where a participant was particularly dubious about being audio recorded. We discussed the issue before the interview, and I explained why I record interviews and how the data is stored afterwards, but that I completely understand if she would rather not be recorded. She agreed to be recorded but after the interview mentioned that she never forgot she was being recorded but she did her best. This is an example of how ethical procedure needed continual negotiation. Throughout the interview process it was essential to ensure the comfort of the participant. If at any point she had wanted to withdraw and stop recording, I would have respected her wishes. This was important throughout the research process as many ethical considerations arose that needed careful management.

One difficulty that occurred when conducting family interviews, like when conducting interviews with community workers, was the issue of speaking to people within the same family separately, and not revealing what others had said. There were situations where I was unsure if parents knew I was going to talk to their adult children; where it was hard not to share what other family members had told me; and where I was in the uncomfortable position of knowing some very personal information from one family member which the concerning family member did not tell me about in their interview (Mannay 2011b). For example, in one interview, a participant explicitly shared his daughter's successful battle with cancer and how this altered the course of her career and life. I subsequently interviewed his daughter, who did not mention her battle with cancer in the interview. I could not un-know that information and it was niggling in the back of my mind in the interview. It also affected how I read and analysed the data produced. Such issues require careful respectful ethical management, especially when working with information across participants who are from the same family.

Maintaining face and the associated emotional labour was also a challenge within interviews (Goffman 1967; Hochschild 1983). As participants reflected on their biographies it was inevitable that sensitive topics would come up. It was my role to carefully manage these sensitive topics, providing an emotional and supportive response, and knowing the boundaries concerning what I should and should not ask. Mental and physical health struggles, failed marriages, family disputes, and caring for ill family members are just some examples of the stories of struggle and loss raised in the interviews. It was essential to be mindful of my responses to participants who arguably made themselves vulnerable in the research encounter. There was an ethical responsibility to ensure participants were comfortable with sharing such delicate information. This extract from my fieldnotes highlights concerns from the interview with Alex:

Alex surprisingly threw in about her struggles with mental health. Maybe this meant that she felt comfortable enough around me to tell me, I hope I showed empathy well and listened well.

(Fieldnote 30.08.2017)

As well as managing my response to sensitive topics, I also found myself negotiating highly controversial subjects, such as politics, Brexit, gender roles and immigration. These were not issues that I asked participants about, and they were not necessarily pertinent to the research, yet they came up in participants' talk. One participant was running as a candidate in the upcoming local elections, and it was difficult to hold back from sharing political viewpoints and beliefs. It was important not to alter the approach taken just because I may not have personally agreed with his political views because ultimately, this was not the time or place to be debating these issues.

Similarly, I found that when some participants spoke about topics such as Brexit, immigration, and welfare payments, these views made me feel highly uncomfortable (such as talking about 'gangs' of Asian families moving to the area). I had to bite my tongue and not appear to be responding negatively to their assertions. Lisiak and Krzyzowski (2018) discuss this struggle to maintain a balance between non-intervention in participants' narratives, establishing rapport, and staying 'true to yourself'. It felt uncomfortable to let such comments slide and not challenge them, but challenging such comments was beyond the remit of the research encounter and would not have been conducive to the research in question.

Finally, I also took the decision not to share interview transcripts with participants, partly because I was conscious of taking up too much of their time when I had already undertaken such lengthy interviews. But there was also the ethical concern, where multiple interviews were undertaken with different family members, of the transcripts getting into the wrong hands and other family members seeing what another had said (Mannay 2011a). This research therefore cannot claim to be 'participatory' in how it handled the data produced.

#### *4.8.3. Working with children and the use of creative methods*

Over the family interviews I spoke to four children under the age of ten and one over the age of fifteen. Young children were very shy and dubious of me at the beginning of the interview, often hiding behind parents, leaving the room, and not speaking to me. With a little encouragement from their mothers and the promise of being able to use craft materials, children eventually became comfortable and confident around me. I made it clear to parents that there was absolutely no pressure for their children to take part but often they would encourage their children to interact with me, and to not be 'rude' or 'silly'. Once I had unpacked the craft materials, children wanted to get involved. I found it difficult to explain to children what they could do (I was trying to keep the creative data production open and non-restrictive) and children quickly became distracted. It was difficult to get them to focus on one thing at a time and there were many times where we

went off topic. As a compromise when interviewing Alex and Lexi, I offered to help Lexi make the paper daisy chains she had been keen to make after she had helped me. This provided a way of focusing her on the task in hand, whilst also offering something in return. Children also tended to interrupt when adults were talking, being disruptive or calling out for mum, which although annoyed the adults, was insightful because I could observe the family dynamic in situ.

In terms of the creative methods used with children, I provided several options for what they could do, if they wanted to do any of them (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Mannay 2010; Smith 2019). Smith (2019) refers to this as a mosaic approach, and a creative approach generally enables participants to communicate in a meaningful way about their experiences through creating artefacts and reflecting on them (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). I typically suggested that they could draw: what they would like to be when they grow up; things that are important to them inside and outside of their home; what they like/dislike about where they live. Again, I ensured that children were comfortable doing this, as I know not all children enjoy paper crafts (Gillies and Robinson 2012; Johnson et al 2012). I provided pieces of card, paper, pens, pencils, glue and stickers and asked permission from parents to ensure they were happy for their children to use these resources as I did not want to make a mess in their homes or on their children's clothes.

Most children interpreted the tasks in their own ways, and arguably creative artefacts should only be analysed by the person who made it (Rose 2001; Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). Packard (2008) argues that the act of seeing is inherently subjective, although inevitably in the write-up process of research, we are still reliant on the researcher's translation of the ascribed meaning (Lomax 2012a; 2012b). For instance, when I asked Lexi and Chloe on separate occasions to draw their homes and things that are important to them inside and outside of it, Lexi drew a fairy house and Chloe drew all the physical items inside her house. Perhaps this was a fault on my behalf as I may not have explained the task clearly enough, but despite these creations not quite being what I expected, they are still of analytical interest. When researchers keep their methods unstructured and loose, the outcomes often vary across participants.

Parents were also highly influential in what their children produced, often giving them ideas or telling them what kinds of things they should include. The 'intrusive presence of significant others' is arguably inevitable in such an approach, and instead of trying to diminish intrusive voices, we should look to them to explore the intersubjective nature of the research encounter (Mannay 2013b). As children were not interviewed away from their parents, there is no way of 'knowing' whether they would have approached the task differently had they been able to do it without their parents present. Hence, we should not see children's 'voices' via visual methods as 'true' authentic representations because artefact production always occurs in social and cultural contexts (Lomax 2012a, 2012b; Mand 2012).

#### *4.8.4. Visual artefacts and ethical considerations*

I tried to encourage children to keep what they had produced, offering to just take a photograph of their creations, but more often than not children and parents were insistent on me keeping their visual artefacts. Lisa encouraged me to take her children's drawings as they would "only end up in the bin" otherwise. Lexi saw her drawings as a gift which she was adamant for me to keep. I deemed it important for participants to keep their creations so that they had something tangible to take from participating in the research. However, to respect their wishes, I kept visual creations when appropriate. Any visual data that I have collated has been stored safely and securely and there was no identifiable information present. Permission was gained from parents and children to use images of their creations in this work and in further publications/presentations.

#### *4.8.5. Adults and creative methods*

Adults were not so open to trying creative methods, often preferring to just talk rather than use a creative technique. Frequently when reading consent forms, adults would chuckle at the section which mentioned 'visual artefacts you produce' as that was not something they saw themselves doing (see also Weller 2012). However, some families appreciated the A3 sized maps of the community I provided so that they could point to areas where things had developed and changed over the years. Although creating something visual did not appeal to adult participants, many found that photographs were a great aid to the conversation (Rose 2010). Primary and secondary photographs were brought to several interviews and were an effective method of encouraging conversation and showing how things in the community used to be. Sometimes these were personal photos of family members or they were local history photos in books or on old calendars. Being able to see these images not only added to participants' stories and to my understanding, but also helped to create a more relaxed and engaging atmosphere. The use of visual artefacts enabled a more engaging and reciprocal research encounter (Weller 2012). I should also note that I did not keep or copy any of the photographs shown to me<sup>36</sup>.

Rose (2010) discusses the analytical importance of family photographs, suggesting that photos are objects embedded in practices that produce various effects. Some of these effects come from how the photograph is displayed (in a frame, on an iPad/computer, in an album) and I was shown photographs displayed both physically and digitally. As Rose (2010) notes, the images on their own are not enough but it is how they are spoken about and displayed that is of interest, and these insights from discussions of photographs contributed to the dataset.

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<sup>36</sup> Brady and Brown (2013) in their work with young mothers discuss the ethical issues around the use of photographs of participants in research, and how that information is not 'reclaimable' once it is out in the public domain.

#### *4.8.6. When the Dictaphone is off*

Some of the most interesting things were said both before the interview had ‘officially’ started, and after the Dictaphone was turned off at the end of the interview. There were many times where I wrote in my fieldnotes “why did I turn the Dictaphone off?!” as I rushed to scramble down notes about what had happened. On one occasion, I was walking for a few minutes with a participant after we had ‘finished’ the interview and she told me that she “couldn’t imagine not having family close by” and proceeded to tell me about how close her parents live in relation to her and how she sees them every day. Often researchers think the interview is over and begin to pack away, and then participants start discussing something which is of significance to the research. On another occasion, I had my coat on and was walking towards the door when a participant began showing me photographs she had up of her family members in another room. As aforementioned, I was ethnographic in my approach in terms of writing fieldnotes and thick descriptions of the research encounter and about the homes I was entering, and my intrusive presence and rupture into the private sphere. The waiting field and ‘spaces previous to’, ‘spaces after’, and ‘spaces of interruption’ all added further snippets of rich detail to provide a fuller picture of what the research encounter was like and how it was experienced (Mannay and Morgan 2015). These elements were just as vital as the interview ‘technique’ itself. Eventually, it was time to leave the field, and I document this process in the following section.

#### *4.9. Getting out of the field*

As recruitment for family interviews was a long and challenging process, I had to make an informed decision about when it was time to stop searching for new participants. By September 2017, I had completed nine lengthy family interviews with eight families, and alongside the data from the other aspects of fieldwork, it seemed like a good time to wind down the recruitment process to focus on data analysis. The interview with Roger in September 2017 fortunately and unexpectedly led to two further interviews, one with his wife Maureen, and one with his daughter Lesley and her family. This snowball sampling therefore added two further lengthy interviews to the dataset. I also heard back from Rosemary and Charles’s daughter, Kathryn, after initially interviewing them in May 2017. I interviewed Kathryn in October 2017. And finally, I had one further response to my advertisement in the Hiraeth community Facebook page from Tanya who I subsequently interviewed in October 2017. This final flurry of interviews towards the end of the fieldwork brought the total to thirteen family interviews with nine different families. I felt confident by this point that I had co-created more than enough data to attend to the research questions.

Finishing the community fieldwork occurred quite naturally, as my regular volunteering role in the Hub ended due to lack of participants. Work with Communities First started to wind down

due to the office preparing for the programme's end in March 2018. There was still the opportunity of ad hoc volunteering with the local charity, and where possible, I have lent a hand, although since the end of other fieldwork commitments, this also quietened down. Despite some repeated visits to families, contact has not been maintained with participants, mostly due to being aware of families' commitments and appreciating that they had already given their time to take part in the research. Some participants were clear that following their interview, they no longer wanted to be contacted, which I have respected. This was another reason why I did not present participants with their transcripts to review.

#### *4.10. Data keeping and analysis*

By using an ethnographic approach that produced many differing types of data such as fieldnotes, interview data from individual and family interviews, and visual data, it was important to ensure that the data were organised in a manageable fashion. Data analysis was an iterative and cyclical process, which involved working with all forms of data together to elucidate responses to the research questions - exploring the mobility narratives of participants and the intersection of class, place and gender. As previously discussed, not much visual data was created, and so the majority of data was textual. There was a large amount of textual qualitative data to store, manage and analyse.

The final section of this chapter discusses data keeping, management and analysis. It begins by explaining the approach taken to interview transcription, before exploring the important role of the research diary and how fieldnotes were stored. It then describes how the data management programme NVivo was used in the initial analysis process and the subsequent move to working with the data by hand. The final section introduces the theoretical approach taken to data analysis, a narrative-discursive approach, to familiarise the reader with the main insights from this approach, why it was appropriate for the research aims, and how it feeds into the following findings chapters.

##### *4.10.1. Transcription*

It was important to transcribe each interview as soon as possible, making notes in my research diary as the research progressed about areas of potential analytical interest. Transcriptions were completed with the aid of a foot pedal and transcription software, Express Scribe, to slow down the recordings. Being immersed in the interview data for such a long period of time over the transcription process meant I was strongly grounded in the data. This provided close attention to detail that would be lacking if transcription was left to a third party. The transcription model was kept simple because of the sheer amount of time transcription took, and because I deemed a granular, conversation analysis style of transcription unnecessary to fulfil the aims of this research.

Having over twenty-six hours of recorded material meant that transcribing took up a substantial amount of time. Therefore, the transcription process was basic, utilising: commas for pauses in continuous speech; full stops to indicate longer breaks in speech; square brackets to indicate when interjections were made by others; laughter denoted by \*laughs\*; clearing throat/pauses for thinking acknowledged; whispers denoted by \*whispers\*; and capital letters used for noticeably louder emphasis. If words were dragged out, this was shown by including extra letters in the word (for example, reeeally?). I did not record any information about lengths of pauses or about the speed or tone of the speech. The use of square brackets to denote interjections was especially important as often this showed how certain narratives were being co-constructed, either by my own supporting interjections (such as ‘yeah’, ‘mm’), or other family members’ interjections where they added information to the narrative, supporting or correcting it (Edley 2001; Atkinson and Coffey 2002; Nightingale and Cromby 2002; Burr 2003; Atkinson and Delamont 2006; Taylor 2006; 2010).

Transcription was essential to the process of data analysis, and continual immersion in the transcripts helped to develop familiarity with the material. By being transparent about the method of transcription chosen and why it was suitable to meet the aims of the research, it is hoped that a level of credibility is added to the research.

#### *4.10.2. Research diary and fieldnotes*

Throughout the research process, continual fieldnotes and memos were kept in a research diary, which were useful for reflection on method and for further data insights. For organisational purposes, fieldnotes were typed at the end of each session in the field so that they could be easily transferred into NVivo, a computer programme which supports the development of qualitative data analysis. It was not always an option to log fieldnotes on the computer straightaway when ideas came to mind. This led to making initial notes on my phone after leaving the field. Typically, significant things happened when the recorder was off and so every effort was made to report on these in the fieldnotes. Using a mobile phone was essential for the initial ‘brain dump’ of information that swarms researchers’ minds after an encounter in the field. However, it is vital to consider the ethical difficulties of having such data on a mobile device, and so when I was able to access the computer to type up the observations, the notes were deleted from the phone.

The main benefit of using a computer instead of handwritten notes was that thoughts and ideas could be noted down faster, without worrying about forgetting something. It also meant that through secure storage and back-ups, the fieldnotes would never be lost. I do recognise, however, the more emotional and personal involvement that comes with handwritten fieldnotes, but for practical reasons it was easier to type up research reflections. The research diary where I recorded potential analysis ideas was handwritten in the form of a notebook and several post-it notes. This

provided some distance from the data itself and allowed a clearer depiction of how some of the analytical thought processes came about and developed.

#### *4.10.3. NVivo for organising data and aiding data analysis*

Having kept fieldnotes recorded electronically, using a programme such as NVivo seemed an obvious choice to store and organise the data. Within NVivo, data can be added in a variety of formats such as interview transcripts, images, and documents, and it provided a storage point for all the data created and used in this study. NVivo proved crucial in providing the scaffolding for the analysis of fieldnotes, which formed the basis of the reflexive insights in this chapter (see *Figure 2* and *Figure 3*).

NVivo allowed data to be coded and for the creation of hierarchies within codes such as parent and child nodes. The codes were continually adjusted and merged, which was essential when analytical concepts were being developed. NVivo enabled me to organise thoughts in a compartmentalised manner, which enhanced the reflexive writing process.

Initially, I thought I would continue to use NVivo to aid analysis of the interview data as it seemed to be the most practical solution for coding a large dataset. However, when it came to reading and re-reading transcripts and recognising initial areas of interest, coding within NVivo was difficult and often led to the loss of nuance in narratives (Benson and Jackson 2012). After coding the fieldnotes in NVivo, the best solution appeared to be printing physical copies of the transcripts out to analyse and work with the data by hand. This included highlighting transcripts in multiple colours and annotating transcripts in a much more traditional style. Although the idea of using NVivo and its organisational interface seemed promising, in practice, having physical copies of the data worked best. It is also important to add that all transcripts were anonymised and kept safely and securely in lockable storage.

Nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
Ad-hoc Volunteering Reflexivity Nodes		1	1 23/10/2017 16:21	LF	23/10/2017 16:21	LF	
Hub		12	17 12/10/2017 13:47	LF	20/10/2017 15:09	LF	
Reflexivity nodes CF volunteering		4	59 17/10/2017 12:38	LF	17/10/2017 12:38	LF	
Reflexivity nodes community staff interviews		6	43 17/10/2017 11:56	LF	17/10/2017 12:31	LF	
Conducting interviews in public places		1	1 17/10/2017 12:25	LF	17/10/2017 12:25	LF	
Difficult to be specific		2	3 17/10/2017 12:00	LF	17/10/2017 12:26	LF	
Difficulties of interviewing people at work		3	14 17/10/2017 11:58	LF	17/10/2017 12:16	LF	
Difficulty of access		2	4 17/10/2017 11:58	LF	17/10/2017 12:16	LF	
Emotional response		2	6 17/10/2017 11:57	LF	17/10/2017 12:20	LF	
Ethics		1	1 17/10/2017 12:27	LF	17/10/2017 12:27	LF	
Familiar faces in public places		2	4 17/10/2017 12:06	LF	17/10/2017 12:08	LF	
New approach to interview		1	3 17/10/2017 12:14	LF	17/10/2017 12:16	LF	
Participant assumptions about research		1	1 17/10/2017 12:06	LF	17/10/2017 12:06	LF	
Politeness and reciprocol		4	4 17/10/2017 12:20	LF	18/10/2017 15:40	LF	
When the dictaphone is off		2	2 17/10/2017 12:08	LF	17/10/2017 12:25	LF	
Reflexivity nodes family interviews		16	246 09/10/2017 15:42	LF	17/10/2017 11:45	LF	
Reflexivity nodes from creative club		29	216 18/10/2017 14:26	LF	18/10/2017 14:26	LF	

Figure 2: Screenshot demonstrating the hierarchy of reflexivity codes in relation to community worker interviews.

Nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
Ad-hoc Volunteering Reflexivity Nodes		1	1 23/10/2017 16:21	LF	23/10/2017 16:21	LF	
Hub		12	17 12/10/2017 13:47	LF	20/10/2017 15:09	LF	
Reflexivity nodes CF volunteering		4	59 17/10/2017 12:38	LF	17/10/2017 12:38	LF	
Reflexivity nodes community staff interviews		6	43 17/10/2017 11:56	LF	17/10/2017 12:31	LF	
Reflexivity nodes family interviews		16	246 09/10/2017 15:42	LF	17/10/2017 11:45	LF	
Awkward moments		9	18 09/10/2017 16:08	LF	17/10/2017 11:53	LF	
Biting my tongue		6	9 11/10/2017 13:38	LF	18/10/2017 14:50	LF	
Children and shyness		3	9 09/10/2017 15:06	LF	11/10/2017 15:48	LF	
Creative methods		8	13 11/10/2017 14:17	LF	12/10/2017 13:35	LF	
Emotional response		4	8 11/10/2017 14:26	LF	18/10/2017 14:50	LF	
Ethics		4	7 11/10/2017 16:07	LF	17/10/2017 11:52	LF	
Family interview difficulties		8	25 09/10/2017 16:15	LF	17/10/2017 11:49	LF	
House appearance		10	33 09/10/2017 15:01	LF	23/10/2017 16:24	LF	
Importance of reciprocity and creating friendly atmosphere		11	29 09/10/2017 15:28	LF	18/10/2017 14:50	LF	
Participant's assumptions about research		9	16 09/10/2017 15:15	LF	27/10/2017 13:00	LF	
Politeness and respect		11	42 09/10/2017 15:03	LF	17/10/2017 11:49	LF	
Positives of family interviews		7	12 09/10/2017 16:18	LF	18/10/2017 14:50	LF	
Researcher safety		1	3 09/10/2017 15:55	LF	09/10/2017 15:57	LF	
Sensitive information		6	9 09/10/2017 15:32	LF	12/10/2017 14:01	LF	
When the dictaphone is off		9	13 11/10/2017 14:21	LF	17/10/2017 11:51	LF	
Reflexivity nodes from creative club		29	216 18/10/2017 14:26	LF	18/10/2017 14:26	LF	

Figure 3: Screenshot demonstrating the hierarchy of reflexivity codes in relation to family interviews.

#### *4.10.4. Approach to analysis*

The analysis explored how narratives of social mobility are constructed and intertwined with place-based, classed and gendered identities. I applied what Taylor (2010) terms a ‘narrative-discursive’ approach. Critiquing the individualising nature of the ‘reflexive identity project’ (Beck 1992; Giddens 1998) which tends to ignore wider sociocultural contexts and constraints upon ‘identity work’, Taylor (2010, p.129) argues that identity projects should be considered in discursive terms, involving the negotiation of “multiple and conflicting versions, positions and projected possibilities”. Rose (1998) and Walkerdine et al (2001) have also critiqued the ‘reflexive identity project’ because of the psychological strain endured in the continual reinvention of the self, which can lead to the internalisation and individualisation of failure. Established narratives and discourses (for example around social mobility, gender roles, and home ownership) are normative and provide speakers with yardsticks with which to measure their own perceived success or failure. These narratives and discourses were explored in participants’ talk, particularly how they were drawn upon to shape and construct continuity in narratives. Importantly, the analysis of participants’ talk did not lead to ‘true’ information about the person behind the talk, but instead has highlighted the specific identity work that occurred in the interview context, and any established narratives and discourses that were drawn upon in relation to social mobility, place, class and gender.

This approach was suited to attending to the research questions and was also informed by the epistemological and ontological positioning of the research. Discursively analysing participants’ speech enabled an exploration of how notions of social mobility (in relation to place, class and gender) were interpreted and constructed in the social context of the interview, and whether established narratives were sought or rejected. Discursive approaches are often critiqued for their inability to account for consistency in identity work and formation. In response to this, Taylor (2006; 2010) argues that identity work is inevitably incomplete and always a work-in-progress as it occurs through talk, however, ‘local resources’ or previous tellings of narratives help us to construct the current telling of the narrative. This allows for some consistency across narratives, although context inevitably influences narrative construction. This approach emphasises the intersubjective nature of identity work, as opposed to the individualised thesis of the ‘reflexive identity project’. It highlights how dominant narratives and discourses are drawn upon, accepted, and rejected in the construction of narratives that help participants make sense of their lives (Skeggs 1997). The findings chapters draw out some of these narratives, demonstrating what they mean in relation to the dominant social mobility discourse, and highlighting the prevalence of place-based, classed, and gendered identities within them.

Throughout the findings chapters I discuss the common discursive resources drawn upon by participants and explore this in relation to previous literature that has been reviewed, relevant

theoretical concepts, and the research questions. If social mobility is deemed as “a matter of being the right kind of self” (Gillies 2005, p.839), the analysis demonstrates how this is negotiated by participants in their narratives.

#### *4.11. Conclusion*

This chapter has provided a comprehensive, reflexive insight into the research process undertaken and how this attunes to the research questions stated at the beginning of the chapter. It has introduced the reader to the key epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the research and has presented the rationale for the methodological decisions taken pertaining to data creation and analysis. It is hoped that the transparency and authenticity of this research has been strengthened by describing the research process in close detail. As an intersubjective, discursive approach has been taken to the analysis, it seemed only appropriate to draw upon the intersubjective nature of the fieldwork through the reflexive insights presented in this chapter. The three different strands of data creation - community fieldwork, community worker interviews, and family interviews - each provided different opportunities to learn more about Hiraeth and some of the community’s inhabitants. Through working rigorously with all of the different data created, both textual and visual, the findings chapters provide readings of the data, suggesting how the data can be understood in relation to social mobility and demonstrating the intersection of place-based, classed, and gendered identities within mobility narratives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Introducing Hiraeth - Class, Community, Place-Making and (Im)mobilities

#### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the importance of place to Hiraeth's residents, providing a detailed analysis of the importance of place-attachment. The chapter examines the dynamic relationship between place and class and their impacts on discursive identity formation. There is a focus on place fixity, and the ways in which it is contradictory to dominant social mobility narratives, where those in disadvantaged communities are encouraged to 'get out and get away' to improve their lives.

The socioeconomic profile of Hiraeth is characterised by deprivation, whilst also being home to pockets of affluence. Section 5.2 provides a short history of the community and its development, drawing upon residents' narratives. I also explore the construction of 'place' through the Welsh Government's flagship 'Communities First' programme, and the frustrations from community development workers of the policy's approach. The rest of the chapter explores how place-making and belonging were constructed by Hiraeth residents, applying the analytical concept of the 'born and bred' narrative to explore the variety of different ways that residents constructed their place-attachment. These include: the importance of keeping close to family and home; generational constructions of belonging; temporary mobilities and the road to home; and the construction of meanings-made-in-common.

In presenting a detailed exploration of the importance of place-based attachment, this chapter seeks to question dominant narratives of social mobility that encourage geographical mobility. The overall argument of this chapter is that the value attached to place in working-class communities needs to be recognised (McKenzie 2015; Littler 2018) by those who suggest that residents in such communities need to expand their spatial horizons (Green and White 2007). Investments should be made in communities such as Hiraeth to further strengthen the communal bonds and to recognise local value systems that matter to the community (Skeggs 2011; Lang and Marsden 2017). As the dominant social mobility discourse focuses on *movement*, this chapter demonstrates the value attached to *anchorage*, suggesting that the concept of social mobility needs re-imagining to allow for relational selfhood tied to locality to flourish.

#### 5.2. Setting the scene: Hiraeth's community profile

This section introduces the reader to Hiraeth, drawing upon the narratives of participants. I will provide a brief historical overview of the development of the suburb and the socioeconomic status of the community. I will also describe and problematise the Welsh Government's approach to community and place through its long-running 'Communities First' policy, which ran in Hiraeth

from 2008 to 2018. It is important to distinguish between area and place, as area refers to how the suburb is understood formally through statistics and governmental understandings, whilst place refers to how residents construct and interpret the community in which they live. This descriptive section will help paint a picture of both area and place for the reader and provide detailed contextualisation before exploring residents' constructions of place and belonging.

### *5.2.1. From agriculture to urban suburb - A brief history of Hiraeth*

Hiraeth is an area of interesting contrasts. A suburb of the south Wales city Pencaer, the area has a strong agricultural heritage, and used to be considered a rural parish at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anonymous 1997<sup>37</sup>; Anonymous 2003; Anonymous 2005). It was seen as a village by residents before the World Wars, with village life being centred around the amenities available on the main road, or dirt track as it was then, that links the west to the east of Hiraeth. Local historians have documented the presence of farms and rolling countryside in Hiraeth, with its population under 600 at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of whom were farmers (Anonymous 2005). This notion of the 'rural idyll' was maintained until the introduction of housing developments, about which lifelong residents would reminisce:

**Tracy:** I mean, you could also walk from here right through to the sea wall towards [neighbouring town] [LF: mhm] as well, none of that over there was built [LF: mhm], the industrial estate no, that was, there was just like, countryside again.

Today agriculture has disappeared in Hiraeth, and the population has increased more than thirteen times the figure from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anonymous 2005; ONS 2011). Progression into the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen Hiraeth adapt from its agricultural roots, whilst also managing to maintain some sense of continuity and linkage to its past. As agriculture made way for more dominant forms of industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the steelworks which were situated in central Pencaer, Hiraeth became an 'overspill' community, often shipping in buses of workers to the city. Although not home to industry itself, Hiraeth was and still is essential in providing workers for some of the city's biggest industries. I will explore employment narratives further in Chapter Seven, sections 7.3.3 and 7.4.

Geographically, Hiraeth maintains its boundary to connecting areas via the Hiraeth bridge, which goes over the river (Anonymous 2005). This bridge is the first sign that you are entering Hiraeth and is an important part of the history of the area (Anonymous 1997). Once over the bridge, one of the first buildings you come across is the historic family-run craft business, which is one of the oldest buildings in Hiraeth dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still manufacturing today (Anonymous 2005). As you continue up the main road, you come to the mainstay of shops and amenities for the area, including a supermarket, police station, banks, estate agents, hairdressers,

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<sup>37</sup> Sources have been anonymised in order to protect against identifying the area.

takeaways, a dental surgery, and a pharmacy. The topography of the area is quite hilly, and as you walk up the main road, you are walking up what locals call 'Hiraeth hill'. Although writing some twenty years ago, it was noted that these shops have changed ownership over the years but little else has changed since the 1960s (Anonymous 1997). A local historian notes that a garage on the hill has been open since 1924, and from personal observation, I can see it is still in business today. These are just a few examples of the continuity of the local businesses in Hiraeth. As Mary, one of my oldest participants recalled:

... actually, Hiraeth itself apart from the, the uh, the big housing estate, is very much the same [LF: yeah], you know, very much the same from what I remember it...

The rest of Hiraeth is mostly reserved for housing with some community buildings (such as churches and schools) dotted around. At the bottom of Hiraeth, there is a large area of flatlands that lie along the coast, with a continuous sea wall in place to protect from the tide that dates back to Roman times (Anonymous 2005). This moor or salt-marsh used to be commonplace for fishing although less so today (Anonymous 2002). Slightly further inland yet still below the residential area there is a modern industrial estate. There is also a man-made lake and park, which was opened by the local council in the early 2000s to compensate residents for a loss of open space in the community. The various terrains in the community show linkages to Hiraeth's past whilst also developing the community for 21<sup>st</sup> century living.

### *5.2.2. Housing development in Hiraeth*

Housing development in Hiraeth started after the first World War with a house 'here and there' but gradually picked up pace by the end of the 1930s (Anonymous 2005). By 1931, Hiraeth's population had grown to over 3000. Both Wars caused a large shortage of houses in the area, alongside the influx of workers moving to Pencaer. Around 800 homes were built in 1938, most of which were semi-detached (Anonymous 2003). These houses are either redbrick-fronted or well painted, often have large bay or turret windows, with some having steps up to the front door with a leafy, moderate-sized front garden and enough space to park a car or two on the drive. These homes are large and desirable and look like homes you would find in affluent green suburbs, which is surprising given the high levels of poverty in Hiraeth.

Two years after the end of World War II, more housing developments further encroached into the large open spaces that were previously used for agriculture and farming (Anonymous 2005). Large houses on the main road on the western border of Hiraeth lost a considerable chunk of their leafy front gardens due to the widening of the road, as their homes became absorbed into the modern housing estates that were appearing around them (Anonymous 2003). These eventually spread into the neighbouring suburbs of the city. Homes on the north-eastern side of Hiraeth are mainly council houses, many being prefabricated homes and a large number have metal cladding

on their exterior, physically marking them as different. These houses came along much later in the development of the area. Hiraeth's agricultural history is barely recognisable, there are still some open spaces and parks, although residents often queried how well these were maintained by the council. As Lisa, her husband Rob, and her mother Anne reflected, it was quite a disappointment when original homeowners realised that they would no longer be living in the 'countryside':

**Lisa:** It was all fields weren't it when you, when you bought

**Rob:** The build, the two builders went uh bankrupt [Anne: yeah] and uh, council moved in then and built the council [Lisa: the whole estate] estate all around us

**Lisa:** Cos dad said uh, to the, to the builders, you're not gonna be building around here now are you? Cos they moved from [Pencaer suburb] he wanted to, moving out to the countryside he thought [LF: yeah] he said oh no, it's all farmers' fields dint he?

**Anne:** Yeah, he had all these plans with lovely things all around us like you know [LF: yeah] the next thing we know they started building all around us, this was the same house now, my mum lived here before Lisa and Rob

When looking at Census data (ONS 2011), a vast majority of homes in Hiraeth are semi-detached (over 60 per cent), with purpose-built blocks of flats (low-rise) and terraced houses/bungalows the next two highest groups. Almost 70 per cent of households are owned (either outright or with a mortgage), a figure that is 10 per cent higher than Pencaer-wide figures. Social renting (from both the council and 'other' providers) accounts for a fifth of homes, which is marginally higher than Pencaer figures. It appears both privately owning your home and socially renting are overrepresented in Hiraeth, highlighting the area's complex and varying socioeconomic make-up.

### *5.2.3. Understanding Hiraeth's socioeconomic profile*

There are stark socioeconomic contrasts in Hiraeth. Areas of poverty and disadvantage are concentrated in the newer estates, where younger families reside often in (socially) rented houses. Even where homeownership has been an option (for instance, through the Right to Buy policy), council homes are still clearly demarcated through their physical appearance. Houses in the south and west of Hiraeth are typically more 1930s style semi-detached. Housing is one of the biggest physical markers of the contrasting socioeconomic statuses present in one neighbourhood, and this is explored in detail in Chapter Six, section 6.2.

One widely used measure to understand the level of deprivation in communities is the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). Described as the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales (Welsh Government 2017), the WIMD uses a variety of domains to measure the levels of multiple deprivation and is both an area-based measure and a relative deprivation measure (Welsh Government 2017). It is a comparative measure that does not provide

the level of deprivation within areas, but it allows for comparisons to other areas across Wales, leading to a relative ranking. Parts of Wales are divided into Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) with 1909 areas in total. These 1909 areas are ranked based on the eight domains, from most (1) to least (1909) deprived. The eight domains are compiled from a range of different indicators and focus on housing, employment, health, education, access to services, community safety, physical environment, and housing (Welsh Government 2017).

Hiraeth is split into six LSOAs, two of which are categorised as being amongst the ‘10% most deprived’ in Wales. One LSOA is categorised as being amongst the ‘10-20% most deprived’ and another amongst the ‘30-50% most deprived’ LSOAs in Wales. Despite this suggesting that Hiraeth has a high level of multiple deprivation, two of the LSOAs are defined as being among the ‘50% least deprived’ LSOAs in Wales. It comes as no surprise that these two LSOAs are situated in the south and west of Hiraeth, the areas typically dominated by privately owned 1930s semi-detached houses. Nevertheless, the three lower rankings are what qualified Hiraeth to become a ‘Communities First’ area, the flagship Welsh Government anti-poverty initiative. This demonstrates that Hiraeth has some substantial social and economic contrasts, influencing the place-making and (im)mobility narratives of its residents.

#### *5.2.4. Communities First? How the Welsh Government conceptualises area and place*

Central to the Welsh Government’s approach to strengthening communities and addressing poverty and disadvantage was a flagship, long-term, area-based programme called ‘Communities First’. Starting in 2001, the Communities First programme was originally based in 142 small areas around Wales that were considered some of the most disadvantaged, with more areas being added following the release of the 2005 WIMD. The approach of the programme was emphasised as being bottom-up as it utilised a ‘three-thirds partnership’ model whereby Communities First partnerships would consist of one third community representatives, one third statutory sector representatives and the remaining third divided equally between the voluntary and business sectors (Welsh Assembly Government 2002). One of the driving aims behind this programme was for communities themselves to be able to decide what is needed in their area and to increase the participation of local people, particularly as they accounted for a third of the partnership. Encouraging “creativity, risk taking and imaginative approaches”, the Communities First programme was considered an innovative and integrated approach to improving communities and addressing issues of poverty (Welsh Assembly Government 2002, p.6). As I suggested in Chapter Two, section 2.4.2, social mobility arguably became an implicit aim of the Communities First programme, as it was framed as a policy that aimed to improve and raise the aspirations of individuals and communities, despite the Welsh Government’s lack of direct policy focus on social mobility.

With a multitude of aims, the programme set its sights on improving issues that disadvantaged communities may face such as: increasing the confidence of residents, encouraging skills development, improving job opportunities, and improving the quality of local housing. Ultimately, however, it was down to the partnership itself to decide what to focus on through the creation of a 'Communities First Plan' which referred to a 'Community Vision Framework'. Residents were very much at the core of how their communities were developed, having a much more active than passive role in the Communities First programme (Dicks 2014). It is unclear when exactly Communities First took hold in Hiraeth, although I was informed in the fieldwork that a core team of five including three development officers, an administrative officer, and a coordinator started work in the community in 2008.

In 2012, it was announced that Communities First would be reimagined and updated, with new, larger 'clusters' replacing previous Communities First areas (although still based on the WIMD), and a focus on 'good governance', 'strong community involvement', and 'effective delivery of outcomes' (Welsh Government 2013b, 2015; Arad Research 2017). The new Communities First had a more top-down approach with a strong target-focus ensued through Results Based Accountability, abandoning the previous 'Partnership' approach (Dicks 2014; Arad Research 2017). Hiraeth became one community within a Communities First cluster, which covered Hiraeth and five other distinct neighbouring communities. It seemed that the notion of 'community' was lost as clusters incorporated a variety of communities all with differing needs and concerns. Any understanding of what 'place' meant to residents was lost under this new approach.

As I sat in on staff consultations following the announcement in February 2017 of the eventual ending of Communities First, many frustrations with the 'cluster' model were communicated. The community of Hiraeth alone is almost double the size of a Communities First area pre-2012, adding to that the other five communities surrounding it. Staff were spread thinly, feeling unable to build relationships with the communities or be reflexive of their needs, as they were more focused on delivering the programmes that would meet the Welsh Government's target outcomes (Dicks 2014). The competitive nature of target meeting often came at the expense of working collaboratively with partners and the communities, as one frustrated Learning Officer said in his consultation about targets - "we've missed the fucking point". In this sense, the notions of 'place' and 'community' were lost in Communities First as it did not attend to residents' needs and conceptualisations of place but focused on an agglomeration of deprived communities with an array of needs and a dearth of community workers on the ground. For some staff, the intricacies and complexities of Hiraeth, as well as the other communities in the cluster, were ignored in the cluster approach of Communities First.

One of the biggest difficulties faced by Communities First in the cluster where Hiraeth is situated was the lack of trust and knowledge of the programme by residents. Hiraeth was the location of the cluster's offices (before Communities First ended in March 2018). In consultations with community partners (June 2017), the issue of visibility and accessibility came up repeatedly as partners emphasised the lack of an established 'community space' where residents would feel comfortable accessing community services and advice. The offices the Communities First team worked out of in Hiraeth appeared too formal, with a fence surrounding the perimeter and the need to press a buzzer to gain access. As a programme focused on 'strong community engagement', it appeared that Communities First in Hiraeth struggled with its community presence, even though its offices were based in the community. Once residents were aware of the Communities First programme, there was still a lot of scepticism as Hiraeth, as well as its neighbouring communities, had previously been home to many attempted community programmes and services. As Lucy, a Health Officer for Hiraeth's Communities First cluster reflected:

And yeah, that said I think the trust also is, there's been obviously a lot of community initiatives that come and go... if you're really finding it difficult to get confident to use some services when you decide to use those services then they disappear because the funding has run out or whatever. Whatever is coming again is going to have to start from scratch or even worse because you know the trust has gone, not one step, two or three steps, you know people feel even less supported, like what's the point, I've heard that, what's the point if you're not going to be here, or how long is that?

My interview with Lucy took place just after the initial announcement that Communities First would be ending in March 2018. Arguably, any trust and relationships built under the Communities First umbrella were dismantled with its demise. Lucy's use of the word 'services' is interesting here and is one of the key turning points of Communities First post-2012. The programme saw a move away from collaboration *with* the community to service provision *for* the community, or what Dicks (2014) terms, the move from an active citizenship approach to community activation. Towards the end, all three strands of the post-2012 Communities First programme appeared to have employability as their sole focus - Learning programmes to ensure residents of all ages were skilled enough to enter the job market; Prosperity programmes helping those out of work to become successful in applying for work; and Health programmes to promote healthier behaviours for both physical and mental health in order to aid employability, productivity, and 'well-being' (Dicks 2014). This was noted in the National Assembly for Wales' (2017, p.18) review of Communities First which stated, "Since 2016, the Welsh Government has shifted its focus to the economy, skills and employment in relation to poverty reduction". This was evident in the programmes that ran (and still run despite Communities First ending) alongside Communities First, 'Communities for Work' and the 'LIFT' programme. These focus on those who are long-term unemployed in workless households and those aged 16 to 24 not in education,

employment or training (NEET) (Welsh Government 2015; Communities First Annual Review 2016; Arad Research 2017). Chapter Seven, section 7.2 critiques the employability focus of Communities First in closer detail, exploring the implications for community ‘development’ and improvement.

The loss of the community focus from the original incarnation of Communities First saw a move to the individualisation of poverty and disadvantage through employability programmes. This was critiqued by the National Assembly for Wales (2017, p.8) who stated, “the approach of influencing individual circumstances in an effort to improve the outcomes of an entire area has no proven evidence base”. This, combined with the target-driven approach, meant much of what Communities First workers in Hiraeth were concerned with was ‘bums-on-seats’ on the programmes being offered, rather than organic engagement and collaboration with the community itself (see also Dicks 2014). This was something that staff discussed in their interviews with me and in the consultation meetings following the announcement of the end of Communities First. Staff were frustrated by the limitations placed on them through the Welsh Government’s demands for quantitative targets to be met.

This more top-down approach meant the programme failed to engage meaningfully with what was of value and importance to Hiraeth residents. As the notions of place and community were lost through the creation of one large and unmanageable cluster, the locally constructed meaning-making of Hiraeth residents could not be attended to in the programme’s aims (explored in the following section). Arguably, the programme shifted the responsibility for local socioeconomic improvement onto individuals’ efforts and outcomes. Improving your ‘self’ will not improve the structural inequalities faced by your community, but it will suggest expanding your spatial horizons to follow opportunities elsewhere, therefore rendering your community as somewhere that is value-less (Green and White 2007; Skeggs 2011; Littler 2018). This leads to the suggestion that perhaps we should be investing in the improvement of places and communities, instead of individuals, aligning with Lang and Marsden’s (2017) notion of a place-based approach to growth. Through their ‘Deep Place Approach’, Lang and Marsden propose semi-autonomous local economies that encourage genuine community development over competition. Investing in place is, of course, the antithesis of social mobility, as instead of focusing on ‘escaping’ certain communities for individual gain and encouraging competition, it encourages fixity and cooperation (Littler 2018). I will return to this idea of alternative approaches to social mobility in the concluding section of this chapter.

Through providing a description of the development of the community of Hiraeth, exploring in detail the socioeconomic dynamics of the community, and how ‘place’ was constructed through the Welsh Government’s ‘Communities First’ initiative, I have given a broad overview of Hiraeth,

which will help to contextualise the residents' narratives presented in the following section. There are interesting contrasts in the community, some of which could not be attended to by the top-down approach ascribed by the Communities First programme. It was important to consider how Communities First constructed 'place' as this is different to localised constructions on the ground, which is what the next section will demonstrate. I am aware that I have left several key demographic areas untouched (culture and identity, education and employment) but these shall be covered in Chapters Six and Seven respectively. The next section explores place-making and belonging drawing on the key discursive resources through which participants constructed their relationship to Hiraeth.

### *5.3. Place-making and belonging*

Even in contemporary social mobility studies, such as the edited collection produced by Lawler and Payne (2018), there is a lack of recognition for the role that place-attachment and community plays in mobility narratives (Folkes 2018a). Normative discourses of social mobility involve the notion of 'getting out and getting away' (Lawler 1999; Littler 2018), neglecting the meaning-making of people who value anchorage to the local community and kinship ties. This section examines how place-attachment featured in participants' narratives and how commonly shared discursive resources helped to construct both place and classed identities. It begins by outlining some key literature on place-making and how social class is implicated in this process, before working through the key resources drawn upon by participants, under the broader umbrella of the 'born and bred' narrative.

Although discussed in Chapter Three, it is important to revisit the relationship between social class and place. The intersectionality of place-based and classed identities is premised upon the performative and relational nature of both identities, as both draw upon sets of discursive practices in processes of class distinction-making (Watt 2009; Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013; Bradley 2014; Jeffery 2018). The process of place-making is dynamic, and place has a role in shaping the classed subjectivities of local residents (Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012; McKenzie 2015). Although often argued that place-based attachment is an expression of class identity, it is important not to reduce class identity solely down to place-based identity as many other factors influence class identity formation (MacDonald et al 2005; Paton 2013). As class identification is often rejected and struggled against (which in itself is a class-based process), place can be used as a way of exploring aspects of classed identities (Skeggs 1997; 2004; Lawler 2005; Tyler 2013; 2015).

Much contemporary literature exploring place-based belonging examines how middle-class residents make places their own or maintain their communities as middle-class, usually in gentrified or gated communities (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012).

Utilising the work of Savage et al (2005), this literature draws upon the concept of ‘elective belonging’ and processes of ‘doing’ place that mean the middle-classes can take moral ownership over them. For Paton (2013) and Jeffery (2018), this ignores the place-making work that is achieved by longstanding working-class residents, where different local value systems may be present (Skeggs 2004; Evans 2006; Skeggs 2011; McKenzie 2015; Walkerdine 2016). Middle-class values are centred on choice, commodification and mobility, both in relation to place and achievement (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Skeggs 2004; Benson and Jackson 2012; Tyler 2013). Consequently, social mobility narratives suggest that the only way for those in marginalised communities to get on is to get away from such areas, ultimately devaluing their community (Scourfield et al 2006; Green and White 2007; Skeggs 2011; Littler 2018). Rather than framing such communities as ‘lacking’, and its residents as ‘stuck’, it is timely to appreciate the place-making that occurs and the value this holds in working-class communities such as Hiraeth.

### *5.3.1. The born and bred narrative*

For many participants, a central resource for enabling identity work in relation to place was the born and bred narrative. This discursive resource was used by participants when recalling memories of their lives as a way of constructing continuity in their narratives, demonstrating attachment to place through length of residence, close kinship ties and a sense of anchoring (Taylor 2010). The born and bred narrative holds value within the community of Hiraeth, and interviews demonstrated a strong attachment to place. Through use of historical terms and knowledge of the area, families were able to extend their connection to place by situating their own life narratives within the longer historical narrative of the community (Taylor 2010). Within this narrative, specific and often implicit local discursive resources were drawn upon when discussing different parts of the community. These social and cultural understandings provided participants with resources for talk, which strengthened their connections to place as these resources were only available to those who were ‘local’. I will demonstrate how the born and bred narrative and local discursive resources constructed a strong place-based attachment, which held local value within the community, despite the dominant social mobility narrative’s focus on social and geographical mobility.

### *5.3.2. Familial proximity, keeping close and anchoring*

Of all the families interviewed, with the exception of one, there were other family members either living in the same house, on the same street, or in other streets within Hiraeth. Having family near was a locally valued and central facet in the born and bred narrative, through which participants understood their lives and identities compared with those living nearby (Barker 1972; Watt 2006; Skeggs 2011; Mannay 2013a). In her 1972 seminal work based in a south Wales town, Barker highlighted the centrality of an affective relationship with home within the Welsh context. Therefore, the home is valorised and the notion of ‘keeping close’ amongst family members is

crucial to maintaining this relationship (Barker 1972). Often a certain family home acted as a kind of anchor, providing stability and consistency for those in the family, and a site of support when needed. This can be seen in Rosemary and Charles's (married, 70s) narrative about downsizing their home:

**Rosemary:** I think it's about eighteen years around like that, yes cos, oh, it doesn't work out this way but I mean we had left the house because we had four, we had four, yep, four in six years, our babies you know, because they all grew up and they all...and then they were all leaving home, and we moved to a bungalow and suddenly everybody came back home again \*laughs\* [LF: oh no!] at one point we had three, three lots in a year! [LF: oh gosh!] but uh, we built the conservatory \*laughs\* to give a bit of extra room [LF: extra space], we had one in each room and that was it! One family! But uh, yeah, they've all had their problems at different times but that's family, isn't it?... Yeah, if you can't go anywhere else you can go home. Even the grandchildren come back to us, don't they Charles?

Even after children have grown-up and moved out (and parents have downsized) the anchoring role of the parental/familial home is still important to families (Barker 1972). This provides consistency and continuity to the narratives constructed by participants as proximity to the familial home helps to shape (im)mobility narratives. When I asked Rosemary and Charles about where their children currently live, it became even more apparent that maintaining proximity to family members has impacted upon decisions made by their three children:

**Charles:** Yes well they're very close together

**Rosemary:** No they're all very close! \*laughs\*

**LF:** They haven't gone far!

**Charles:** We can't get away from them!

**Rosemary:** The one [grandchild] I was taking to school today they're in [neighbouring suburb] so they're just the other side of Penrhos Road, and right at the top of [neighbouring suburb] so just opposite the rec, so um, yes they're there. My daughter is in Hiraeth, she lives behind the shops, you know there's the little block of shops... And then, [Charles: John is close] John lives down off Trinity Road [LF: mmmm] yeah, so they're all very close... you could walk to any of them \*laughs\* ...so yeah, all the family live close yes.

Attachment to place is reinforced through kinship networks and social capital linkages within the immediate community (Barker 1972). Charles humorously states, "we can't get away from them!" although clearly this has never been attempted as they have remained in the same area since marrying over fifty years ago and their children are Hiraeth 'born and bred'. Unlike the commodification of place as typically emphasised by more mobile and transient middle-class 'consumers' (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Skeggs 2004; Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013), the residents of Hiraeth displayed a sense of value and worth in being close to home (Barker 1972). When discussing spending her whole life living in her grandparents' home, Tracy and her husband Michael (50s) talked about how they have adjusted to living in the house, and how their daughter Lucy (30s) came to live with them following her wedding and having children:

**Michael:** Yeah over the years [LF: mmm] we've just, fitted the house to suit us really [LF: mm] um, and Lucy and Martin when they got married in 2011 they moved out to [neighbouring suburb] and then um, when Tracy's Nan passed away we were in the similar situation, in so much as we were kinda rattling around in a big house [LF: mmm] with no children home, oh Gareth was home at that time, no! And-

**Tracy:** Yeah he was home

**Michael:** That's right, only just though wasn't he?

**Tracy:** Mhmm

**Michael:** So um, Lucy and Martin moved back in and rented their house in [neighbouring suburb] so... So we, we live with our grandchildren... So we used to, used to live with your grandmother and grandfather, and we live with our grandchildren

Similar to Rosemary and Charles, this narrative illustrates how the longstanding family home provides the same anchor to different generations. Tracy has remained in the same home her whole life, providing a consistency to her narrative, and multiple generations have consistently lived in and returned to the home. Often childcare was an important factor in keeping close, highlighting the gendered nature of the born and bred narrative, explored later in Chapter Seven, section 7.3 (Barker 1972; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Taylor 2010; Mannay 2013a; 2016). Similarly, my interview with another Hiraeth resident, Tanya, further entrenched the idea that familial proximity had been crucial in anchoring herself to the Hiraeth community:

**Tanya:** Um, I've always lived in Hiraeth, I think my parents moved here when my mum was pregnant with me, but they, they went from [neighbouring suburb] to [neighbouring suburb] to here [LF: okay] so they've always been in the area, um, and I went to Hiraeth nursery, infants and juniors, and then I went to [local secondary school], but I've always lived here, I haven't gone anywhere else [LF: oh okay] so, so, I'm thirty-six now so \*laughs\* [LF: been here] yeah thirty-six years \*laughs\*

**LF:** And why have you stayed?

**Tanya:** Cos, I don't know, I got married at twenty-one so um, we bought our first house in Hiraeth, when we were in our twenties so um, just wanted to stay close to my parents and stuff, it just seemed [LF: mm] why, you know, \*laughs\* nowhere else seemed any better so we may as well stay here hadn't we? \*laughs\* [LF: \*laughs\*] yeah and my grandparents live in Hiraeth as well so [LF: so you've got a lot of family nearby] yeah, yeah, yeah, both sets of grandparents live in Hiraeth, and my parents, so [LF: oh everyone's here \*laughs\*] so yeah, and I used to work in Sainsbury's on Cambrian Avenue so [LF: yeah] so, it was close by and then my husband got a job in um the [local] hospital, so again it's easy [LF: yeah] so yeah, we just stayed \*laughs\* and then we had um, my eldest when I, was twenty-three, so obviously then he started at Hiraeth as well so [LF: mm], once you're here, you're here aren't you? \*laughs\* stay near the babysitters once you have children! \*laughs\*

There is a sense of fixedness in Tanya's narrative that appears to stem from her limited experience of living anywhere else (MacDonald et al 2005; Jeffery 2018) for instance, "nowhere else seemed any better so we may as well stay here hadn't we?", whilst also suggesting a lack of agency in her decision to stay in Hiraeth, "once you're here, you're here aren't you?". The narrative shows the ongoing, unresolved negotiation of discursive identity work (Taylor 2010)

as contradictory to this, Tanya also suggests that she has chosen to stay because “both sets of grandparents live in Hiraeth, and my parents” and jokes about staying near the babysitters once you have children. Again, this demonstrates the practical importance of having family close-by to assist with childcare whilst also strengthening the relationship to home (Barker 1972).

Familial proximity and keeping close therefore provided both a practical and a sentimental value, as Hiraeth residents expressed how important it is to them to have their family living nearby. Often this spanned three generations of the family all living in close proximity, if not in the same home as each other. Families discussed the importance of generational traditions and of having strong social bonds with neighbours, and this is explored next.

### 5.3.3. *Historical legacies: Generations of belonging and knowing*

One key area where generational tradition was prevalent was education. The local primary school was greatly valued by residents, and this pride was maintained through the tradition of sending each new generation to the school. Returning to Tanya’s narrative from the previous section, she expressed comfort through the consistency of having her first-born (and subsequent children) attend the same school that she did as a child- “so *obviously* then he started at Hiraeth as well”, suggesting a sense of inevitability. Michael and his wife Tracy also discussed the continuation of the family tradition of attending Hiraeth’s local school:

**Michael:** How many generations of this family have been to, Hiraeth Juniors?

**Tracy:** Oh, nan started off there

**Michael:** So nan, nan, your mum,

**Tracy:** Me

**Michael:** You

**Tracy:** Lucy

**Michael:** Lucy, and now Lucy’s children, so five generations

The notion of passing down to subsequent generations the same experiences that older family members had experienced was common in families, providing a shared anchor to the community. This place-attachment and fixity was not constructed by residents as something that needed to be moved away from. There was pride in being able to say that there was a continuity and consistency across generations (Paton 2013; McKenzie 2015; Jeffery 2018), unlike the current emphasis in the education system with a focus on school performance and consumers making the correct ‘choice’ for their children (Ball and Vincent 1998). Having consistency in narratives and supporting the local school were central to the construction of residents’ belonging to place. As Zoe (20s) said to me in her online response, “I love Hiraeth and want my children to grow up here”.

From spending time in the community and with families, I gained an understanding of the local value attached to the born and bred narrative. Participants often told me who their current neighbours are as well as how this has changed, and there was a sense of safety expressed in knowing those in your immediate surroundings. Mary (80s), reflected on her neighbours both past and present, and her son's upbringing:

...after we, we moved from my par- my in-laws, we moved to uh, Gendros Avenue, I'm still living in the same house, oh my husband passed away six and a half years ago, but I've been happy there, and I have lovely neighbours and I just feel, safe there, and I want to stay there, you know, as long as I can... Carwyn always says he had a very happy childhood and I think it was all to do with people living around you know, neighbours were very uh, they weren't in and out of each other's houses, but they were very supportive, weren't they Carwyn?

These strong social networks are significant in the everyday lives of those in Hiraeth, as it shapes residents' anchorage to place and sense of ontological security (Atkinson and Flint 2004; MacDonald et al 2005; Watt 2006; Green and White 2007; Walkerdine 2016). This is commonly lost in gentrified areas or gated communities, which are targeting mobile middle-class residents, where isolation from others is seen as pivotal to personal security (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Minton 2009). This sense of safety, security and attachment to place appeared strongly in participants' narratives. However, it is important not to romanticise working-class communities and ignore the many struggles and difficulties that form part of everyday life (Jeffery 2018). Often these strong kinship and social ties perform a very practical function, such as childcare and financial support (Barker 1972; Skeggs 1997; MacDonald et al 2005; McKenzie 2015). Recognition of local value practices helps when understanding responses to normative social mobility narratives, avoiding the assumption of 'lack' or the accusation of the community being 'stuck in the past' (Skeggs 2011; Tyler 2013; Walkerdine 2016). Jeremy and Diane (70s) reflected on their fifty years in their home, and explained what has driven their desire to stay in Hiraeth:

**Jeremy:** Oh yeah, yeah, as I say, we've only have, we've lived in the same house now for fifty years next year I think so uh

**Diane:** Yeah fifty years

**Jeremy:** Never ever thought of changing it

**Diane:** Well we did

**Jeremy:** Well we always said we'd move if we won the lottery, but we don't even do the lottery so \*laughs\*

**LF:** \*laughs\*

**Diane:** Once or twice we thought, but we like it here so much, we've got fabulous neighbours

This narrative provides an example of strong place-attachment. Jeremy's comment about moving, "if we won the lottery but *we don't even do the lottery so*" suggests an attachment to the community. Similarly, Diane's "we like it here so much, we've got fabulous neighbours" exemplifies the importance of social networks in providing a sense of belonging.

It was commonplace amongst the 'born and bred' residents to discuss their own and others' relationship to place through the amount of time spent in the community. Phil (50s), who had always lived in Hiraeth, except for periods working away with the army, spoke positively about how embedded the local community is and the social bonds between residents:

...and my friend Jeff who I was on about he also lives in Saunders Street, you tend to find that a lot of people who were brought up in Hiraeth tend, tend to stay, Pete and Paula who live at the end house, um their son and his family lives in, in Gabalfa Street, next door to them coming this way um Susanne, she's from Hiraeth, her grandmother lives on Hiraeth Hill here, her parents live on New Street [LF: gosh, close!], there, so they're all really close, um, the family next door, there's an Asian family next door, uhh and they were from, before they lived here they lived in Bishops Road so they've lived in Hiraeth for years, the girl next door, used to live opposite me in Derlwyn Road [LF: my gosh!] so they're, I don't think, they, he might be, he might be, Hiraeth/neighbouring suburb Nick, um, because they've just, they've just, she's just had a baby now this week, they've got a little, a little boy [LF: aww], um, not sure where the couple next door from there are, who else is from Hiraeth? The lady opposite, Judith, her husband was the local priest, so they've been in Hiraeth for a while, the rest are not, I think they've been the end house over the while, over the road they've been in Hiraeth for probably, uh fifty odd years, but a lot, a lot of them just, [LF: yeah] to think about it now is, oh yeah well her grandmother's in Hiraeth, probably been there for god knows how long, her parents are in Hiraeth, they all live in Hiraeth, and they've had a, had a child, who uh, yeah so it, there's quite a good community spirit here though...

As Phil explained to me how many of his nearby neighbours are 'born and bred' residents, he also framed Hiraeth as a good place to live with a "good community spirit". Demonstrating his large social network in the community, Phil's narrative helps to show that length of residency and social network links hold the community of Hiraeth together. Just as Mary and Diane construct the relationships with their neighbours as important factors, which have encouraged them to stay in the community, Phil's narrative illustrates in more detail the value that the 'born and bred' narrative holds in Hiraeth. Phil describes residents in relation to their time spent living in the community, whilst also highlighting that "a lot of people who were brought up in Hiraeth tend, tend to stay". Arguably this is a result of the formation of sociality in certain material conditions, leading to an understanding of personhood based on relationality as opposed to resource extraction and accrual (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016). I will explore this further in the concluding section of this chapter.

Intertwining both the personal and the historical in narratives was a further discursive method of constructing strong relationships to place. Having a historical frame of reference when describing the community was important in showing belonging to the area (Jeffery 2018). Many residents

described the history of their homes with (grand)parents either occupying it from new, or even building the house themselves. I am going to return to Tracy, who has lived in the house her grandparents built in the late 1950s since she was born, and where she now lives with her own daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. Tracy was born in Hiraeth in what used to be a café on one of the community's most prominent streets. On the same street is a memorial hall which has a long history in the community and is often hired out for community events. Tracy, her husband Michael, and her daughter Lucy described both the prominence of the café and the memorial hall in their historical family narrative:

**Tracy:** Yeah, yeah. My dad played football for [local football team] and they got the footballers to have dance lessons [LF: \*laughs\*] and that's where they met

**Michael:** That was the dance teacher

**Tracy:** Yeah and [LF: aww!] that's how he met my mother at the dance lessons [Michael: so] and many a couple of that generation have met via the memorial hall with my grandmother teaching them to dance.

**Lucy:** Either that or the café

\*\*\*

**Lucy:** Well, it's a case of if you didn't meet, if people don't remember Nan for the dancing, they would have remembered Nan for the café

**Michael:** And the café yeah, so after, she run the café, she always used to complain about people ordering a cup of coffee and taking three hours to drink it

Tracy's attachment to place is not only held in the fact that she has only ever lived in the home her grandparents built, but also the connection that her family have to two key community spaces and within the wider history of the area. As Tracy's daughter states, "if *people* don't remember Nan for the dancing, they would have remembered Nan for the café", suggesting a wider connection and importance to the history of the community, not just to the family (Taylor 2010). This strong historical relationship to the community holds value across generations, which may help explain why the family have chosen to remain in the area. Many families displayed a detailed knowledge of the history of Hiraeth, weaving their familial narratives into historical narratives and the development of the community. It could be argued that this provides an anchorage to the community as narratives of community and familial history are passed on through generations and treasured, providing consistency and value to current day narratives.

#### *5.3.4. Temporary mobilities and the road to home*

Not all of the residents I met had remained in Hiraeth from childhood. Some had had periods away with work, such as Phil (previous section), some moved to neighbouring suburbs before deciding to move back, and others had grown up in another part of the city before moving to Hiraeth for the long-term. It was not uncommon for people who had left Hiraeth to feel the pull to return, anchoring them to the community. I met Cathy through volunteering at the local scouts'

hall, and she was intrigued about my research into families living in Hiraeth. This fieldnote extract highlights the importance that returning to Hiraeth had for Cathy:

Cathy seemed bemused about what I was doing, after I explained my work she started to tell me that she's lived in Hiraeth all her life, apart from moving away for two years to [neighbouring suburb] before coming back. She has her mum nearby as well. She said that she wants to stay in Hiraeth and that she owns a house now in Hiraeth because she wants her children to have the same upbringing and community as she did. She told me she knew of people who had been priced out of Hiraeth because of increasing housing prices which was a shame.

(Fieldnote 02.10.2017)

As discussed in Chapter Three, class as defined by stratification scholars using socioeconomic data such as income, occupation, and education tends to forget “that it is actively engaged in the formation and establishment of the class hierarchies that it describes” (Tyler 2015, p.499). Although Hiraeth is a community that could be described as working-class based on its socioeconomic status, it may be easy to assume that as the majority of participants in this study are homeowners, they must be among the more ‘middle-class’ residents of the community. However, this ignores the dynamic and relational nature of social class, which is a site of political struggle, “rather than... a set of static and empty positions waiting to be filled by indicators such as employment and housing” (Lawler 2005, p.430). The political struggle demonstrated here by Cathy (and other ‘born and bred’ residents) is the need to secure and maintain permanent housing in Hiraeth, which could be seen as a protection against the precarity and uncertainty that neoliberal society brings, providing comfort and security (Minton 2009; Paton 2013; Jeffery 2018). The political struggle of resisting individualism makes way for a model of personhood based on relationality, providing ontological security through relationships with others, anchored in one community (Skeggs 2011; Studdert 2016; Walkerdine 2016).

Cathy was not the only one to mention the rising property prices in Hiraeth, with some parts seen as more ‘desirable’ than others (see Chapter Six), and some plots of land that are awaiting private development. For Cathy, a move back into the area was achievable, which was essential for her as she wants her children to grow up in the same community as she did, providing consistency and continuity to the generational born and bred narrative (Taylor 2010). As ‘regeneration’ slips into the surrounding suburbs, it will not be long before this has a further knock-on effect on the availability of affordable housing options in Hiraeth (Minton 2009). This in turn demonstrates why such value is placed on the born and bred narrative, as family homes provide an anchoring and security to both kinship ties and place.

The pull to return to Hiraeth, seen as a hometown and a place of safety and belonging, came across in several residents’ narratives either through describing family members’ eventual return home, or their own journey back to the community. Diane discussed how her brothers have returned on the road to home:

**Diane:** ...yes, because I've got one brother who lives across the road from me [LF: Really?] yes \*laughs\* [LF: Close by!] close by, we did have one who lived in Carmarthen Road [LF: mhm] but then he sold and he bought a bungalow off, um, Rhoose Road by Fieldview [LF: Yeah], and he's only been there two years and it's up for sale, he wants to come back to Hiraeth [LF: really?] yeah. My other brother had a big property in [neighbouring suburb] which he just sold, so he's back in Hiraeth as well

**LF:** They're coming back! \*laughs\*

**Diane:** They're coming back yes, the only one who's not back is my eldest brother, but I don't, he'll never come back to Hiraeth but um, my other brothers, our Steve he got his up for sale cos he misses Hiraeth [LF: aww], he's got a beautiful bungalow, done a lot to it but um, he misses, being in Hiraeth [LF: really?] and you find a lot of people that grew up in Hiraeth always seem to come back [LF: yeah], yeah.

Diane constructs her brothers' movements away from Hiraeth as associated with loss and separation through phrases such as "he misses Hiraeth" indicating the strong attachment to place. Despite the fact that her brother Steve has "a beautiful bungalow" and has "done a lot to it", the aesthetics of his property do not equate to the satisfaction of returning home. Diane further suggests that this is a common occurrence (echoing Phil's observation in the previous section)- "you find a lot of people that grew up in Hiraeth always seem to come back". Therefore, homecoming and place-attachment play a role in the narratives of those who move away. Kathryn, who as a young woman moved to London to complete her nursing training, before returning to Hiraeth some ten years later, reinforced this narrative:

Yeah, yeah, yeah it did feel, it does feel like home, it's always felt like home, yeah, cos I've got friends that have moved away, well, Clive's sister, she lives in Manchester, she's been in Manchester for twenty years, she no longer considers this home [LF: mm] but I'd only been away for, ten years [LF: mm] so yeah, it did feel like coming home [LF: mm] and, d'you know, in places like London they don't understand happy Welsh girls [LF: \*laughs\*] you get, you thank the bus driver here don't you? [LF: yeah, yeah] you always, you try thanking the bus driver in London, they're like, you're mad, absolutely mad! \*laughs\*

Kathryn's narrative constructs this move back home using temporal boundaries and devices. She begins by correcting herself, "yeah it *did* feel, it *does* feel like home", before emphasising it has "always" felt like home. She then predicates her attachment to home through length of time spent away, as her husband's sister has lived away for twenty years and so "she no longer considers this home" whereas Kathryn has "only been away for, ten years", thus allowing her to claim that Hiraeth still feels like home and that she still has a strong attachment to place. Unlike many other residents I spoke to, Kathryn had the experience of living in another city which allowed her to construct her difference to those living in London- "in places like London they don't understand happy Welsh girls". This again provides her narrative with the strengthened notion that she belongs in Hiraeth, although she did tell me she enjoyed living in London, Hiraeth was, and still is, home.

### 5.3.5. Meanings made-in-common: Local discursive resources for describing the community

One of the main discursive devices used by those drawing upon the born and bred narrative was the use of shared local terminology amongst residents (Taylor 2010). These local terms were commonly used by residents I spoke with and were often implicit ways of talking about different parts of the community. As the research process progressed, I managed to gain an understanding of what these meanings-in-common meant and realised that they were the ultimate marker of an insider. Terms such as ‘the village’, ‘the common’, ‘the coast road’ and ‘the top road’ were used by many residents, and often they were used without definition, or if I asked what they meant, residents found it difficult to explain this to me. This was the case with Diane and Jeremy:

**Diane:** Well no, so go Gwahanred Road I mean, bar from Gwahanred Road from when we first came up here to live, I mean that was just all fields [LF: mmm] and farms and a lane, but then they built on that, but actually Hiraeth village hasn’t altered

**LF:** And where’s Hiraeth village, what counts as Hiraeth Village?

**Jeremy:** Well we still call it the village that’s what it was [inaudible]

**Diane:** The village yeah, Gwahanred Road \*laughs\* I always called it Hiraeth village

**LF:** \*laughs\*

**Jeremy:** You know where New Inn pub is? [LF: Yeah] we still class that as uh Hiraeth village

**LF:** Really?

**Jeremy:** Going up Penrhos Road, it’s always been known as the top road

When I asked Diane and Jeremy what they meant by Hiraeth village, they initially struggled to explain it as this locally available discursive resource is so ingrained in their understandings of the community. As Jeremy states, “well we still call it the village *that’s what it was*” showing the taken-for-granted and implicit nature of this terminology. I was cautious of overstating the presence of these local terms initially as both Diane and Jeremy were amongst the older residents I spoke to, and it was unclear whether such terms were also pertinent to younger generations in the community. However, in further interviews I found that these local terms were used by younger generations, suggesting that they are passed on and maintained across different generations. For example, Peter (50s) and his son George (under 12), discussed an old peanut factory in Hiraeth:

**George:** Do you remember the peanut shop down on the common?

**Peter:** Oh yeah! That wasn’t a shop that was a factory [George: yeah same thing] that used to roast peanuts, [Manufacturer’s name]

**LF:** \*laughs\*

**Peter:** Um, the KP peanut factory [LF: oh wow] and it was wonderful because, with a prevailing wind, it was, when you're in Hiraeth, the wonderful smell of roasting peanuts just wafted [LF: ohh!] so much nicer than the smell from the steelworks anyway

This extract is particularly pertinent as it highlights that even younger generations are inheriting these local constructions of place, as George refers to 'the common'. Even though George clearly will not remember the "smell from the steelworks", he still shares the common knowledge and understandings of the community. Similarly, Tracy, Michael (50s) and their daughter Lucy (30s), discussed 'the top road' and 'the common':

**Michael:** So how, how else has Hiraeth changed? It, it hasn't changed dramatically, the common is one of the biggest changes [LF: mmm] ummm

**Lucy:** Penrhos Road, nobody knows that as the common anymore

**Michael:** Oh we've explained to Louise yeah the common

**Lucy:** You have yeah?

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**Tracy:** Umm.. just tryna think, the shops were amazing it was on the top road, that was called the top road, you know, [Lucy: where the banks are] Penrhos Road up where the banks are there, that was called the top road, as I say and then that led into the common, didn't have all the, problems that you've got now getting along the common [LF: mmm]

What is interesting in how this family used local place-constructions is that they recognised them as 'old' terms which required explanation (as Lucy says, "nobody knows that as the common anymore") yet they refer to them in both past and present tense. For instance, Michael says, "the common *is* one of the biggest changes", and Tracy informs me "that *was* called the top road", yet throughout the interview Michael, Tracy and Lucy all use these terms in their descriptions. Through their explanations, describing both 'the common' and 'the top road', they show awareness that these terms are not known by those outside of the community, thus they act as an identity marker of an insider. It is interesting to note that although Lucy thinks 'the common' is not used by residents anymore, in the previous extract we can see George using the term despite being a generation younger than Lucy. Drawing upon Walkerdine (2016) and Studdert's (2016) work, we can see these local constructs as meanings made-in-common, where these repeated actions of sociality work to create community. Therefore, an attachment to place is constructed through discursive place-making. The importance of these local meanings is shown through the accessibility and use of these devices by residents of differing generations, constructing continuity and anchorage to the community.

This section has highlighted the centrality of the born and bred narrative as a resource that enables certain identity work in relation to place (Taylor 2010). Familial proximity, keeping close and anchoring; historical legacies and generations of belonging and knowing; temporary mobilities and the road to home; and meanings made-in-common, all formed part of the born and bred

narratives that were constructed, providing continuity, consistency and anchorage to the community of Hiraeth. I have used this section as a way of demonstrating the value that this narrative has in Hiraeth and the importance of social networks and kinship ties in the everyday ‘communing’ that takes place (Studdert 2016). I have suggested that this continuity and anchorage provides the working-class residents of Hiraeth with a sense of security and is a rejection of individualistic discourses, demonstrated through a model of personhood based on relationality (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016). In the following section, I develop this point further, providing an overall conclusion of what attachment to place means for the dominant social mobility discourse.

#### *5.4. What does place-attachment mean for social mobility? A conclusion*

This chapter has introduced the reader to the community of Hiraeth through the lens of local history, residents’ narratives, and the Welsh Government’s area-based policy. By exploring the construction of ‘place’ through the Welsh Government’s ‘Communities First’ initiative in contrast to the construction of place achieved by Hiraeth residents, it highlights the shortcomings of the Welsh Government’s approach to communities and poverty. There is little appreciation for the nuances and values attached to being a Hiraeth resident ‘born and bred’, and how this attachment to place is constructed and maintained over generations. The construction of place-making and belonging is a continual, relational, and dynamic process that takes place discursively through residents’ narratives.

In relation to normative social mobility discourses, this chapter has explored the importance and intricacies of place-based attachment in narratives of *fixity* as opposed to *mobility*. I used examples from participants’ narratives to demonstrate how both place-based and classed identities are constructed and negotiated through a variety of discursive resources. The importance of anchoring, keeping close, and the passing on of generational knowledge have all been crucial to the creation and maintenance of belonging to Hiraeth. I have also explained the interwoven nature of classed and place-based identities, whilst emphasising that class is relational and a site of political struggle, instead of a hollow shell of a classificatory label. I will now attempt to draw the chapter together, reflecting more broadly on social mobility.

Attachment to place, community, home, family and kinship networks are often overlooked in normative social mobility discourses (Folkes 2018a). However, this chapter illustrates how valuable the born and bred narrative was to residents and how this contributed to identity formation (Taylor 2010). Social networks and kinship ties played a vital role in the everyday ‘communing’ of the community (MacDonald et al 2005; Studdert 2016). The sharing of local discursive resources also became a marker of an ‘insider’, somebody who knows the community

well, and this was a source of pride. As some literature warns about the dangers of ‘socio-spatial entrapment’ (MacDonald et al 2005; Green and White 2007), I would caution against the undermining of these localised attachments, as many residents I spoke to do not see themselves as ‘stuck’ or ‘trapped’.

Seeing long-term place-attachment as ‘backwards’ fails to consider the value of the long histories and relationships created across generations of families living in Hiraeth (Walkerdine 2016). The dominant, idealised notion of the self, endorsed through social mobility narratives, focuses on a self that is singular, contained, and individualised; someone who is forward-propelling, accruing capitals, and investing to enhance their future (Walkerdine et al 2001; Skeggs 2004; 2011). Many of the ‘drivers’ for social mobility focus on individualised solutions to structural inequality, such as investment in your ‘self’ through education and skills (the core focus towards the end of the Communities First programme). Arguably, there are many issues within the community of Hiraeth that need addressing to make it a stronger and healthier community, but these will not be achieved by placing the blame on residents and encouraging them to widen their spatial horizons. This individualised self is not always available or even desirable for working-class communities, as “the concept of value is contingent and situational” (Skeggs 2011, p.509). Therefore, encouraging a need to ‘get out and get away’ ignores the importance of local value systems; and the overwhelming evidence of the pain that can be inflicted upon socially mobile working-class people who have to geographically and psychologically move and readjust (Lawler 2005; Scourfield et al 2006; Mannay 2013a; Reay 2013; McKenzie 2015; Lawler and Payne 2018).

The focus on employment and economic growth by the government is questioned by Lang and Marsden (2017) who argue that the notion of ‘success’ needs to be widened beyond economic growth and employability. They highlight that even in places such as London, which has high growth and employment opportunities, severe poverty and inequality continue to prevail (p.10). Instead of encouraging competition between individuals and communities, Lang and Marsden propose a semi-autonomous local economy approach to help promote sustainability and work to eradicate poverty. Investment in place and community underpins this approach, as community well-being is a central tenet. Through resisting the individualism that is propagated in the dominant social mobility discourse, personhood based on relationality flourishes, and doing things together as a community provides ontological security, especially in contrast to the insecurity and uncertainty of neoliberal society (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016). This can be seen as part of the ‘political struggle’ of class (Tyler 2015).

None of the residents I spoke to framed Hiraeth as holding them back from being ‘successful’ or achieving fulfilment in life. For, as Skeggs (2011, p.509) so neatly summarises:

If we only focus our theoretical gaze on abstractions from the bourgeois model of the singular self we will never be able to imagine or understand how value is produced and lived beyond the dominant symbolic and will repeatedly misrecognise, wilfully ignore and degrade other forms of value practices, person-value and personhood, by default performatively relegating them to the void of valueless.

I am cautious not to overstate my claims and generalise my findings to other working-class communities. However, future research could build upon the analysis provided here to develop theoretical understandings of working-class place-based belonging. I also want to highlight that this is not a romanticised account of a working-class community, as divisions, distinctions and place-attachment ‘trouble’ were constructed in residents’ narratives, which are explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Contradictions and Complexities- Troubled Place-Attachment and the Creation of Divisions, Distinctions and Boundaries**

#### *6.1. Introduction*

Having explored the variety of ways in which place-attachment was constructed by Hiraeth residents in the previous chapter, this chapter unpicks some of the complexities present in these narratives. Continuing to emphasise the relational aspect of both class and place-based identities, the chapter focuses on how class and place were constructed, performed, and produced through everyday talk (Benson and Jackson 2012). Often, narratives of place-attachment contained inherent contradictions and frustrations, where localised identities were defended, whilst the community was criticised. Section 6.2 explores some of the divisions and boundaries that were discursively constructed by both community workers and Hiraeth residents, which worked to situate people within the community. These included the ‘dividing line’ of the community that distinguished areas based on housing type and tenure; suspicions of the ‘racialised other’; and the importance of localised and national identities in demarcating who can belong. Section 6.3 examines some of the frustrations, contradictions and place-attachment ‘trouble’ that occurred in these narratives; and I discuss some of the key complaints that residents had about their community before looking at whose voice gets heard when these complaints were aired to local powerholders. The final part of this section draws upon two examples of troubled and precarious place-attachment in relation to locality and social class.

This chapter aims to demonstrate the ways in which class and place-based identities are interwoven, and how this directly impacts upon understandings of the self. Despite strong place-attachment, threats to the community, whether they be outsiders coming in, the lack of respect shown by local powerholders, or the running down of public spaces, are a threat to identity and can bring about shame and impinge upon residents’ sense of respectability (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). It is also a threat to the ‘containing skin’ that holds the community together (Walkerdine 2010). The narratives of class, place and belonging drawn upon in this chapter are complex and contradictory in nature, challenging a romanticised view of working-class community belonging. Having argued in Chapter Five that fixity as opposed to mobility is valued in Hiraeth, this chapter further develops understandings of place-attachment by attending to the nuances within these narratives. The chapter concludes with a discussion about what can be learnt from the residents of Hiraeth in relation to policy approaches to social mobility, social cohesion, and community development.

## 6.2. *Who belongs where? Division and boundary distinctions*

After emphasising the importance of attachment to place, there is a need to discuss the complexity of residents' relationship to place. As representations of space are "intimately tied up with the performative dimensions of residential practices and belonging" (Benson and Jackson 2012, p.797), I draw upon the narratives of residents and community workers to highlight how both class and place were negotiated and achieved in talk. Through repetitive use of local discursive resources, boundaries were constructed that worked to distinguish who belonged where within the community and who could be considered as an insider or an outsider (Watt 2009; Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012). Conversations with those who live and work in Hiraeth demonstrated the taken-for-granted place-making practices used every day in the community, whether in relation to area and housing distinctions, suspicion of the 'racialised other', or notions of national identity linked to local belonging. I discuss each of these in turn to highlight the complexity and intricacies of belonging within a white, working-class Welsh urban suburb. Although Hiraeth may be described as a 'strong' community, it is not a community without distinctions and distancing, which help to reconstruct both place and class on a daily basis.

### 6.2.1. *The dividing line*

The interview phase of the fieldwork began by interviewing community workers. It was through these interviews that I first learnt about the 'divide' in Hiraeth. One road, which I have renamed Gwahanred Road (gwahanred being the Welsh word for separate/different), was consistently referred to by staff as the dividing line between the two areas, a division predominantly constructed in reference to housing type and tenure. In my interview with Harriet, part of the Prosperity Team in Communities First, she discussed the divide in relation to the location of the Hub:

**Harriet:** I don't know but have people talked about the divide of Hiraeth, have you heard people talk of it?

**LF:** Not extensively, tell me about it.

**Harriet:** Okay, so apparently there's an idea that there's one part of Hiraeth which is a bit more affluent, it's closer to Penrhos Road, on the other side of Gwanhanred Road and then there's this part on this side like right by the surgery and over, so there's this idea that the two groups won't cross sides [LF: yeah]

Harriet described the two sides of the community, suggesting one part is "a bit more affluent", whilst not providing a description of the 'other' side. She did not talk specifically about social class or housing type although perhaps this can be inferred by her mention of affluence. Harriet positioned the divide as consisting of "two groups" who "won't cross sides" with the suggestion of self-containment and autonomy of the two sides, and Gwanhanred Road acting as the buffer. Harriet was an outsider to the community, which may have explained some of her reluctance to talk in detail about the 'divide'. However, when I spoke to Abi (Volunteer Coordinator/ Learning

Team in Communities First), she was more candid about the divide as somebody living in a neighbouring suburb:

Yeah, so you've got, this is sort of, the more 'working-class' an area, it's all working-class but then you have got a more affluent area over past Gwanhanred Road down in towards Penally Road, you've got the bigger houses, you can see it as you drive through, you can see the difference, but then within the other areas... so I think there is wherever you go there is that divide, and you can, you can see it, but when we put our courses on, or whatever we do we make sure that that's not like ever an issue, if you're all coming to learn how to manage children's behaviour it doesn't matter where you, what street you live in to us, you're here together to do the same thing, so I don't see a lot of that myself in what I do, but I know from living around here there is sort of, over there is the posh area, and this is the rough area, do you know what I mean so there is, but I think everywhere you go you get that, unless you're living in Richtown or something \*laughs\*

Abi touched on class-based place distinctions - "bigger houses", "rough" and "posh" areas. Despite her emphasis that "it's all working-class" and that the divide does not affect her work, her knowledge from living nearby reminded her of this division. Although Abi was insistent that "everywhere you go you get that", this was caveated with "unless you live in Richtown" (the wealthiest suburb of Pencaer), which marked Hiraeth as a particular type of community where poverty and affluence live side-by-side. Again, Gwanhanred Road is constructed as the dividing line between the bigger houses and the not-so-big houses. This division, as seen in previous research, can limit the amount of interaction between people in differing parts of the community, and can act to limit the services available to some community members (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012; Jeffery 2018). This was mentioned by the local priest who remarked, "the sad thing for us is the parish church here is at the wealthier end of Hiraeth, the parish goes all the way to Ladyhill Road...".

When I spoke to Alex (Participation and Communications Officer for Communities First), her status as somebody who was an active local resident in the community helped to consolidate my understanding of what this 'divide' meant locally. She discussed an event she was planning where an organisation refused to cross the dividing line:

**LF:** What's the divide about?

**Alex:** Social housing, and non-social housing.

**LF:** Is it? Interesting.

**Alex:** Yeah totally, Gwanhanred Road is the dividing line.

**LF:** Is it? And people don't like?

**Alex:** No, I had somebody from the \*posh voice\* Wine Guild<sup>38</sup> said that I was going to do an event here does the \*posh voice\* Wine Guild want to come and have like, you know, come and ‘oh we don’t go over that side of Hiraeth, that’s not Hiraeth’

**LF:** What do they think it is?

**Alex:** It’s not Hiraeth according to them

Alex extended the local discursive construction that Gwanhanred Road separates two distinct sides of the community, by suggesting the sides are differentiated by housing tenure. Alex’s narrative demonstrates how the division played out amongst local organisations. When the local Wine Guild refused to attend an event in the ‘less affluent’ side of Hiraeth, they were refusing to recognise it as part of Hiraeth. This is perhaps because of the association of the Wine Guild with middle-class tastes, and therefore the organisation preferred to focus its efforts on the ‘more affluent’ side of the community. This dismissal of a large part of the community illustrates the power of discursively formed divisions, with representations of space being produced through a range of everyday practices, regulatory processes and imaginings (Benson and Jackson 2012, p.797). These practices and processes are where both place and class intersect, particularly through the construction of difference, distinction and separation. As Skeggs (1997) explains, class is dialogic and involves judgement and measurement of our ‘self’ in comparison to others.

The distinction also came across in the interviews conducted with families. There was an acute awareness of the perceptions of the ‘two sides’ of Hiraeth, often understood in relation to housing price and appearance. When I discussed property choice with Tanya, one of the ‘born and bred’ participants, she explained the impact of the divide on her ability to buy a property in the area:

**Tanya:** Cos my parents are sort of in prime position \*laughs\* in Bedwas Lane, they seem to be [LF: yeah] house prices around that village area is uh, you know, top, so we thought, get out a bit \*laughs\*

**LF:** It’s the same area though isn’t it? \*laughs\*

**Tanya:** Yeah, exactly, exactly, yeah

**LF:** Yeah, that seems to be a thing, the difference between sort of two halves of the area

**Tanya:** It’s amazing the difference [LF: yeah] yeah, when you look into it, when you looking to buy a house [LF: yeah] it is huge the difference of like, say like, the village area, [LF: yeah] and the desirable bits, and then, say we’re literally, we’re in Fishguard Avenue which is just, as you turn the corner into Penally Road [LF: mhm], we’re the first one off, so we’re literally on Gwanhanred Road, or back to back with it, but our house is probably quite a lot cheaper than [LF: mm] Gwanhanred Road [LF: that’s crazy isn’t it?] but then to the back of us, we’ve got council houses, we’ve got Nevern Road then with the pre-fab houses? [LF: yeah, yeah] so again, I suppose they’re, cheaper again \*laughs\* [LF: yeah] you know

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<sup>38</sup> The Wine Guild of the United Kingdom is an organisation that runs social activities such as dinners and wine tasting courses in order to share the enjoyment and appreciation of wine. See <http://www.wineguilduk.org/origins-objectives/> for more information.

Tanya discussed the desirability of the village area of Hiraeth. She described her parents as being in “prime position” with a house in the village area of the community, somewhere where she would not be able to afford to live, despite it being only streets away from her current home. The “village area” and the “desirable bits” are constructed as being separated from the rest of the community by the dividing line of Gwanhanred Road. Tanya appeared to construct a hierarchy of housing: the village houses being the most desirable, houses in the area which back onto Gwanhanred Road which are slightly cheaper, then council houses behind hers, which are “cheaper again”. She is careful to position herself in close proximity to Gwanhanred Road, thus of higher ‘value’ in comparison to those in the houses situated behind her home.

The type of housing and the location within certain marked streets were a strong indicator of belonging to a ‘side’ of Hiraeth. This draws parallels with both Watt’s (2009) and Benson and Jackson’s (2012) studies where certain parts of the community were constructed as ‘posh’ or only for certain *types* of people. The demarcation of different housing types was summed up by Phil (50s) who proudly told me he grew up in a council estate on the eastern side of Hiraeth yet now lives “about as far west as you can get”. Using a map of the area, he pointed out which parts of the community contained which types of housing:

**Phil:** ...everything from Gwanhanred Road [LF: yeah], probably when, this is Gwanhanred Road [LF: yeah], if you come out Gwanhanred Road and probably along Bedwas Road Road, this area \*on map\*, [LF: yeah], is more or less your private housing [LF: okay], this area [LF: yeah] and that bit there, everything to the east then of uh, Gwanhanred Road, tends to be your council houses, now obviously there are a lot of people, um, thanks to Margaret Thatcher, was, was allowed to buy their council houses like my mother did...a lot of people bought their council houses um, in Hiraeth and still live in them today, or their children now live in them [LF: mmm], there’s quite a lot, not all of it, there’s obviously your odd roads up here which are still private, they’d be private up there \*on map\*, but all this area \*on map\* Derlwyn Road, would be mainly council estate, or people who, who live in a council house who’ve, who’ve bought it you know...

Phil’s narrative is interesting as it touches upon localised understandings of mobility in relation to housing. Despite being brought up in the east on a council estate, he is now happy to be living in the private housing area, showing his mobility from one side of the community, typically seen as less desirable, to the other, which Tanya described as the “desirable bits”. Again, Gwanhanred Road is constructed as the dividing line between the “private housing” and the “council houses”. However, Phil made the further distinction of those who were able to buy their council house, which he talked about proudly in relation to his mother’s purchase of her council home. It became clear later on in the interview that descriptions of the council houses work to further strengthen the ‘division’ of Hiraeth. Phil discussed the prefabricated homes in Hiraeth, which as previously mentioned, are physically marked through their metal-cladded exterior:

**Phil:** ...I had a walk around there the other day actually, and they’re not, they’re not very nice, they’re not, the houses are not very well kept, there’s a lot of litter, and a lot of, uh

rubbish around there, which is, is a shame because I remember that being you know a nice green, it was a huge, huge, cos that's, up there's a huge hill, and we, we, you know, roly-poly down the hill and run down that hill, the green bank, but it's, they're crappy houses on there now.

This narrative associated the less affluent side of Hiraeth with decay, degradation and disorder (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006; Minton 2009; Tyler 2013). Phil described these houses as “not very nice”, “not very well kept”, and as having “a lot of litter” suggesting a demise in the area, as these homes lack the appropriate ‘respectability’ (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). Phil’s conclusion, “they’re crappy houses on there now” further emphasised his construction of these houses as unkempt and undesirable. The exterior of these houses acts as a physical marker of difference that highlights the area’s divide. Michael explained how these houses were originally meant to be temporary, while his daughter noted the physical appearance of the houses has remained unchanged despite supposed maintenance work:

**Michael:** ...where I lived at this end, um, this was probably, this was all uh, these are all council houses here [LF: mhmm] and they were, um, they were, prefabricated houses which you’re probably familiar with [LF: mm], they were only supposed to be there for fifteen years [LF: yeah] well they were put up in the early 50s and they’re still there [LF: Still there!] but they were only supposed to be temporary accommodation.

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**Michael:** But they have been upgraded, in fairness

**LF:** Yeah, I should hope so after that long time! \*laughs\*

**Michael:** They were like, glorified caravans, in a sense [LF: yeah] or, or, cabins, but they were, they were

**Lucy:** They’ve still got the uh tin on the outside, most of them have still got the tin on the outside

As Lucy described, many of these houses still have both metal roofs and metal cladding, whilst Michael discussed the temporary nature of the houses as “glorified caravans”. Despite being “upgraded” these houses still stand out as different to the privately-owned homes in the community. This physical distinction and the discursive ‘dividing line’ of Gwanhanred Road demonstrates the power of everyday practices, through the use of localised discursive resources, to continue to construct both place and class (Skeggs 1997; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013). Regulatory processes, distinction-making and judgements require comparison to respectable and acceptable (typically middle-class) norms (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). In Hiraeth, the respectable and accepted are situated on the ‘posh’ side of Gwanhanred Road, whilst many of those on the ‘other’ side reside in “crappy houses” with “tin on the outside”. Residents on both sides of the community and community workers were aware of this division, although they were cautious to overstate its importance. Nevertheless, the interviews suggested that this divide has meaning on an everyday level, which is reproduced through discursive accounts of the

community. Distinction in terms of housing was not the only division constructed by participants, as the next section explores.

### 6.2.2. *Suspicious of the 'racialised other'*

Before I discuss notions of fear around the 'racialised other', it is important to understand the ethnic and national identities of those living in Hiraeth. Drawing upon Census 2011 data, Hiraeth has under ten thousand residents, of which over ninety per cent identify their ethnicity as white (ONS 2011). This is a higher proportion than for Pencaer overall, suggesting that there has been a lower rate of migration to the area compared to more multicultural inner-city areas. Consequently, there are considerably smaller Asian and Black populations in Hiraeth. Over eighty-five per cent of residents were born in Wales, with the second largest country of birth being England, both accounting for over ninety per cent of Hiraeth's population.

Statistics exploring national identity appear to show that residents of Hiraeth have a strong 'Welsh only' identity, despite not being able to understand the Welsh language, at over sixty-five per cent. This may of course be due to the lower migration levels of the area. The religious make-up of the area shows that over sixty per cent of residents identified as Christian, whilst just under thirty per cent claimed to have no religion. Although Pencaer has a strong Islamic community, in Hiraeth, less than two per cent of residents identify as Muslim. Again, these figures reflect the population make-up and the smaller number of migrants to the area.

The ethnic and cultural homogeneity of Hiraeth may well help to explain the fear and othering that residents constructed when newcomers moved to the area. Community workers Abi and Ian both spoke about how difficult it can be for new families moving to the area from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in particular those from Czech-Roma and Gypsy traveller communities. Abi explained the difficulty of encouraging integration across different ethnic groups:

**Abi:** ...they've got their core community which has been there for years, and then it's been difficult sometimes when new people have moved into the area, but it's about just, I think it's about educating people as well, just letting them know, they're no different to you or me, there's, do you know what I mean? They just speak a different language, which is, they're probably more frightened because this is not what they know, and what, you know, all you people stood here just like staring at people it must be awful, cos they're coming to a new country, if they can't speak very much English, it must be so frightening because I know I would, I would be petrified you know, if I had to go somewhere else and start again so um, I think it's about educating people as well, just takes time, cos again it's been years and years of the same thing, and a lot of people don't like change either, so and that again, it's just little like drip feeding and hopefully within time, then they'll make positive changes, like I said you can't change everyone can you, you just do the best you can, and hope for the best really \*laughs\*

Abi's narrative demonstrates how entrenched a white, working-class, Welsh identity is in Hiraeth, as she said, "it's been years and years of the same thing", which may have made residents sceptical of outsiders coming into what has been constructed as *their* community. Abi recognised that this

adjustment will take time as “people don’t like change” and emphasised the need to educate those in the community about newcomers who may be from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Watt 2006). What became apparent from some of the family interviews was that the ‘racialised other’ was typically constructed as coming from an Asian background, rather than Czech-Roma or Gypsy traveller as highlighted by both Abi and Ian. When I asked Rosemary and Charles (70s) about their neighbours, they were quick to highlight the changing ethnicities of those living around them:

**Rosemary:** Well it’s changing a lot now because a lot of the original residents are dying so a lot of younger people are coming in, and families, a lot of Indian families are coming in, isn’t it? A lot more foreigners now

**Charles:** A lot more foreigners, I mean when we came here it was all white [LF: mmmm] literally, but um, [Rosemary: now] but now I think the-

**Rosemary:** A third of this street I think

**Charles:** A few Tibetans I don’t know \*laughs\*, they...walk down and they seem to have what I term as Tibetan dress like you know, but a lot of Indians

**Rosemary:** A lot of Indians yes um, it’s quite diverse round here now!

Between Rosemary and Charles in this short extract, the phrase “a lot of Indians” was used three times, placing an emphasis on what they believed to be a big change in their local area. When Rosemary guessed how many Indian people had moved to their street, she claimed “a third of this street I think”. This seems to be quite an over-exaggeration, especially when considering that less than two and a half per cent of Hiraeth’s population are Asian, a figure falling below one per cent for those who identify as Indian. The perception of “a lot of Indians” can be read as the fear of the ‘other’ taking over (Watt 2006; Every and Augoustinos 2007), especially as Charles acknowledged that “when we came here it was all white”. As Rosemary and Charles are of an older generation, I considered that perhaps age influenced their views on newcomers to the community. However, in my first interview with Lisa (30s), she also told a story of how her neighbours have changed, constructing a narrative of neighbourhood decline (Watt 2006):

**Lisa:** we’re getting a few more um, new, newcomers now, there’s the two on either end of the, little terrace across there, they’re um, I think they’re Turkish, I’m not sure where they’re from. Um, and then there’s a Portuguese family who have just moved in, and now we’ve got two lesbians \*laughs\* [LF: \*laughs\*], so we have been like, getting more and more multi, multi-cultural now \*laughs\*, cos it’s always been just, I’ve been thinking of this because I’ve been helping my son doing his equality [LF: ohhh] for his GCSE and it was one of the questions was how do you know your, your, you know, your area’s becoming more multicultural and, you know, and all equal and whatever, and I was thinking, look at our street, it used to be, mum, dad, two, two kids in every house, that’s, that’s all [LF: yeah], how it, every house was like that, but now we’re getting, there’s like you know there’s people from different countries moving in, and we’ve got a few rented houses and then like there’s single parents and it was never like that it’s [LF: mm], it is really changing over time, I don’t know if it’s good or bad \*laughs\* I haven’t seen much of the good really but, times change unfortunately \*laughs\*

As Lisa described some of the newcomers to her street and community, she constructed a notion of respectable versus rough residents (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). She reflected on how “it used to be, mum, dad, two, two kids in every house” but now a range of residents are moving in such as those “from different countries” and LGBTQ+ sexualities. Lisa constructed a narrative of neighbourhood decline as she had not “seen much of the good really” of these newcomers joining the community. She suggested that the change in the neighbourhood make-up has been damaging, and that a respectable, preferred position is to be married with children (and from a white, Welsh cultural background). When I interviewed Lisa a second time, her mum, Anne, was present. Interestingly, she lived only a few doors down from Lisa on the same street. Anne shared her concerns on seeing an Asian family out of her window:

**Anne:** Mind you I shouldn't say it cos I'm not prejudice really but, I was shocked the other day, I was opening my curtains I suppose, and there was this mum and dad, they were, Pakistani or whatever, with all the bits, you know [LF: yeah] coming out the street opposite me [LF: mhm] and we've not had any foreigners in here, in this area at all, well we have one over there didn't we [Rob, Lisa's husband: Yeah there's a few] but, they, they were nice ones, well, they're all nice no doubt [LF: \*laughs\*] but like, she had these three little boys walking and one in the pram, and oh my god, they've moved in over there, and then the next thing was later in the day, three more of these ladies came up with pushchairs, child either side [LF: yeah] loads of stuff, and gangs following 'em I thought \*whispers\* I don't like this [LF: yeah], but you don't see much of 'em but it's just thinking of the neighbours, what they must be saying, because it's so quiet, and people don't move very often up here [LF: no] you know, unless they pass away, people are not really moving [LF: yeah] but uh, you think oh God, is that gonna be, is that the start like [LF: yeah], cos you do, they eventually, once they're in a house, another one will go and say well I'll buy that by there [LF: yeah] you know, it's what happens ain't it, they take over the area like [LF: mm] As I say it shouldn't be like that but

**LF:** It's what you're used to isn't it?

**Anne:** When you've lived here so long like, you know. You know, we've lived in this street for fifty odd years, and you start to see it going down you think oh! [LF: yeah]

Anne began by using a disclaimer or denial of racism through the phrase “I'm not prejudice really but...” (van Dijk 1992; Goodman 2014). This discursive technique is often used in ‘race talk’ by those who think they may be accused of racism. As Anne continued, she constructed the positive self/ ingroup representation in contrast to the ‘negative other’ with whom she associated uncertainty and distrust, as she said, “I don't like this” (van Dijk 1992; Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2014). An anti-migrant discourse is drawn upon as Anne describes “gangs” of Asian people in the community, a word which has connotations of large groups, crime and control. When Anne stated that “people don't move very often up here”, she was arguably using a deracialisation technique as the ‘people’ she was referring to are a certain type of people - foreigners (Goodman 2014). The anti-migrant discourse continued when she claimed “it's what happens ain't it? They take over the area” and this means you see the area “going down” (Watt 2006; Every and Augoustinos 2007). Premised upon fear of the ‘racialised other’ and a concern

for the moral decline of the neighbourhood, migration to the community is understood through this anti-migrant discourse.

Because of strong tradition in Hiraeth relating to the born and bred narrative, change in the community can be difficult for community members to adjust to. Place-making in Hiraeth has been solidified over generations and perceptions of change threaten the social bonds that hold these constructions of place together (Walkerdine 2016). It is not only a threat to the community, but a threat to identity, as so many residents understand their 'selves' through their spatial relationship to place (MacDonald et al 2005; Taylor 2010; Paton 2013; Jeffery 2018). So, whilst older residents such as Anne, Rosemary, and Charles constructed concern about being taken over by the 'racialised other' and losing their historical connection to place, Lisa's concern was about the respectability of her community, and subsequently, how the community reflects upon her identity.

It is important not to assume that an anti-migrant discourse is a distinctively working-class construct, however, it is commonly found in working-class communities where there are areas of severe deprivation and a fight for local resources (Watt 2006; McKenzie 2015). These localised place-based attachments and identities have strong local value, and when they appear to be threatened by outsiders coming into the community, it can lead to degrading comments about those from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There was pride and history in the identities of Hiraeth, and protecting these identities engendered a maintenance of respectability and consistency in the born and bred narratives constructed by lifelong residents (Skeggs 1997; Taylor 2010). Due to the homogenous history of Hiraeth, in comparison to other diverse suburbs, change is something that will take a long time to adjust to, particularly when it impinges upon local identities and understandings of self.

### *6.2.3. Markers of belonging- Localised and national identities*

There were many examples from both community workers in Hiraeth and local residents of how localised identities were constructed, which were central to everyday life in the community. Discursively marking out places of belonging helped to create a sense of safety amongst residents, although sometimes this was to their detriment when it excluded them from accessing certain local services (MacDonald et al 2005; Green and White 2007). One distinct event that entrenched localised identities was the merger of Hiraeth High School with the neighbouring suburb's high school. The resulting amalgamated school was given a general name. Abi (member of the Learning Team in Communities First) recalled that the children from the neighbouring school were merged into Hiraeth High School initially, before eventually being moved into a new build suitable for the number of pupils:

**Abi:** I think, I think personally it would have been better to build the new school and then put the two schools in the new school rather than take a load of children from [neighbouring suburb] put them in the Hiraeth school, when it used to be like that anyway the kids always be like, we're from [neighbouring suburb], you're from Hiraeth, that sort of divide, and then put them all together, and then it was just mayhem ...

Abi's narrative suggested that this local identity has always been important. There is a strong sense of belonging and place-attachment demonstrated, which had an impact on the performance of the amalgamated school. Lisa's son Adam was in the final cohort who experienced Hiraeth High before the merger, and she reflected on the difficulties the merger has had on his education:

**Lisa:** ...because they amalgamated the two schools as well didn't they? [LF: yeah]. That was, he was up there, the first year he went up there it was Hiraeth High [LF: oh he's the last sort of year then, of that], yeah so he, he, so I think their year have had the worst time up there [LF: yeah], um, then they amalgamated, so there was, there's always been a massive divide between... Hiraeth High and Treharris High [LF: yeah], so to put all the kids from both schools in one, um there was a lot a trouble up there once it first opened, um there used to be police on the, on the gates, and you didn't feel safe [LF: yeah] dropping him off...

The policing of behaviour at the school demonstrates the gravity of the localised identities of both Hiraeth and its neighbouring suburb and how these were actualised on a day-to-day basis. As there had "always been a massive divide" between the two schools, the idea of Hiraeth High School being mixed with the neighbouring school threatened the local identities of the pupils, leading to disruption and difficulty. The local high school was not the only example of the everyday experience of localised identities in action. Community workers often reflected on the difficulties they had encouraging initiatives across Hiraeth and its neighbouring areas, as many residents saw anything offered outside of their community as 'not for them'. Anna (Neighbourhood Development Librarian) discussed this:

**Anna:** And I think people are very proud of their communities in [this side of] Pencaer, and whereas I call it West Pencaer, because I'm external, people in West Pencaer they don't say they're from Pencaer, they say they're from Hiraeth, or they say they're from Treharris or Hendre or Trelech, and when I first started someone said to me oh you won't get people from Treharris coming to Hiraeth you just won't, and I thought don't be ridiculous! But you don't, you really don't get people, they don't cross Penrhos Road [LF: strange] they just, I don't know what it is they just won't come across the other side of the road, and it's not, it's not laziness, like they're capable of doing it, it's just almost the feeling that like oh that's not for me, that's not my part of town, and I live here by big Tesco I don't need to go to the other side to Barnardos or Co-op or the butchers or whatever, so it's very, it's very interesting.

Recognising herself as "external", and therefore an outsider to the community, Anna described the reluctance of those within Hiraeth and its neighbouring areas to leave and attend community initiatives in other areas. Her description, "oh that's not for me, that's not my part of town", is another demonstration of the strength of localised identities, even if they limit participation in community events and services (MacDonald et al 2005; Green and White 2007). Lucy (member of the Health team in Communities First) told me that within their remit of six suburbs in Pencaer

there were “very specific communities within that cluster” with limited crossover of residents going from one to another for support. The lumping together of distinct communities both within Communities First and with the school merger discussed above, displays the lack of consideration and respect given to the local identities in these areas. The local identity of belonging to Hiraeth has value and is defended and protected when in jeopardy, as can be seen with the response to the creation of the new High School. Place-attachment and insider status are markers of belonging that should be valued and invested in, instead of being ignored or being seen as a hindrance to the community’s growth and development (MacDonald et al 2005; Green and White 2007; Paton 2013; Lang and Marsden 2017; Jeffery 2018). Social mobility narratives encouraging getting out and getting away therefore undermine the importance of these local place-based attachments to residents’ everyday lives (Lawler 1999).

Scourfield et al (2006) discuss the importance of theorising both local and national identities relationally. Not only were localised identities important in recognising who belongs in the community and who does not, but national identities also helped designate who was an insider/outsider. As over sixty-five per cent of Hiraeth residents identified as ‘Welsh only’ (ONS 2011), there was an association with being Welsh and belonging to the community. Many participants asked where I was from in an attempt to situate me, as typically the significant ‘other’ in terms of Welsh identity is the construction of the English (Scourfield et al 2006). I have reflected on the impact of this on researcher positionality in Chapter Four and elsewhere (Folkes 2018b), however, I will draw on examples from family interviews which demonstrated the importance of the Welsh identity in belonging to Hiraeth:

**Lucy:** How long have you been in Wales now?

**LF:** Six years

**Lucy:** \*intake of breath\* you’ve gotta pass that decade, decade mark, decade mark  
\*laughs\*

**Michael:** \*laughs\*

**LF:** Four years to go yet then \*laughs\*

**Lucy:** No only because I’ve got friends who are English think that they’re, no, no, the decade, the decade, that’s the uh, you’ve gotta pass the decade now

**Michael:** Yeah you’re almost local if you’ve been here ten years

**Lucy:** Yeah

Both Michael (50s) and his daughter Lucy (30s) performed identity-work in this passage, through the active construction and negotiation of what constitutes a ‘Welsh insider’. As they are both lifelong Welsh residents, they have access to this established discursive resource and so work to shape the boundaries of the identity category ‘Welsh’ (Edley 2001; Taylor 2010; Folkes 2018b). As Lucy told me, I would have to pass that “decade mark” before I could consider myself as

Welsh, Michael suggested I would only be “almost local” if I lived in Wales for ten years, showing the difficulty of belonging in a Welsh suburb if you identify as English. This difficulty of belonging was something Roger discussed in his interview as an English outsider who has lived in Wales most of his adult life:

**Roger:** The other thing that’s a bit strange, for us, for me, I’ve been thinking a lot about this recently, funnily enough, is do I feel Welsh? [LF: mm], and I do sometimes, there are sometimes when I feel very, very Welsh, um, usually when I’m at a football match \*laughs\* [LF: \*laughs\*] you know and the, the anthem’s coming on or something like that and uh, there are, there’s elements of that that I, that I really, admire and want to be a part of [LF: mm] uh, and it’s not just football, you know, you get it in other things... and you, and you feel, you feel, I feel, well I’d like to be a part of that [LF: mm] and, I appreciate having that opportunity, but then there are other times when I feel almost as soon as I’ve opened my mouth, and exposed the fact that I’m not Welsh, that I’m actually English, um, where I feel, hurt [LF: mm] really hurt, uh, by and um, it’s, and uh, that’s a bit uh, that’s a little tricky sometimes, and, and again I think that’s, there’s some insularity about that...

**LF:** Yeah, I get that about that, the Welsh thing, as soon as I speak anywhere, especially when I’ve been helping out around here, it’s kind of like the first thing people notice is you don’t have the slight accent

**Roger:** No, and in a way, uh again I’d be very careful who I said this to, but in a way that’s not far short of racism [LF: mm] really, when people make you feel um, that you don’t belong because of where you are born really is what it boils down to and um, yeah it’s very close to racism that

The precarity of Roger’s Welsh identity and belonging is demonstrated here as he described instances where he felt “very very Welsh”, yet he positioned ‘Welshness’ as something he wants “to be a part of”, suggesting exclusion. As his accent “exposed” the fact he is not Welsh, Roger described feelings of hurt and concerns of the insularity of the community. This has some similarity to the discussion above about fear of the ‘racialised other’ and identity protection. As we both shared an outsider, English status, Roger cautiously claimed that being constructed as not belonging “because of where you are born” is “not far short of racism”. Both the extract from Michael and Lucy, and from Roger, highlight the importance not only of localised identities in Hiraeth, but how these intertwine with national identity, and being ‘Welsh’. Belonging to the community involved not only localised understandings and attachment to place, but also belonging in relation to Welsh national identity. For the majority of participants this Welsh identity was implicit and taken-for-granted as a part of belonging, but for those who were newcomers to the community, especially from England, not being able to identify as ‘Welsh’ limited their access to community belonging, therefore situating them as ‘outsiders’.

This section has discussed the complexity of residents’ relationship to place through the exploration of belonging, division and boundary-making. I have drawn upon the narratives of both residents and community workers to demonstrate how class and place are negotiated, achieved and performed through talk. The ‘dividing line’ in Hiraeth was a common discursive resource that featured in both residents’ and community workers’ narratives of the community, a

division based on housing type and tenure. This highlights the dynamic and intersecting relationship of class and place, as distinction is often drawn upon using class ‘tastes’ and markers of respectability (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 1997; Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012; Jeffery 2018). Fear of the ‘racialised other’ and use of an anti-migrant discourse illustrates the local importance of place-based identities built over generations, and the gravity of the perceived threat of this being lost. This led to some inappropriate racial comments from some residents. I have also discussed how localised and national identities are important in understanding and situating the self in relation to place, particularly the intricacies of localised identities which get ignored by the local authority and government (also seen through the Communities First programme explored in Chapter Five, section 5.2.4).

The narratives explored here illustrated the repetitive use of local discursive resources and the construction of boundaries, which work to distinguish who can belong (Watt 2009; Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012). Living in a white, working-class Welsh urban suburb has certain strong identity markers that (re)produce both class and place. Although there is a strong sense of belonging in Hiraeth (see Chapter Five), this does not forgo serious issues and consequences of belonging for those who are ‘outside’ of the community or living in ‘marked’ accommodation in the area. As attachment to place holds great value in Hiraeth, and is premised upon a sense of continuity across generations, any changes that threaten this can be seen as a threat to the self and a particular personhood. If strong place-based attachment achieved through relation-to-others provides ontological security, especially against the insecurity and uncertainty of neoliberal society (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016), it can begin to explain why Hiraeth residents are reluctant to accept outsiders into the community. The following section explores further some of the ‘trouble’ associated with place-attachment.

### *6.3. Frustrations, contradictions and place-attachment ‘trouble’*

Despite the strong place-attachment constructed by residents of Hiraeth, there was no denying that there were many problems with the area, mostly driven by funding cuts that have depleted local services. Similar to work conducted in other working-class communities (Minton 2009; McKenzie 2015; Jeffery 2018), there was a sense of frustration and distrust amongst residents as their (often very basic) needs and concerns were not being taken seriously by the local council. This section will highlight these concerns, before looking at action taken by residents and their success in relation to social class. Finally, this section will consider troubled place-attachment by exploring how living on the periphery of the community (in terms of locality and social class) affected local identity construction. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the complex and contradictory nature of place-based identities and attachment, and to highlight that although residents may display strong belonging to their community, there was frustration and unease about services being rundown and areas being neglected by the council. The running down of areas of

the community can bring about shame and impinge upon residents' sense of respectability, as their 'self' is so closely tied to place (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). As Jeffery (2018) notes, place belonging is contradictory and difficult especially when changes are being implemented that do not benefit the local community.

### 6.3.1. *"There's nothing for kids to do"- Youth services and public spaces under attack*

A recurring concern amongst both community workers and residents of Hiraeth was the lack of public spaces and buildings in the community, especially for children. As Minton (2009) notes the dramatic decline in publicly owned spaces and the increasingly punitive approach taken to those deemed acting 'anti-socially', it was clear that this was a concern in Hiraeth as parks were rundown and youth services had diminished. It was ironic that a community campaign to save the library in Hiraeth led to a 'compromise' by the council to build a new community 'Hub' on the site of the former youth centre. As Ian, Learning Officer for Communities First explained:

**Ian:** ...so this used to be a youth service building um, but you know, that service isn't existent really I mean luckily there is youth provision within Hiraeth Chapel um, but obviously the association as a kind of faith run youth thing then I guess that puts people it's, it's a barrier to some people to attending that but I think they've, you know, they do, they do a really good job...

This youth provision provided by the local church soon came to an end following a period of substantial damage in the chapel, poor behaviour by young people, and lack of staff. At present there are no youth centres in Hiraeth. It is not only young people who find themselves displaced in the community, as outside of the religious organisations in the area, there are no spaces for community members to spend time. This was noted by Harriet, Prosperity Officer for Communities First:

**Harriet:** ...um we don't have maybe a lot of, can you think of, you've been here for a while, can you think of any places where people would go just to hang out?

**LF:** umm...from the top of my head no!

**Harriet:** Cos if you have that, cos if you have that then you know, development work, or you know, letting people know about what you're doing is easy [LF: yeah]

The lack of community assets and spaces for public sharing can limit the arena for cohesion and togetherness in a community (Minton 2009; McKenzie 2015). The near loss of the library in Hiraeth led to a large community campaign to save it, resulting in a new library or 'Hub' being built in a new location in the community (although this is currently significantly underused). The old library building has since been rescued from private development by a local charity and is currently in the process of being made into a community café and community centre. This was something that was praised by both community workers and residents alike. Alex, local resident

and community development worker, told me about the significance of this campaign to her life as the library was the only place she could take her young daughter who was born prematurely:

**Alex:** I couldn't work, so we were like struggling for money and stuff, and cash and like, we were, we were, like, it was horrible, we were like choosing between like paying the bills or eating, it was like that bad, and so I, I started taking her to the library cos it was free, and then the council announced that they were gunna shut the library, and I was like, you can't shut the library, it's the only place I can go, I've got, that I can, um, take her for free, we're so skint, and then um, so I got involved in the campaign, and basically led the campaign to save the library...

Alex demonstrated the importance of having public spaces that are free to use, especially for those living in poverty. The centrality of the library to Alex's narrative is prominent, her comment, "you can't shut the library, it's the *only* place I can go", illustrates the lack of community centres and spaces for those on low incomes in Hiraeth. The library is constructed as a central, free-to-access location for Alex and her daughter to spend time outside of the house. Without this space, it is suggested that social isolation would have ensued. Later in her interview, Alex told me about the lack of provision for children in the area, something she had heard time and time again from her community development work and her own experience of living in the community:

**Alex:** ...you know, because I think, generally people have got the same grumbles, there's not stuff for kids to do, there's not, you know all the stuff I've been doing with, the consultation for questionnaires and surveys for the Communities First stuff the same things are coming up again and again, there's nothing for kids to do [LF: yeah] nothing for kids to do, there's nothing for kids to do, there's nothing for kids to do, like again and again and again, no matter what area it's in [LF: yeah] so, and like, to quote, you know, Whitney, the children are our future so like, let's sort it out \*laughs\* d'you know what I mean? [LF: yeah] it's the truth though, it's like, you know, like you're like writing off a whole generation of kids, to, you know, and like, it's all very well like, get rid of all the kids' stuff but then on the housing estates, on the signs on the sides of the walls it's like no ball games [LF: yeah] so there's no, there's no kids centres for 'em to go to but they can't play in the street with their balls so like, \*laughs\* [LF: yeah, it's ridiculous] what, what are kids supposed to do like...

The lack of services and facilities for young people in Hiraeth is constructed as a serious problem in the community that is "writing off a whole generation of kids". Minton (2009) writes about the impact of not being able to play on the street or spend time in the community with friends as something that limits the identity formation and development of young people. The continual marginalisation and demonization of young people is demonstrated by "the signs on the sides of the walls" saying "no ball games" as young people are under constant surveillance, marked as potential troublemakers with nowhere to go. Minton (2009) links this to policy developed under New Labour and the 'Respect' agenda's focus on targeting anti-social behaviour. Young people in the community told me about their frustrations with their community through utilising visual methods. Chloe (under ten), daughter of Lisa and Rob, used suggestion clouds to communicate her suggestions for the area:

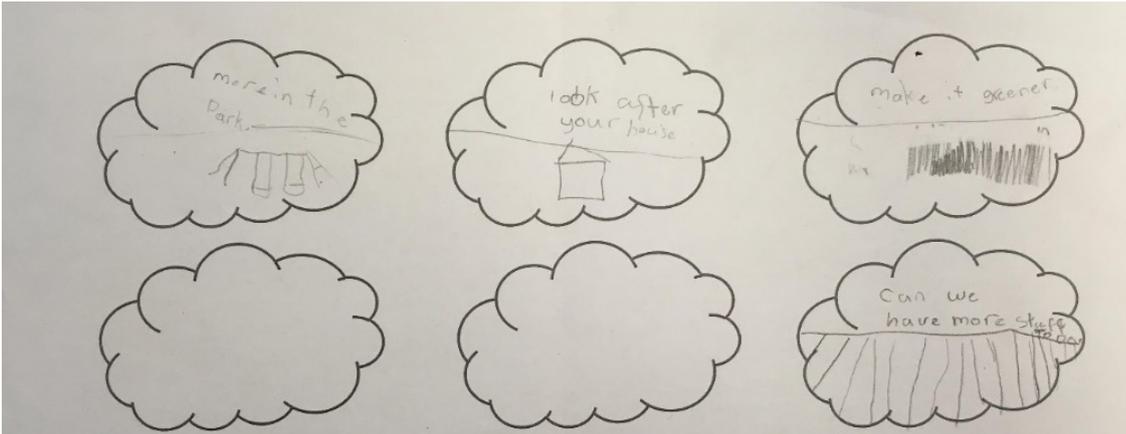


Figure 4: Chloe's suggestion clouds to improve the community.

Chloe's suggestions included "more in the park", "make it greener", and "can we have more stuff to do?" showing how important these local facilities are to young people, particularly the importance of outdoor space. The lack of places for young people to spend time was made even more prominent through a session I conducted in the 'Hub' with a small group of primary school aged girls. When I asked them to draw a map of their favourite places where they spend time in the community, I was met with faces of confusion. Eventually, the girls started to draw and most of their maps featured their homes, schools, the Hub, and local play area. What I did not envisage was the inclusion of the local Spar supermarket and the chip shop across the girls' maps (see Figure 5). Not usually considered as places where young people spend time without being under the watchful eye of policing adults, I considered this, and Chloe's comments above, to be a demonstration of the lack of formal and informal youth provision in Hiraeth.



Figure 5: Place-map produced by Courtney in Creative Club (February 2017)

Although a seemingly minor concern that typically plagues local councils, dog poo and litter were some of the most vocalised issues in a community consultation I attended in Hiraeth. Additionally, the quality of outdoor space has a serious impact on young people and older residents in the community. As noted previously, when areas are seen as unkempt and uncared for, it causes concern for residents as the relationship between both place and class identities is dynamic and interrelated, thus potentially ‘damaging’ residents’ respectable working-class identities (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006; Taylor 2010). When discussing the issue of local parks with Lisa (30s) and her mum Anne (70s), the decline of parks both in terms of numbers and respectability was noted:

**Anne:** Yeah, it’s crazy ain’t it? There’s never ever been any, I mean, I’ve lived here since I was thirteen in Fishguard Avenue, and there’s just nothing [LF: mm] it’s been, park and a few swings and they went [L: mm] there just hasn’t been anything [Lisa: yeah] they don’t replace anything, had a little A, B, C park by here didn’t we? And that went down, and they haven’t put it back

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**Lisa:** ...an everyone’s saying about it, how scruffy it’s gone [LF: mm] how it’s just not getting, not getting, the grass is not getting cut on any council things, the bushes are all overhanging and [LF: yeah] there’s rubbish everywhere, there’s no bins...

Anne and Lisa constructed narratives of blame as the local council “don’t replace anything” and “the grass is not getting cut”. Residents were used to their local facilities being neglected and were concerned, as Lisa said, about “how scruffy it’s gone”. It could be argued that the running down of communities such as Hiraeth should be encouragement enough to want to get out and break free from a community of disrepair and lack of investment, however, increasingly this is not the case (MacDonald et al 2005; Green and White 2007; McKenzie 2015). The importance of place-based identities and social networks are crucial to those in working-class areas such as Hiraeth. As council budgets are tightening under enduring austerity (Shildrick 2018), the demise of services in the area is not due to a lack of local value and pride.

### 6.3.2. *Classed complaints- Whose voice gets heard?*

There have been many community campaigns in Hiraeth, the most notable being the campaign to save the old library which Alex documented in the previous section. Although the old library campaign has seen some success as the community charity now manage the building, there had been several instances where residents were ignored by their local council representatives. I wanted to highlight the classed element to these local complaints, as many residents constructed narratives of disappointment and frustration as their voices were not listened to by powerholders. Roger, a middle-class incomer, explained to me that people in Hiraeth just do not know how to complain correctly, implying that implicit, middle-class capital is required to be taken seriously (Bourdieu 1984). Being disregarded and ignored by powerholders had implications for residents’ sense of self and value, as their community was not seen as ‘worthy’ of investment.

When I spoke to Lisa, a mum of three in her thirties, she mentioned her attempt to ask local councillors about the money the council had made on plots of land, and why some of this profit was not going towards renovating the local parks. I undertook two interviews with Lisa, the first with just her and her youngest son, and the second with her, her husband, her mother, and all three of her children. She mentioned her attempt to interact with the local councillors in both of our meetings:

**Lisa:** ...and yeah the other street parks have gone and never, never been replaced [LF: yeah], and I wrote a letter to one of the councillors years back, um, well I wrote it to all the local councillors because they had sold two plots of land off, and one was for, I think it was 12 million, the other one was for 11 million, and after they took the park away at the top of Ladyhill Road, they had, I think it was 13 thousand pound shortfall why they couldn't replace it, and I thought, well you just made 23 million [LF: yeah], why isn't any of that money ever getting put back into the area? [LF: yeah], it never, it never does.

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**Lisa:** ...you just never, they're just not interested in this, and out of the six councillors I emailed, only one got back to me [LF: Yeah] and he just, he said [LF: ridiculous] that this, um, this area of Pencaer is not the council's priority, it's all [LF: oh nice!], that's all they care for, it's like, the Waterside.

There was frustration in Lisa's narrative. Being told by a councillor that the area "is not the council's priority" further constructs Hiraeth as a community that lacks worth and is a minimal asset to the city. When Lisa claimed that all they care for is Waterside, a gentrified area of the city which has been reconstructed as a centre for middle-class consumption, Hiraeth is positioned as an area not cared for by the council and not worthy of investment, perhaps due to its working-class nature. This kind of story is not new, as many working-class communities across the country experience an avoidable decline due to councils selling off assets to private developers and aims of gentrification in and around the area (Minton 2009; Paton 2013; Jeffery 2018). Nothing appears to make Hiraeth more of a forgotten suburb than the area's own councillor recognising that the community's demands are not the priority of the city council. Again, this shows that the relationship between classed and place-based identities is dynamic and inter-relational (Watt 2009; Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012).

The reason for suggesting that there is a classed element to whose complaints get acted upon or ignored comes from this narrative from Roger, a middle-class newcomer:

**Roger:** And individuals have done, individuals have done um, see that's the other thing that people tend not to understand that even as an individual you've got some influence, you don't necessarily have to gang together [LF: mm] um, you don't uh, I mean I've written to the council a few times, uh with a suggestion, and never once had it really turned down, ever [LF: really?] yeah, I mean I'm lucky cos I know councils, and I know how councils behave [LF: yeah] uh and I know who, who to collar and who not to, but this road here for example, um, I, I wrote originally about the state of this road four years ago, um, and argued, well argued, I said in the letter, that it was now a danger [LF: yeah] to, to children crossing the road because there were pot holes [LF: yeah] right at the end of the road, and um, all

they'd been doing in years gone by is just, putting a bit of tarmac over concrete [LF: mm]... and in fairness, within a few months they, they started off at the bottom there and did, and did that [LF: mm] um, the fact that they came right up to our house which was, which was what was interesting \*laughs\* [LF: \*laughs\*] I said to Maureen oh dear, oh dear, I'm not gonna tell anyone that I've written to them \*laughs\*

Roger boasted that out of all his suggestions to the council, he had “never once had it really turned down, ever”, suggesting his understanding of the implicit social and cultural capital required to be able to communicate successfully with powerholders - “I know councils, and I know how councils behave”. Due to his employment history as a manager in social services, he has the implicit knowledge and the correct habitus to feel at ease in communicating with the council and initiating action in an individualised manner (Bourdieu 1984). If you have the social capital to know “who to collar and who not to” then you see results, perhaps something that Lisa above does not possess. Roger later went on to explain that the local councillor believed that residents “don't know how to complain properly”:

**Roger:** ...there's a tendency to feel that, the council, a) don't know what they're doing and b) um, are not interested in us, uh, uh and, and, and, are just useless [LF: mm] and actually that's not, that's not fair, um, and when the uh, the councillor here, Councillor Jones, is very, very good actually, he's very, very good and he, he came round here one day, he was canvassing, and I was talking to him about different things, and he said to me, he said, the problem is that people down here don't know how to complain properly [LF: mm] uh, he said, because they get almost to the point of protest and there's that sort of instinctive thing where, you protest too much, we're gonna, not, you know, but if you ask reasonable, you make a rational uh, argument, we'll look at it [LF: mm] and in fairness I think, I think they do, and obviously there's a whole question about priorities and all the rest of it, but uh, yeah

This narrative has constructed two ways of complaining to the council: the irrational, to the “point of protest” way of complaining, typically associated with working-class residents; and “reasonable” and “rational” methods of complaining, associated with the middle-classes. To get to the “point of protest” is to be seen as irrational, whereas if a rational and reasonable argument is made, this is respectable and worth listening to (Skeggs 1997). This is framed as the reason why some residents' complaints are not dealt with by the council, wholly ignoring Roger's class advantages of knowing “who to collar and who not to” and his implicit middle-class social and cultural capital.

Highlighting the struggles of working-class residents to get their voices heard when wanting to improve their community is important as it suggests a lack of value attributed to the community and its members by local representatives. Arguably, this demonstrates how class and place play out in the everyday, and how place-attachment, even with the community's flaws, is misrecognised by those in positions of power (MacDonald et al 2005; Watt 2006; McKenzie 2015).

### 6.3.3. *From the outside looking in- Troubled and precarious place-attachment*

This final section outlines two different stories of troubled and precarious place-attachment to highlight the complexity and contradictory nature of place-based and classed identities (Taylor 2010). This ‘trouble’ in place-attachment results from different circumstances, being on the cusp of two disadvantaged communities with concerns about respectability; and being new to the community as a middle-class outsider. Although the narratives I draw upon in this section are unique, the overarching notion that brings them together is the insecurity constructed in narratives of place-attachment. This section illustrates how this ‘trouble’ is constructed and how it is subject to negotiation over the course of the interaction.

I knew that the narratives of Lisa’s family would be interesting as soon as she sent me her address when arranging our meeting. Situated on a road on the very upper northern edge of Hiraeth, it was on the cusp of both Hiraeth and its neighbouring suburb, Newtown. As I looked up the directions of how to get there, Google Maps told me the address was in Hiraeth although Lisa continually referred to where she lived as Newtown, despite acknowledging that most of the services she accesses are in Hiraeth. Newtown, as the pseudonym suggests, is a newer estate than Hiraeth, but with equally spiralling levels of deprivation, if not higher than Hiraeth’s figures. Despite Lisa’s affiliation with Newtown over Hiraeth, her mother Anne (who lived a few doors down) still referred to the area as Hiraeth and told me after the interview that this was because it “sounds posher”. The following extract demonstrates how Lisa and Anne negotiated their place identity trouble:

**Anne:** I mean, when I, I used to live in Fishguard Avenue, as a, a single person, when I lived with my mum and dad, and it was called Hiraeth, but there was nothing ever there, [LF: mm] and we never had nothing in Hiraeth, there still isn’t is there? Not really

**Lisa:** But we’re in Newtown though

**Anne:** No Hiraeth, alright so they got that big park and that big slide [Lisa: mm] that’s all they’ve ever had here, oh park-wise, yeah, that’s what I mean

**Lisa:** Yeah I think, I think [neighbouring suburb] is more set up for kids than Hiraeth

**Anne:** Yeah, but Hiraeth has always been here, okay it’s classed as Newtown now, you know, as part, I mean my rates bill and all that still comes in as Hiraeth [Lisa: yeah, mm] which is crazy cos yours comes as Newtown I think don’t it?

Anne appeared to be struggling to settle her place attachment trouble as she spoke about the area previously being called Hiraeth, “it *was* called Hiraeth”, yet also recognising it as Hiraeth today, “Hiraeth has always been here”, even after Lisa’s correction “we’re in Newtown though”. Anne insistently drew upon the historical continuity of the area being known as Hiraeth, despite its supposed recent re-categorisation, “okay it’s classed as Newtown now”. This shows how identification with place was negotiated and constructed through the narratives of Lisa and her mother, and how difficult and contradictory place-based identities can be (Taylor 2010; Jeffery

2018). Lisa struggled with her attachment to place, continually moving from a position of defence of her area, to a position of disdain. This following extract shows how Lisa attempted to negotiate her conflicting constructions of place-attachment:

**Lisa:** No, no, and that's what, when I, some of the teachers give me a lift home sometimes... because this is not a street like the police particularly come to [LF: yeah] because they don't have any reason to other than now and again like burglaries but [Rob: mm] but that's pretty [Anne: few and far between] you know, yeah, um, but there's not like sort of trouble on the street [LF: no] where they come and have you know splitting up fights and all that, and they were always surprised, and they drive up and, oh, it's really nice up this street ain't it? And I'd say well, yeah actually, it is [LF: yeah, yeah] cos it's sort of, cared for, everyone looks after their houses and their gardens, it's, but then, the new ones, you can see the new ones who've moved in just through walking through the street [LF: mm] they're the ones that don't [LF: yeah] and they've got like, piles of rubbish [Anne: mm] and people, they keep building tiny houses on this side [LF: yeah] I think we've got, two haven't we? [Anne: yeah] then they were both, well one was a detached, and they've built a little tiny house on the side, and the other one end of the row, and they're both wrecked, they're both rough families and it's just, full of rubbish, and parking on the pavement [LF: yeah] and things like that, that it's just a shame, I would, I would happily move if we could now. I wish I could just pick up the house and put it somewhere else [LF: \*laughs\*] Cos I like, I like the house I just don't wanna live here anymore.

To contextualise this extract, it is important to understand that Lisa is a teaching assistant at a local primary school. Lisa positioned teachers as from 'nice' families, or what can be deduced as middle-class, which was particularly poignant in a later section of the interview where she told me "you know, the teachers, if you can afford to be a teacher, if you're a teacher you could afford to live somewhere better". When these middle-class teachers gave Lisa a lift home and drove into her area, which is perhaps judged negatively by outsiders, they "were always surprised, and they drive up and, oh, it's really nice up this street ain't it?". Lisa constructed herself as a proud resident, emphasising the lack of police presence on the street and how "everyone looks after their houses and their gardens". There is a defence to her narrative, defending her community from the middle-class outsider gaze, as she attempts to be seen as 'respectable' in the view of the judging other (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Skeggs 2004). Lisa then described what she disliked about the area, which was attributed to newcomers on the street being from "rough families" and their gardens being filled with "piles of rubbish". Having defended her road to the middle-class teachers who drove her home, Lisa lamented on the decline of the area before concluding, "I would happily move if we could now. I wish I could just pick up the house and put it somewhere else", showing a strong desire to leave the area. This is in sharp contrast to her defence of the area earlier in the narrative, illustrating the complicated, contradictory and tenuous nature of place-attachment for some residents (Taylor 2010).

Place-attachment trouble was also evident in Roger's narrative as he worked to construct himself as different to residents of Hiraeth, whilst simultaneously seeking belonging. As a newcomer to Hiraeth (although he has lived there over ten years), moving from north Wales but originally from

England, he discussed a variety of factors that he believed hindered his ability to adjust to his new community, including age and nationality. However much of this, he explained, was due to differences in class:

**Roger:** Yeah but there is, is a class dimension and people, some people would regard me as being very snobbish [LF: mm], actually, just because of the sorts of thoughts that I've shared with you, if I shared them with them they'd think I was being rather snobbish and, I wouldn't say elitist but, you know, [LF: mm], but sort of moving in that, in that direction, or a bit sort of, superior is not the right word but, d'you know what I mean? [LF: mm] um, and that affects how you fit in really, yeah.

The main obstacle that was stopping Roger from fitting into the community, he argued, was social class. Words such as “snobbish” and “superior” are used in his narrative, which he believed residents would use to distinguish him from the rest of the community. Throughout the narrative, Roger provided examples of how he judged and distanced himself from the behaviours and practices of the working-class residents in the community. Often this included distancing himself from typical working-class leisure activities and hobbies. For instance, he recalled frequently being asked which pub he drinks in or which football team he supports, to which he stated, “okay they're, they're conversational pieces but they're not, they're not necessarily the most important thing, for me, and um, so that gets a bit um, that can get a bit tricky”. Through this distancing, Roger illustrates that he gives little value to these activities, which other working-class residents consider important. He was very careful in his distancing from these activities, as he attempted not to construct himself as a judging other, particularly as someone who was trying to fit into the community:

**Roger:** ...when we retire, we thought to ourselves well how are we gonna use, how are we gonna use this time? And you can get trapped into sort of, well, we'll go down the pub [LF: \*laughs\*] we'll go down the club, um, meet you at the betting shop or whatever it might be, and these are things that people say to me, you know, and um, that's fine you know if you like that, I've got nothing against it personally, but it's not my cup of tea

The word “trapped” suggests working-class residents have a lack of agency in their leisure activities, suggesting they cannot open themselves to other activities and lack choice. The activities Roger distanced himself from were attending social clubs, pubs and betting shops. This is a clear example of the construction of distinction and taste, as Roger marked those activities as not for ‘somebody like him’ whilst simultaneously attempting to not appear judgemental (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 1997; Watt 2009). Similar to the racism disclaimer utilised by Anne earlier in the chapter, Roger used a discursive disclaimer to distance himself from the accusation of being a ‘snob’ – “I've got nothing against it personally, but...” (Van Dijk 1992; Every and Augoustinos 2007; Goodman 2014) Interestingly, it is precisely these activities which did not feature in the Great British Class Survey conducted by Savage et al (2015). These activities lack the recognition required to attain middle-class cultural capital and so Roger discursively distanced himself from them. He was very self-aware of the difficulty of being middle-class and trying to

find a sense of belonging when moving to a working-class community such as Hiraeth, which he succinctly summarised- “so I think class is a little bit to do with how um, how um, difficult or easy it might be to fit in here”. This example demonstrates the differing value systems between working-class and middle-class residents.

Although coming from a different perspective to Lisa and Anne’s narratives above, Roger aptly highlighted some of the difficulties of fitting in and belonging to a community as an outsider. Lisa and Anne, although not technically outsiders as they were ‘born and bred’ residents, were on the geographical periphery of Hiraeth, which caused difficulties in situating their spatial belonging. Roger came into Hiraeth as a middle-class outsider, which as demonstrated above, caused significant conflicts and tensions that needed negotiating to maintain an equilibrium and a settled place-based identity. Roger explained how he manages his conflicting identity and his place-attachment difficulties: “I’ve got settled um, a settled way of life but I don’t uh, I’ve learnt, the importance of being discreet down here, that’s what it boils down to, um, you be careful who you talk to, what you say”. This indicates the difficulties of negotiating place-based identities, which requires careful management on an everyday basis, again showing the performativity of class and place as a dyad (Taylor 2010; Benson and Jackson 2012; Paton 2013; Jeffery 2018). The examples in this section from Lisa, Anne, and Roger’s narratives display the difficulty of maintaining and ‘doing’ place.

This section highlighted the frustrations, contradictions and ‘trouble’ involved in place-based attachment and identities. As with many other working-class neighbourhoods across the UK, there has been a significant decline in public services, especially in youth facilities in Hiraeth. The frustration of this decline was centralised in residents’ narratives. There were many strategies employed by residents to attempt to address these issues. This section illustrated how residents responded to such issues, and how these complaints often got little recognition by the local council, with the exception of the requests from Roger, somebody who had insider knowledge of how the council runs. Finally, I drew upon two different and unique narratives to demonstrate how attachment to place can often be contradictory and tenuous, particularly to those who are on the ‘edge’ of the community in differing ways (geographically or due to social class).

This small selection of narratives cannot claim to be representative of Hiraeth, however, drawing upon my experience of spending time in the community and listening to community members, this is a fair representation of some of the common issues and struggles faced by residents. As the relationship between place-based and classed identities is dynamic and interrelated, the condition of the ‘place’ inhabited therefore impinges upon residents’ sense of self and respectability (Skeggs 1997; Watt 2006). When the focus of residents’ narratives is on fixity rather than mobility, place-

attachment is important and valuable for identity formation although inevitably there is ‘trouble’ and contradiction.

#### *6.4. The importance of everyday place-based identities within understandings of collective social mobility*

This chapter has explored the importance and intricacies of place-based attachment and identity formation. I used examples from participants’ narratives to illuminate how both place-based and classed identities are constructed and negotiated through a variety of discursive resources. Examples of these discursive resources included the construction of the ‘dividing line’ and ‘racialised other’, and the situating of local and national identities. I then discussed some of the place-attachment ‘trouble’ that was present in some residents’ narratives. There was a discursive struggle between strong belonging to the community and showing frustration at the issues within Hiraeth, which are often ignored by those in positions of power. Some examples of precarious place-attachment were then explored from two differing perspectives: living on the geographical periphery of Hiraeth and being middle-class in a working-class neighbourhood. This chapter suggests that place-attachment is dynamic and complex and is continually being negotiated in the everyday by residents.

Benson and Jackson (2012) argue that place-making simultaneously reconstructs classed identities, and the chapter provided examples of the discursive resources drawn upon to construct spatial distinctions based upon class ‘tastes’ and judgements (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 1997; Watt 2009; Jeffery 2018). These distinctions were often based on an appreciation of ‘respectability’ and anything or anyone who goes against the grain is simultaneously ‘othered’ (Skeggs 1997; 2004). It could be argued that residents’ narratives in this chapter exemplify the need for a sense of protection within the community, or what Walkerdine (2010) calls the ‘containing skin’ in a community of affect. With threats such as newcomers joining the community and public spaces falling into disrepair, there is a need to defend and maintain place-based identities, protecting against loss of value (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016). As Taylor (2010) notes, there is a mirroring process between place and residents’ identities. Negotiating belonging therefore requires both place-based and classed identity work in relation to others.

Despite many Hiraeth residents having a strong attachment to place, this attachment is often complicated and complex. Following on from the conclusion of Chapter Five, if the focus of policy can be shifted to investing in and working with communities instead of individualised notions of social mobility, then complexities of place need to be recognised and listened to (Walkerdine 2016). The narratives presented in this chapter suggest there is a need for local value and understandings to be appreciated by powerholders, and recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach to working with communities ignores locally constructed divisions and boundaries.

There are, undeniably, issues for concern in the community of Hiraeth, including the apparent lack of credibility given to residents' views by local council representatives. The perceived threat of the 'racialised other' and the use of an anti-migrant discourse is a further issue which may break down the cohesion within Hiraeth. Continuity in the community has been maintained for generations, making adapting to change difficult for residents. A potential approach to overcome this and encourage cohesion would be to invest in publicly shared communal spaces (Minton 2009; McKenzie 2015), where residents could come together and build relationships with each other, as Abi suggested, encouraging learning across difference. Walkerdine (2010) has discussed the importance of having shared spaces where continual affective practices of being 'held together' take place. However, as section 6.3 demonstrated, there is a dearth of funding and support for communal spaces in Hiraeth. Recognising local value systems and listening to the issues that matter to the community are essential to enhancing communal bonds and encouraging collective mobility, but without solid investment in communities as opposed to individuals, this will be difficult to achieve (Skeggs 2011; Walkerdine 2016; Lang and Marsden 2017). The next and final findings chapter moves on to explore education and employment trajectories and the intersection of class and gender within residents' narratives.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Explorations of the Individualistic Selfhood Discourse- How Policy, Class and Gender Impact on Hiraeth Residents' (Mobility) Trajectories**

#### *7.1. Introduction*

This chapter focuses on education and employment trajectories, which are often seen as the linchpin to successful social mobility. It critiques the individualised selfhood discourse that is propagated through government policy and rhetoric, by drawing on the gendered and classed narratives of Hiraeth residents. The data presented here suggests that Hiraeth residents work within a form of selfhood that is relational – dependent upon relationships with others – in which understandings of fulfilment are often constructed outside of educational and employment success.

The chapter provides a political context by exploring in more detail Communities First's approach to improving the community, critiquing the employability focus of its projects in its latter years. Extending the discussion about Communities First in Chapter Five, this chapter argues that despite of the programme's seemingly laudable aims, it acted as a form of stigma governmentality, shifting the blame of structural inequalities onto the shoulders of those who are most marginalised in the community. This discourse was met with resistance from community workers. The chapter then explores the working-class gendering of roles and trajectories, discussing the centrality of caring to women's narratives and how this interacts with their working lives, reflecting locally held norms.

The final section looks explicitly at education and employment trajectories, examining how residents reject and distance themselves from the dominant social mobility and self-improvement discourse, creating their own sources of value. It explores parents' aspirations for their children and also adults' reflections to illustrate how an alternative discourse is constructed, which provided fulfilment and success in relation to others. The conclusion reflects on what this means for social mobility more widely, suggesting that there is a need for a shift in the conceptualisation of social mobility and what it means for people in marginalised communities such as Hiraeth.

#### *7.2. Community improvement through Communities First*

Acting as an arm of the Welsh Government, I argue that the Communities First anti-poverty programme played a pivotal role in reproducing an individualistic, neoliberal-self discourse. Despite its initial aim of encouraging meaningful community engagement to address poverty and disadvantage in communities, in line with the Welsh Government's dedication to 'partnership' working (see Chapter Two, Section 2.4), this aim was lost when the focus shifted from

participatory working to managing financial risk (Dicks 2014). Interview data presented suggests that community workers on the ground struggled to endorse this individualistic, prescriptive view towards the end of the programme in an era of economic insecurity and deepening inequalities. This section outlines the projects that Communities First were running in Hiraeth, with a focus on the prosperity and learning projects, before exploring what community workers described as the barriers that stopped residents engaging. Despite Communities First coming to an end, a selection of employability programmes have maintained funding and are still operating.

The programme had three ‘different’ strands, prosperity, learning and health; but I argue that its ultimate aim, underpinning all strands towards the programme’s end, was its focus on creating the productive worker. I draw on critiques from both sociological literature and the community workers themselves to illustrate why this individualistic approach to ‘community’ improvement and development is flawed in an age of widening inequalities; and suggest some alternative approaches that could enable improvements in deprived communities such as Hiraeth<sup>39</sup>.

### *7.2.1. Prosperity, learning and health- The governmentality of Communities First*

The nature of the projects offered by Communities First in Hiraeth relied on residents coming forward with the goal of self-improvement and receiving tailored guidance from community workers to improve their skills, employability and/or health. This approach differed from the non-prescriptive, collective model utilised by the programme in its first phase. Dicks (2014) describes this shift in the programme as a move away from ‘active citizenship’ towards a more ‘community activation’ approach, where community members are seen as ‘customers’. Despite their laudable intentions, the projects can be seen as an attempt by the Welsh Government to manage stigmatised populations by encouraging them to act upon and improve their ‘selves’ instead of focusing on the structural barriers that (re)produce poverty and inequality (Skeggs 1997; 2011; Walkerdine et al 2001; Walkerdine 2003; Gillies 2005; Tyler 2013; 2015; Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016; Shildrick 2018; Tyler and Slater 2018). Individualising the problems that are created through the current economic and social system helps to shift the burden from those in positions of power, to those who are struggling. However, this ignores changes in the labour market which have made employment more precarious and insecure (Tyler 2013; Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016; Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018).

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that other Communities First ‘clusters’ have been highly successful, often when ran by community organisations, which have managed to continue offering support to communities despite the end of the Communities First programme. All programmes offered in Hiraeth under Communities First were ended when the programme finished in March 2018, however, some council-funded employment services have continued.

Harriet (Prosperity Team Manager) described her role in the prosperity team in Hiraeth Communities First:

Well I run two projects actually, I run the prosperity project but then I also line manage the Communities Forward project... then of a few different projects, there's the employment projects, um it's mainly mentoring but we have access to a little bit of resource where we can help people with training, and the kind of interventions that we quite often use is very much, um, person-centred, so it's about developing employment action plan with people um and, perhaps if somebody doesn't have work experience or has an employment gap, gain experience through volunteering at workplaces along with maybe some training that might help them \*sigh\* be a little bit more successful in the labour market, I guess that might help them compete with the other people in the labour market...

Harriet discussed an array of employment projects, which aimed to help Hiraeth residents to “compete with the other people in the labour market”, although there was some scepticism in her narrative. Much of the Communities First rhetoric draws upon being, as Harriet described, “person-centred” or holistic, but this appears to be in the context of employability, not a concern for life in the community outside of the workplace (Tyler 2013; Lawler 2018). The value of the individual is reduced to their labour market value, ignoring their value outside of work and what benefits it could hold for the community (Frayne 2015). This demonstrates the shift of the Communities First programme from a non-prescriptive, community development approach, towards a more individual ‘responsibilisation’ approach encouraging labour market activation (Dicks 2014).

One of the most highly praised projects for turnout and engagement was the ‘Stress Management and Control’ course, which focused on helping residents deal with difficult emotions arguably caused by the strains of poverty and the individualising pressure to be in work. The wider aim of this course, as prescribed by the Welsh Government, can be seen as ensuring that individuals function well enough to be better and more productive workers, working their way out of disadvantage. Again, this displays the individualising nature of these projects, which placed responsibility on residents for their position and did not address larger, structural inequities. The discourse promoted by these projects arguably insinuated that poverty and disadvantage are due to individual lack, ‘risky’ behaviours, and deficient subjectivities (Skeggs 2004; Tyler 2013; Dicks 2014; Littler 2018). The valuable subject is the ‘forward-propelling’ individualised subject, and to ‘improve’ means to distinguish yourself from those who cannot, therefore configuring and entrenching class distinctions (Skeggs 2011; Reay 2018). This approach was an ameliorative attempt at improving the lives of those in poverty, ignoring the direct causes such as poor labour market conditions and lack of community investment (Dicks 2014; Adamson 2016). As I will outline in section 7.4, this individualised improvement discourse is not always accessible, or desirable, for residents of Hiraeth.

Whilst the prosperity projects assisted adults who were entering/re-entering the labour market, the learning projects focused more on shaping young people's trajectories after they finished school at sixteen. Due to lack of local employment opportunities and an underperforming high school in Hiraeth, the destinations of its young people were (and still are) a cause for concern. As I highlighted in Chapter Five, strong attachments to place may make young people less likely to leave Hiraeth in search of wider opportunities. A body of literature critiques the assumption that those from working-class backgrounds have lower/no aspirations, instead arguing that the social and economic adversities experienced by working-class pupils are what curtail their ambitions (Archer et al 2014; McInerney and Smyth 2014). As St Clair and Benjamin (2011) assert, UK government policy has incorrectly acted on the belief that efforts to raise aspirations will subsequently raise attainment. Much of this meritocratic discourse, which has been highly invested in by all governments since the New Labour era, has an individualised, psychological dimension, with many young people themselves believing that all that count are hard work and effort, thus ignoring wider structural barriers such as class, gender and ethnicity (Tyler 2013; Luttrell-Rowland 2016; Baker 2017; Littler 2018). This discourse arguably shaped the Communities First approach to learning projects, which in appearing to offer supportive mentoring and advice, also involved working upon the psychological self in order to be successful:

It might be sort of like self-esteem, self-worth workshops, things like that, um and we do a lot of things about sort of motivation and sort of improving your understanding of careers and you know pathways towards those careers so at the moment... we're working with a lot of sort of year elevens who haven't you know, made any final decision as to which college to go to, which course to do, or whether they want to go into employment

The workshops described by Ian (Learning Projects Manager), self-esteem, self-worth and motivation, suggest that the construction of a particular psychological subject is essential for self-invention and improvement (Walkerdine et al 2001; Gillies 2005). In relation to her analysis of think-tank reports on social mobility, Lawler (2018) notes that the political discourse works to eradicate class through reference to individual psychological qualities including character, personality, aspirations and motivation. Often working-class parenting gets scapegoated as a cause of this lack which requires intervention (Gillies 2005; Allen and Bull 2018). This was enacted through the Communities First 'Family Learning' projects that aimed to manage 'risky behaviours' (Dicks 2014). Arguably, inculcating the correct kind of middle-class 'character' via interventions illustrates the regulatory nature of resilience, which aims to help individuals survive in neoliberal times (Gill and Orgad 2018). It appears that middle-class aspirational values are the norm from which to judge value (Lott 2016); but perhaps there needs to be a widening of what constitutes 'success'.

As Skeggs (2005; 2011) contends, not everybody wishes to engage in the ‘capital loaded fetish’ of middle-class possessive individualism, which I discuss in section 7.4 when exploring participants’ narratives. This is not to say that there was no merit in the approach taken by Communities First or that it did not help some residents of Hiraeth. The initial focus of the programme embodied a collective and collaborative approach, though this was lost in the final few years of the programme (Dicks 2014; Arad Research 2017). The more individualised nature of the programme failed to grapple with the wider social and economic inequalities that are affecting the community and its residents, something which community workers on the ground recognised. The programme’s focus on employability seemed lost in an era of precarious and insecure employment, whilst also reducing individuals to their labour market value (Dicks 2014). Helping a small number of people find employment and training does not vindicate the toxic nature of this self-improvement discourse, which places responsibility and blame on those with the least resources (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Skeggs 2005; Tyler 2013; 2015; Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018). Arguably, investing in communities such as Hiraeth and raising the living conditions for the entire community would be a more beneficial approach than individualised notions of social mobility and self-improvement (Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). This approach resonates with the initial foundation of Communities First back in 2001.

### *7.2.2. Barriers to becoming the active and productive resident*

Tensions were present in community workers’ narratives around why it was difficult to get residents to engage in Communities First programmes. For community workers these barriers included mental well-being such as lack of confidence, resilience and trust, and wider structural barriers including the current state of the labour market. I argue that by focusing on the individual, Communities First in its latter years was only working on the symptoms and not the cause of the problems (Adamson 2016). There was some recognition of this in the interviews with community workers after the announcement of the ending of the programme, as they felt pressure from the Welsh Government to get people into work despite dire labour market conditions and without appearing like a statutory, sanctionable arm of the state (such as the Department for Work and Pensions or the Job Centre).

Johnny, who was one of the staff members mostly involved in the ‘Family Learning Signature’ project, told me about some of the difficulties in confidence, demeanour, and mental well-being that can act as barriers to residents engaging with the programme:

I think sometimes the biggest obstacle is an individual themselves, and the word I would use would be they need to find a sense of braveness within themselves and to come forward um, as an, as an adult within a community setting actually seeking help, and to get the and be able to um, conduct themselves in the, in the right way um, to find the help that they need you know, obviously a lot of our projects are you know get leading into work, getting young people um straight from school um on apprenticeships, college courses, part-time

jobs, and also even working back into their families and, and supporting their father or mothers, or older brother and sisters, aunties, uncles, and getting them into work, obviously there's a whole array of issues around things like substance misuse and, and, and the intake then of substances, and alcohol and so forth, so um obviously there's a bit of vetting sort of thing goes on as well when um obviously people first come forward and seeking help is you know, they're asked a whole lot of personal questions, um they're obviously got to be open to that as well, so some of those things can be the barrier, not really admitting where, where your weak points are really, yeah.

For Johnny, “sometimes the biggest obstacle is an individual themselves” because it requires “braveness” to “come forward”. Johnny recognised the construction of poverty and disadvantage that is related to shame, which carries stigma and judgement (Tyler 2013; Scambler 2018). Tyler and Slater (2018) argue that deliberate stigma strategies can be used to manage or alter the behaviour of underperforming populations, what they term ‘stigma as governmentality’. Johnny appeared to recognise the effects of such stigma in stopping residents seeking support. He also suggested that the level of personal information required to receive support can be off-putting for some residents, demonstrating the regulatory and surveillant nature of the project. Despite acknowledging some of the barriers to engagement, Johnny constructed an ideal ‘self’ when he discussed people being able to “conduct themselves in the, in the right way”, alluding to the suggestion that residents do not conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. Although Johnny was sympathetic to the reasons why some people find themselves in difficult situations, the later mention of substance misuse may work to enhance the stigmatising discourse he had previously identified.

Following the announcement of the ending of Communities First, Johnny spoke emotively about his frustrations with the project work, perhaps due to his impending redundancy. He discussed the arbitrary nature of the target-approach to measuring success, whilst also constructing a sense of deep embarrassment and sadness about the work residents had done to themselves to become ‘work-ready’, only to be met with limited employment opportunities afterwards. As Tyler (2013) argues, government initiatives around self-improvement and employability often fail to consider structural changes in the labour market, which in turn may lead to an internalisation of failure. Johnny’s narratives demonstrate the difficulty of subscribing to an individualised discourse when it is clear that even when people do behave “in the right way”, they still cannot improve their living standards due to wider societal issues beyond their control.

Similarly, Lucy who worked on the health projects for Communities First, recognised the tension in the individualising discourse, as often it was the precarious labour market holding people back from breaking what she termed the “benefit loop”:

...but getting out of the benefit, benefit sys- loop and getting out of that is very very daunting isn't it, it's like I know where I am, I know I can get benefits for this and that etcetera, if I get out of this I don't know, am I going to be able to manage in staying in a

job, are there jobs for me that are, are permanent? If I'm getting a job and it's only for you know a few months, is it worth it? So, stay in the same in the place where they know.

Lucy questioned the individualising self-improvement discourse, as she suggested that it is not a question of motivation or laziness that is holding residents back from entering the labour market, it is the fear of insecurity. As people who are out of work are often constructed as 'national abjects' and the scapegoats for the ills of society (Tyler 2013), this fear of insecurity is often ignored by powerholders who continue to heap blame onto shame whilst government policy on welfare becomes more punitive (Tyler 2013; Jenson and Tyler 2015; Tyler 2015; Scambler 2018; Shildrick 2018). As explored in Chapter Two, Section 2.2, the construction of moral panics around the unemployed leads to an 'othering' and the creation of 'disgust' (Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2005; Jenson and Tyler 2015). It is important to be distanced from these stigmatised positions to avoid feelings of shame and humiliation, yet arguably for many, work does not pay, and the insecurity of employment would enhance their precarity (Horton 2013; Carson 2015; Scambler 2018; Shildrick 2018). Both options therefore have negative consequences. The community activation approach of the Communities First programme arguably attempted to manage the risky behaviour of underperforming populations by encouraging them into work, although many community workers on the ground recognised the flaws in this approach (see also Dicks 2014).

One core barrier to engagement with Communities First recognised by staff was its regulatory, formal nature. In the consultation interviews after the announcement of the ending of Communities First, several staff members talked about the projects appearing too formal and official, with one warning that the vast array of employability projects made Communities First appear as an extension of the Department for Work and Pensions or the Job Centre. The governmentality and regulatory nature of Communities First after 2012 was something that many community workers felt uncomfortable with, as they feared it would hinder their ability to meaningfully engage with the community, as Johnny noted above. Staff recognised that the individualisation of responsibility for self-improving and becoming a productive resident through the exercise of governmentality fails when structural barriers and inequalities impede many people's chances of 'success' and social mobility. The limited scope to tailor the programme to each community in the cluster was also a source of frustration for many staff. The constricted, narrow nature of the programme in its final years propagated this individualistic approach to poverty and social mobility, ignoring the concerns of staff on the ground and side-lining attempts at collective community development.

This section has explored the role that Communities First projects have had in the propagation of discourses of self-improvement and social mobility within Hiraeth. Interview data from Communities First workers suggested that an individualistic, neoliberal-self discourse was reproduced throughout Communities First projects post-2012. Staff recognised the tensions in

this discourse when structural barriers and inequities made ‘self-improving’ difficult for those who took part in the projects. This becomes particularly pertinent when considering that the main driving force of Communities First in its final years was its focus on employability, which I have argued underpinned all three project areas through prescribed governmentality. This approach was met with resistance from some staff who argued that the dominance of employability made the programme appear too official to residents, whilst the pressures of meeting quantitative targets for the Welsh Government overshadowed their ability to focus on community development work. Drawing on community workers’ concerns of the programme, this section has been critical of the individualised selfhood discourse and its dedication to neoliberal capitalism through the maintenance of the productive worker. Instead, I argue that it is important to recognise structural constraints that (re)produce inequality and to recognise the value that people, and communities, hold outside of their employment.

The individualised forward-propelling subject who continually accrues various valuable capitals is not accessible or desirable for all, particularly in working-class communities where models of selfhood are based on relationality and support for others (Skeggs 1997; 2005; 2011; McKenzie 2015). It is this model of selfhood, self in relation to others, that underpins the following two sections of this chapter. By drawing upon the narratives of Hiraeth residents, I examine the influence of gender on life trajectories before exploring more explicitly residents’ classed narratives of their education and employment trajectories. Whether through the gendering of caring roles or temporal reflections on past and future ambitions, it is the self in relation to others that is prominent in Hiraeth residents’ narratives, and not the individualised notion of self that is perpetuated in neoliberal political rhetoric.

### *7.3. “It’s all still very much a girl’s job”: The role of gender in shaping life trajectories in Hiraeth*

One of the clearest examples of relational selfhood came through the gendered nature of participants’ narratives. As discussed in Chapter Five, the born and bred narrative is highly gendered, with specific, assumed roles for both men and women. This section aims to expand the heteronormative, patriarchal ‘born and bred narrative’ by further exploring what Taylor (2010) terms, the dominant coupledness narrative. This narrative positions women as wives, mothers and daughters, and this assertion underpinned many participants’ narratives. There was a significance placed on the role of marriage as all participants were married and had children (with the exception of one who was divorced), and I argue that this fixing or grounding paved the way for gendered roles to be assumed, in particular, the caring and domestic responsibilities attributed to women.

This section examines the tensions that women experienced in balancing both the domestic sphere and the labour market, questioning whether decisions to prioritise either home or work are a mother's sacrifice or choice. Drawing on Hollway (2006), there is an exploration of the 'capacity to care' across generations, emphasising the dominance of the caring role for women of all generations, as older women are relied upon for childcare duties as part of a wider kinship network of support. The section then discusses how gender has shaped participants' labour market trajectories and the types of work both men and women engage in, highlighting that the traditional gendering of working-class communities is very much present in Hiraeth. However, rather than relegating such roles to the realm of 'recalcitrant dinosaurs', it examines the local value and emotional significance constructed when maintaining gendered roles (Walkerdine 2016). In contrast to the individualistic selfhood discourse endorsed through Communities First, the strongly gendered nature of participants' narratives draws upon a much more relational model of selfhood that emphasised support, care and kinship.

### *7.3.1. A mother's sacrifice or choice? Juggling the domestic sphere and the labour market*

Writing in 1976 in an edited collection entitled *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage*, Davidoff (1976, p.148) warned that sociologists can "no longer go on turning their attention to everything but the kitchen sink". As Mannay (2016) argues, this is still pertinent today for the lives of many Welsh women. As individualistic selfhood discourses encourage women to put themselves first, a difficulty arises when having children is brought into the equation (Hollway 2006). The notion of 'having it all' appears to ignore the often-feminised duties of care-giving and domestic responsibility (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Warren 2003; Littler 2018). Being able to 'do' home well, such as cleaning and caring, and the centrality of the home as a nurturing place can inculcate a sense of respectability and morality for working-class women (Skeggs 1997; May 2008; Taylor 2010). If domesticity is chosen solely over paid employment, it can provide another way to 'become' a woman, outside of the career woman discourse (Walkerdine et al 2001). For example, Tanya (30s) explained how she and her husband decided that once they had children, she would leave her administrative job at the council for good:

I didn't have, an amazing career that I'd worked for or something, you know, I wasn't that bothered about giving it up [LF: mm] I suppose it might have been different if I'd spent years \*laughs\* [LF: yeah] you know working on something to become like a lawyer or something you know [LF: yeah, yeah] it might be different, and you probably could afford to pay the childcare then

Tanya justified her 'choice' to stay at home full-time with her children using two reasons: not having "an amazing career", and the cost of childcare if she were to work as well as her husband. This justification is productive, as it provided a way for Tanya to construct her sense of self in relation to her mothering role which is her source of value and success outside of the workplace

(Walkerdine et al 2001; May 2008). When Tanya shared that “we’d always said that when we had children I’d stay home”, it demonstrates the power of the dominant coupledom narrative over the gender roles taken up by partners. As Betts (1994) notes, women and children are historically associated with the kinship system whilst men are described in terms of their place in the labour market, and this appears to still be important in Hiraeth. Tanya suggested that if she did have a highly paid job then perhaps she could afford childcare, something Warren (2003) states is an option for the middle-classes. However, regardless of ability to buy-in domestic support, Warren’s work concluded that both working and middle-class couples had some form of female-carer arrangement and that hours spent caring were strongly gendered across classes. It appears then that regardless of income, women cannot buy themselves out of their assumed caring responsibilities.

In her research in post-industrial steelwork communities in south Wales, Walkerdine (2010; 2016) argued that there was often a mother-centred community ‘feel’ with the maintenance of gender roles engendering affective responses from residents - similar constructions were also present in narratives from Hiraeth. Being a ‘good’ mother and carer, bound in all its moral expectations, first and foremost requires an ‘ethic of care’ where the children are put first, before the self (Skeggs 1997; Hollway 2006; May 2008). I first heard about Lesley’s (40s) narrative when I interviewed her father, Roger. He explained to me how Lesley trained in psychiatric nursing but following the birth of her first-born who was diagnosed with a learning disability, she gave up work to care full-time for her three children and look out for her chronically ill mother:

But she’s, she’s, from our point of view, you know people say this about their kids anyways but, she is um, she is very unselfish [LF: mm] yeah she’s, she spends all her time um, trying to make a difference for lots of people, including us, and because her background’s in health, um, and Maureen’s got chronic illness and disability, she’s been really, you know, good support to Maureen, and obviously a good support to me because of that, um, and she’s um, she just looks after, looks after her children, and she looks after them very well...

Roger described his daughter as “very unselfish” and a “good support”, constructing her within the vision of the selfless good mother, following the ethic of care and gaining her sense of self through her care for others (Skeggs 1997; 2011; Walkerdine et al 2001; Hollway 2006; May 2008). Concern and compassion are two characteristics that Hollway (2006) associates with the capacity to care and Roger described his daughter in these terms. Despite this, when explaining what currently fills his daughter’s time he said she “just” looks after her children which, perhaps unintentionally, seemed to undermine the value of her unpaid domestic labour (Gardiner 1976). As men typically see care work as something that is more ‘natural’ for women, it can be forgotten that this work is hard and a strain on women (Davidoff 1976; Gardiner 1976; Betts 1994; Dempsey 2000; Hollway 2006). When I spoke to Lesley (40s), it was clear that giving up work

to care for the children was a sacrifice and a difficult choice to make as she enjoyed the work she was doing:

I enjoyed it, I did enjoy it, um, but once you, once you've had kids it's really difficult to, well I found it really difficult to go back, cos I only went back part time [LF: mm] um, and you end up sort of, trying to do, what you end up not doing anything fully [LF: yeah] so you don't do your job properly and you don't do home properly and, so, in the end I ended up, at first I took a career break, and then just finished [LF: mm]

Unlike Tanya's narrative of choice, Lesley's decision to give up work was constructed as a difficult and gradual decision whereby managing work and domestic responsibilities was irreconcilable. Mannay (2016) discusses the 'unreachable standards' women feel they need to meet by stretching themselves across both work and the home equally, and for Lesley it was the desire to care 'well' for her children which meant putting her (also caring) nursing career on hold, first temporarily, before leaving indefinitely. Lesley's decision therefore positions her as putting the care of others before her own freedom of choice (Hollway 2006). Not all decisions to take on domestic and care responsibilities full-time are therefore made lightly or without significant impact on the mother's sense of self and trajectory.

Many mothers did not leave the labour market entirely to care for their children and were still trying to meet those 'unreachable standards' through fitting their domestic responsibilities around their (mostly part-time) employment. Often, with husbands working full-time, it was down to the women to work part-time in order to fit around taking the children to and from school, with many women aiming to return to work full-time once their children are old enough to be at home on their own. Kathryn (40s), a nurse at the nearby hospital, explained to me how her work has fitted around her domestic responsibilities over the years:

I've been up the [nearby] hospital for, twenty-two years now, oh my God, twenty-two years yeah [LF: really?] yeah, various permutations of part-time, and I went full-time about two years ago when Lauren went to high school [LF: yeah] my last one went to high school, finally a bit of freedom [LF: \*laughs\*]

Kathryn constructed her childcare responsibilities as a constraint on her ability to work, by describing being able to go back to work full-time as "finally a bit of freedom". As is noted in much feminist literature exploring women's domestic work, even when women are in paid employment, the bulk of the caring responsibilities still fall on their shoulders (Gardiner 1976; Betts 1994; Rees 1994; Warren 2003; Mannay 2016). Hollway (2006) discusses this tension inherent in motherhood where the feeling of gain and the feeling of loss go side-by-side as women enter motherhood often in exchange for some loss of their previous independence, becoming a relational, caring self. There is a mismatch between the image of 'mother' and the image of 'worker', and so hours worked have to be carefully balanced around unpaid domestic labour (Rees 1994). When I asked Kathryn why she thinks women end up taking on the bulk of the domestic duties, she replied:

Well I think it's because we're the ones that have the maternity leave, so right from the beginning, we're the ones that are doing the childcare, and six months, nine months, twelve months later, it's just assumed that we'll carry on [LF: mm, mm] it's the same as we end up taking over most of the housework [LF: yeah] because we're the ones that are here, and while we're looking after the children, we do the cleaning and, uhhh, we create a problem for ourselves, plus they don't do it very well

This draws on the discourse that care work and housekeeping are natural for women to undertake, and despite women also being in employment, men do not take full responsibility for the jobs typically seen as 'women's jobs' (Davidoff 1976; Gardiner 1976; Pilcher 1994; Rees 1994; Dempsey 2000; Mannay 2016). As Kathryn claimed, "it's just assumed that we'll carry on" with the domestic duties, with men holding the definitional power over what count as 'women's jobs', reducing their own role to 'helper' rather than taking responsibility for tasks such as childcare or cleaning (Pilcher 1994; Dempsey 2000; Mannay 2016). There is tension in this narrative as Kathryn suggests that by taking initiative and doing jobs around the home while looking after the children that women are creating the problem themselves, alongside their reluctance to pass tasks over to men because "they don't do it very well". Dempsey (2000) argues that this ambivalence of handing tasks over to men can be an impediment to change, as Kathryn implies that she is better at domestic tasks than her husband, therefore reinforcing her position of being solely responsible for such tasks. Kathryn also highlights, however, the structural nature of care work that positions women in the home to begin with, "we're the ones that have the maternity leave". She concludes later in the interview by claiming, "it's all still very much a girl's job", whether women want it to be or not.

Lisa, a mother of three in her thirties, took a less critical stance in her approach to work around the house. When interviewed, she was working as a teaching assistant in a nearby primary school because of the convenience of working school hours for looking after her children whilst her husband worked full-time as a carpenter. She told me why she decided not to train to become a teacher:

It's not worth the, the added stress, I do, I do quite a bit at home, but I do it because I enjoy it [LF: mmm] not because I have to do it, and I think if you have to do it, you probably realise you're not enjoying [LF: yeah] doing it so much, but \*laughs\* umm, no, so I wasn't, I wasn't too keen.

The reason she gave for maintaining her role as a teaching assistant was because she enjoyed being able to do "quite a bit at home" when she was not in work. She was keen to emphasise that she does this because she enjoys it and not because she has to, clearly constructing a narrative of choice. This suggests that the home is a nurturing space that is created by women, where cleanliness and order are a signifier of respectable femininity for working-class women; being able to be a good 'Welsh mam' whilst upholding a job and the home simultaneously (Davidoff 1976; Skeggs 1997; Taylor 2010; Mannay 2016). Lisa's values on keeping a clean home appeared

to influence her young daughter Chloe (aged 9), who in her suggestion clouds for the community, wrote “look after your house”, indicating that these values can be passed on across generations (see Figure 6).

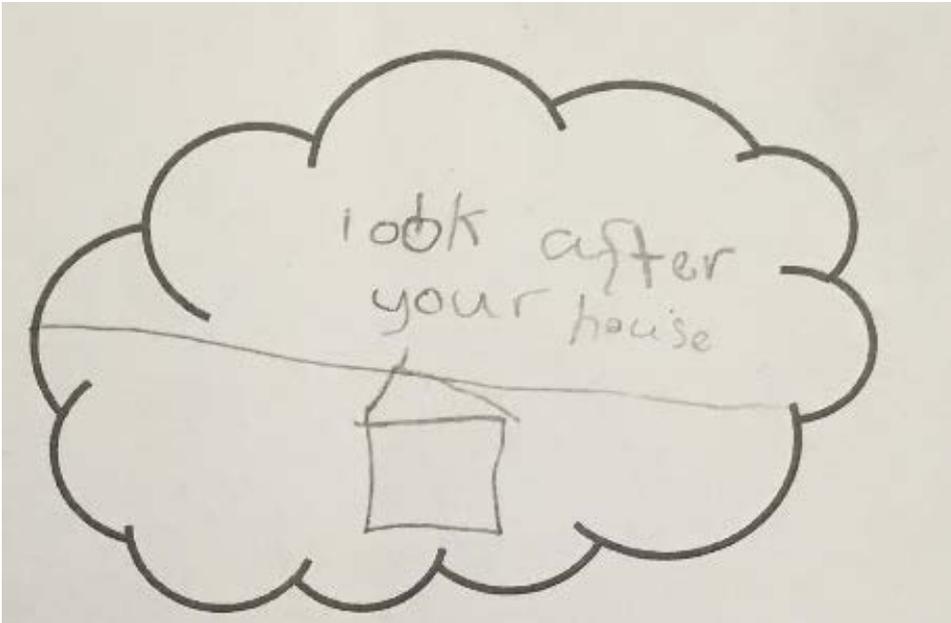


Figure 6: Chloe's suggestion for improving the area.

For all mothers interviewed in this study, care work and other domestic duties were a central part of their daily lives (see Chapter Four, Section 4.7). This could be contested, as Kathryn demonstrated, but it appeared difficult to move away from the discourse where domesticity and care fall within the woman's remit. When this discourse is disrupted, and men do offer their 'help', this is constructed as unusual and a novelty, as Lisa described:

He's the only dad that goes on school trips, cos he's, he cut his finger last, it was about October, November so he's been off, waiting for his, waiting for the op so he's been able to go all their school trips [LF: go on the trips] which is really nice though ain't it? And like, schools like having a man to go [LF: yeah, yeah] it's, it's different for the kids.

### 7.3.2. *The capacity to care across generations*

Obligation and continuation across generations were constructed in narratives of care for family members. This intergenerational transmission passes down the capacity to care and its associated responsibilities, so that the female caring role continues over time (Pilcher 1994; Walkerdine et al 2001; Hollway 2006). Often, this requires helping your children by caring for your grandchildren while they work, an important facet in Barker's (1972) Welsh study into 'keeping close'. Tracy (50s) is an example of how the capacity to care is required when caring for younger generations. She 'gave up' work in order to become a full-time foster carer, although it could be argued that being a foster carer is an extremely difficult if not rewarding vocation. Alongside her

care duties for the children she fosters, Tracy was also responsible for caring for her daughter's children. As Tracy's husband Michael (50s) explained:

Well it's good (having Lucy and son-in-law living in the same house) because, um, Tracy's able to do childcare for Lucy so, amongst all the other things you do.

Not only did Tracy care for their foster children full-time whilst Michael worked, she was also expected to look after the grandchildren while her daughter and son-in-law were working. Although Tracy did not suggest that she was unhappy with such an arrangement, this caring and domestic work does not appear to be recognised as a form of labour, as she has 'given up' traditional employment to take on an assumed caring role (Gardiner 1976). Having multiple generations living either in the same house or very close by was common amongst the families, in an attempt to 'keep close' and maintain the belonging to home (Barker 1972). When I spoke to Lisa's family, Lisa (30s) was keen to move to a house further into Hiraeth, preferably with a 'granny annex' for her elderly mother to join them too, as she lived a few doors down from Lisa. As her mother Anne assisted with the day to day domestic tasks, it was important for Lisa to look for houses large enough to accommodate her mother. When discussing a potential move Anne joked, "I said oh, at the end of the day you just want a built-in babysitter".

Therefore, Anne recognised that despite being retired, she still had a role to play in the caring responsibilities of her family. This was common amongst older women who often talked about their caring responsibilities for family members whilst being in their seventies. This care work was not always for younger children in the family. When I met Diane (70s), she recalled giving up her part-time job to care for her mother who lived until she was over one hundred years old:

I used to bath her [LF: mmm], wash her, um, get her up in the mornings, put her to bed in night, and I'd be up there any hour, my pillows are not, this is not right, that's not right, so I'd already had, she um, we went away for two days, we went round to my brother in [nearby road], missed the last step and fell, she broke her wrist [LF: oh gosh], she was black and blue from head to toe, we were only away two hours down our daughter's caravan so we had to go back home and they said then that, I would need, help, and that was all sorted, and then in the end I asked for it in the night because she would play me up something, I'd say, she'd, say to her, you going to bed mum now? No, she'd be up til midnight.

Displaying a strong ethic of care and a moral obligation to look after her mother through her narrative, Diane constructed her capacity to care in what she described as very challenging circumstances due to her own physical health and her mother's stubbornness (Hollway 2006; May 2008). Caring for older relatives was an unwritten, taken-for-granted assumption for Diane, a responsibility which she valued and created value for her sense of self through her retelling of events. It was hard for Diane to seek help in caring for her mother as she did not want to subvert the dominant caring discourse by appearing to not meet her caring responsibilities adequately (Skeggs 1997; Hollway 2006). Caring for others, whether older or younger relatives, was therefore common for older women in this study, and was highly influential on their sense of

value and self through their relationships to others. It also constructed a strong and supportive kinship network within the community, based on motherly and grandmotherly support (Barker 1972; Walkerdine 2010). This care work obligation was anticipated by younger women, such as Kathryn (40s), who commented, “you feel a kind of duty to pass it on” after receiving childcare help from her mother and mother-in-law. Regardless of age, caring was something that all women were expected to ‘do’, drawing upon both the heteronormative ‘dominant coupledom’ and ‘born and bred’ narratives within this traditionally working-class community (Taylor 2010).

### 7.3.3. *The managed heart: Gendered labour market trajectories*

Despite the decline in typically working-class industrial jobs, there was still an importance placed on maintaining the traditional gender roles of the community, and a lot of the work that residents were employed in was highly gendered (Walkerdine et al 2001; Warren 2003; Lawler 2005; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Mannay 2016; Ward 2016). As the decline in available ‘male’ work in heavy industry is often associated with narratives of lack or decline of the working-classes (Warren 2003; Lawler 2005), it was important for both men and women in Hiraeth to be employed in what was deemed as suitable employment. For the men in this study, their work encompassed what could typically be seen as skilled, masculine work such as being in the armed forces, carpentry, and engineering. Three of the men in this study were currently or had previously been carpenters. The work the women were employed in, by contrast, had a more caring-focus as it included nursing, school lunchtime assistant, childminding and foster carer, teaching assistant and community work (see Appendix C). This indicates that although Hiraeth itself was not an industrial suburb, there were still implicit expectations of the types of work that men and women should engage in (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Ward 2016).

Hochschild (1983) in *The Managed Heart* introduced the notion of emotional labour, a form of labour that is commodified for the employer’s benefit as workers, often women, are told to suppress their feelings and put on an act in their work. A certain level of acting is required to come across as genuine and for the work in question to appear as requiring little effort. Hochschild’s work was with flight attendants, but this idea of emotional labour was drawn upon in the narratives of two nurses, Kathryn, a nurse on an oncology ward, and Lesley, who was previously a psychiatric nurse. Kathryn’s account describes the emotional labour involved in dealing with difficult patients at work:

I dunno, it’s just natural to us [LF: yeah] it is, it’s like being an actor cos you, you’ll be in handover and you can feel like, uh, I can’t do it today [LF: but once you’re there] then you go out and it’s shoulders back, smile on and, yeah, we can do anything, anything [LF: mm] but it is, it’s, it’s a game face you put on [LF: mm] because often you are really not feeling and, some people are really unpleasant and unreasonable [LF: mm] and, and we’re not allowed to say what we would say in real life, you know, if somebody came up to you in the pub and talked to you like that, you’d \*whispers\* [LF: mm] but no we’re polite and we call people Sir [LF: \*laughs\*] \*laughs\*.

Kathryn recognised that this difficult emotional labour is part of all nurses' work when she claims that it is "natural to *us*", as a collective. Part of the act involves putting on your "game face" and suppressing whatever mood you bring to the shift, so that you can do your work effectively. Kathryn explained the strain that occurs when, as Hochschild (1983) describes, the difference between feeling and feigning is difficult to maintain. Hochschild (1983) highlighted that this form of emotional labour and the tension it causes is rarely recognised by employers. As Lesley also expressed, "yeah, it was hard work [LF: yeah] um, it was hard work, and it's, it's very emotive work for people", demonstrating an additional form of labour that is typically performed by women. When women such as those in this study are employed in caring roles, it is often seen as an extension of their more 'emotional' and caring nature, therefore undermining the labour involved (Hochschild 1983; Skeggs 1997; Hollway 2006).

Although not an industrial part of Pencaer, some men were reminiscent of the steelworks that used to be a major employer of men in the city. Roger (70s) used to work at the steelworks, one of his jobs in his long career of engineering, and Carwyn (60s) recalled generations of his family working at the steelworks, getting daily lifts from Hiraeth into the city:

There was this sort of hardness, there was a gentle hardness you know, so there was a, an inner resilience I guess that's what I mean by hardness.

Drawing upon Edley's (2001) work, this extract shows the performativity and active (re)construction of masculinity through talk, as something which requires a "hardness" and "inner resilience". It could be argued that just as the capacity to care has been transmitted across generations of women in Hiraeth, this hegemonic masculinity has been transmitted across generations of men in the community (Hollway 2006; Walkerdine 2010; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011). Ascribing to traditional gender roles and maintaining these roles in a post-industrial society is difficult, but skilled manual work was undertaken by most men in this study. The armed forces were a source of masculine labour, as Phil (50s) served for almost thirty years in the army, whilst Lisa's son Adam (school leaving age) was aspiring to join the army. Previous research has suggested that there is a pressure on working-class boys and men to ascribe to traditional gender roles or face subordination and ridicule (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Ward 2016). When chatting to Lisa's youngest son Brendan (under 10) about his aspirations for the future, he told me he wanted to be a policeman. His annotations in Figure 7 can be linked with hegemonic masculinity:

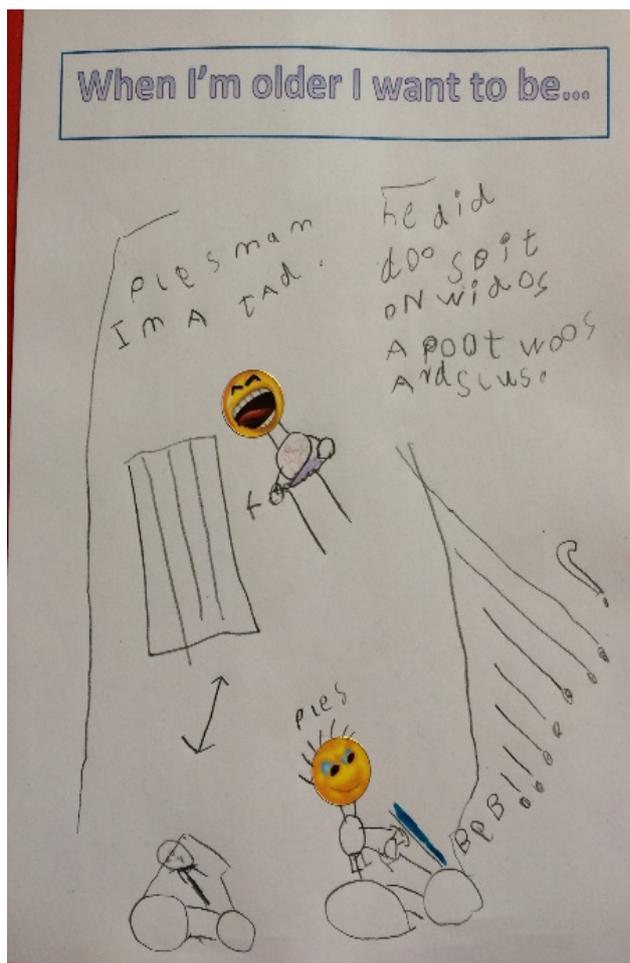


Figure 7: Brendan's aspiration drawing.

Lisa was interested to find out what exactly Brendan meant by writing "I'm a dad" on his drawing:

**Lisa:** Yeah. Why have you written I'm a dad on there then?

**LF:** Yeah

**Brendan:** Cos they know I'm not a girl

**Lisa:** Oh right \*laughs\*

**LF:** \*laughs\*

**Lisa:** Why didn't you write I'm a boy then?

**LF:** \*laughs\*

**Brendan:** Cos I'm a dad

**Lisa:** Oh, right ok. Do you wanna draw a picture of you with um, with the baddies, putting handcuffs on him or something?

**Brendan:** Ohh yeah!

Brendan could be seen to be performing masculinity through this extract and his drawing, as he explained that he's not only a boy, but a dad, and it is the features associated with being a 'dad' that are most suitable to being a policeman, such as being brave and strong (Edley 2001). He distances himself from the category of 'girl' through his affiliation of being not just a boy, but a 'dad'. The performance and influence of hegemonic masculinity was therefore present across

narratives from men of all ages - those who had retired from manual, skilled labour; those who were still working; and even those who were looking ahead to their future career aspirations.

This section highlighted the significance of gender on the narratives of participants, with a particular focus on the impact gender has on life trajectories and notions of selfhood. The gendered 'dominant coupledness' narrative underpinned many residents' narratives as they conformed to and performed traditionally ascribed working-class gender roles (Taylor 2010). Similarly, the 'born and bred' narrative drawn upon by residents also ascribes to heteronormative gender roles where women are positioned in a nurturing role within the home. These narratives see women as wives and mothers, two identities in tension with the identity of being a worker (Rees 1994; Hollway 2006). Often women's paid work was of a caring nature, arguably an extension of their unpaid caring and domestic work in the home. Through their capacity to care and providing essential kinship support, women actively constructed their sense of self through their caring relationships with others. Men's identities were more associated with their labour market role, particularly in gaining typically 'masculine' manual employment, although still reliant on the emotional and domestic support of their wives (Gardiner 1976; Betts 1994; Dempsey 2000; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011).

Instead of stigmatising the traditional gendering of Hiraeth as a working-class community, I have explored how these gendered roles have cultural significance and local value, and the importance of utilising a relational instead of individualistic model of selfhood. Although critical of the amount of both paid and unpaid labour that women engaged in, it played a vital role in the everyday functioning of working-class family life. Women in Hiraeth were constructed as 'caring subjects' which provided them with respectability and value through their relationships with others (Skeggs 1997). The support, care and kinship network that continues across generations is synonymous with working-class culture and is valuable, essential, and difficult to subvert despite reservations from some residents (McKenzie 2015; Walkerdine 2016). The next section will critique individualised notions of social mobility and selfhood further by exploring education and employment trajectories of Hiraeth residents.

#### *7.4. The three Es: Education, employment and expectation*

The final part of this chapter explores participants' narratives around education and employment before examining their hopes for the future and lessons from the past. As political rhetoric such as that espoused by Communities First focused on aspiration through an individualistic lens, this section will discuss how this discourse was responded to by Hiraeth residents. The potency of this dominant individualised and psychologised discourse works to place blame on those in disadvantaged communities by suggesting that they need to raise their aspirations and collate capitals that will make them more competitive within the neoliberal market (Walkerdine 2003;

Reay 2013; McInerney and Smyth 2014; Evans 2016; Lott 2016; Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018). Arguably, this approach of encouraging competitiveness and the need to work on your 'self' ignores the economic and social inequalities experienced by working-class communities.

I will reflect on residents' responses to this discourse by firstly discussing the education to work trajectory and the desire to 'get out' of education quickly. This entails looking at the discursive construction of the psychological impact of dominant improvement discourses, which led to some residents doubting their 'selves'. Then I will explore working-class narratives of university as a middle-class space. Finally, I draw upon residents' reflective accounts of their aspirations for their children's futures, and their life lessons and values in terms of fulfilment and success. The main argument underpinning this section is that ascribing to the individualised 'meritocratic' social mobility/improvement discourse was not available or desirable to residents. Fulfilment was associated with being able to maintain and look after the family unit and was detached from wealth, income and employment status (which incidentally are the main 'measures' of social mobility). Skeggs (2005; 2011) argues that different forms of subjectivity and selfhood are available to different groups, and in Hiraeth, a relational sociality which is 'other-orientated' generated value, in contrast to the dominant, individualised selfhood model propagated in political rhetoric.

#### *7.4.1. Getting out quickly - The education to work trajectory*

It was common to hear stories of difficult and turbulent experiences of the education system. For many, the focus was on getting out of education as soon as possible to gain some in-work, on-the-job training and start earning. I previously introduced Tanya who gave up her job when she started a family, mostly because she had not built up a 'career' that she was reluctant to leave. Tanya also discussed her education trajectory, in particular, her decision to drop out of art college and not go to university. For Tanya, the ability to buy her own home at a much younger age negated the fact that she did not 'invest' in her education:

I know, I know it's sickening for everyone else but, I don't regret not going to university [LF: no?] because, I think, so we bought our first house when we were twenty, [LF: yeah] so, and then, we doubled our money on our flat in, by the time we sold it and bought our house so, we did well.

Tanya rationalised her decision in relation to what Taylor (2010) terms the 'property ladder narrative', whereby fulfilment is constructed in relation to being able to provide stability for your family, as she claimed, "we did well". Investing in your family, being 'okay' and having 'enough' in order to avoid daily struggles were often more essential to residents' narratives than individualised projects of self-improvement through education (Walkerdine et al 2001; Casey 2008). Frequently when further education was attempted, such as Tanya with art college, or Alex

(30s) with her A-levels<sup>40</sup> and Lisa (30s) with her teacher training qualifications, quitting was part of the difficult trajectory. Out of these three women, only Lisa managed to complete her qualification:

...so, no I didn't particularly enjoy school, I was glad to get out of there, and then when I when I left and went to college I was, that took me years to actually finish the college course [LF: mm], that's because I just didn't, just didn't enjoy being at school [LF: yeah] then you have to do work and if I fell behind I used to start panicking and think oh I'll just quit and start again next year [LF: yeah], so eventually managed to finish my um, teaching assistant, I did one in Pencaer College, in College Road...um, and then the other one I had to go down to [town over ten miles away] which was a drag [LF: yeah], but finally, finally got through the two, two different courses, I think, I've been doing it for eleven, eleven years now I think.

Lisa constructed her educational trajectory as a struggle, as something she “didn't particularly enjoy”, which she was glad to get through. This was common across many narratives from residents, who were happy to get out of the education system promptly as it was something ‘not for them’, as they perceived themselves as ‘other’ (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Walkerdine et al 2001; Reay 2013). Like Lisa's story, Alex explained to me why she quit her A-levels for the second time:

Started about two months later I just quit again cos I was just like, I can't do this, this is not for me like.

This concern about feeling out of place and ill at ease in the education system may stem from a lack of confidence, as failing to improve your ‘self’ is constructed in the political discourse as an individual failing (Walkerdine et al 2001; Tyler 2015; Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). Often this self-improvement discourse is not even desirable as many working-class parents just want a basic level of education for their children, and for them to fit in and ‘survive’ school (Gillies 2005). Mannay (2015b) explains that when constructed as an active choice, separation and detachment from education may be used as a defence against exclusion from educational opportunities, shielding the self from the pain of internalised failure. There is not always the desire to ‘escape’ and become middle-class, and working-class values are not always considered inadequate and in need of escaping from (Loveday 2015; McKenzie 2015; Friedman 2016a; Chapman 2018; Mallman 2018; Reay 2018). Often it is difficult circumstances from which people want to escape, not their families and their values (Mallman 2018). When discussing her son Adam (school leaving age) and his aspirations, Lisa told a story very similar to her own:

Because he's not doing brilliant at school of course it's gunna help him because he wants to do um, public service, I think it's called, um and he needs, and it's only four Ds, so it should be easy, but he's that against school, he really, he sort of just pushing like

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<sup>40</sup> In the UK, Advanced Levels or A-Levels are qualifications undertaken after GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education), usually between the ages of sixteen and eighteen.

everything, like every time they try and help him, he pushes against them, he just, he just wants, he just wants out now.

When discussing her educational journey, Lisa stated that she “was glad to get out of there”, and when telling her son’s story, she claimed that “he just wants out now”. This consistent language use of ‘getting out’ constructs education as something from which escape is needed, and somewhere where neither Lisa nor her son can be comfortable or belong. When I visited Lisa for the second time, both Adam and her mother Anne were present, and it was the day before GCSE results day which Adam was adamant he would not attend. When I asked Adam if he would stay in Hiraeth when he leaves home, he said he would not and proceeded to say he would move to the most affluent part of Pencaer, which I have renamed Richtown:

**Lisa:** Where would you go then?

**Adam:** Richtown

**Anne:** Oh! \*laughs\*

**LF:** Oooh!

**Anne:** Richtown!

**Lisa:** Well you need more uh, more than Bs, oh, Cs and Ds on your sheet then mate  
\*laughs\*

This extract, despite its light-hearted, teasing nature, arguably is a performance of symbolic violence, where both Anne and Lisa actively recognise the dominant social mobility discourse but dismiss it as something that is not available to Adam because of his performance in school (Reay 2013). As Evans (2016) argues, spatial mobility requires both social and economic resource, both of which are distributed unequally and unfortunately, Adam is likely to be at a disadvantage. The positioning of Richtown as somewhere that is off-limits due to lack of educational and financial capital appears to be accepted by both Anne and Lisa, whose ridiculing works to construct a distance between themselves and Richtown. Richtown is not for people like them, strengthening their connection to place and what they know. Adam’s troubled educational trajectory and suggested lack of confidence in his academic ability (demonstrated through his determination to not pick up his GCSE results) is another example of how this forward-propelling, capital accumulating subject is not an option for everybody (Skeggs 2011).

Adam was toying between starting a public services course at college or taking a job in a supermarket, although his wider aspirations were to either become a firefighter or join the army. These are laudable aspirations despite Adam’s difficult educational journey and display little desire to become ‘middle-class’, even though he recognised Richtown as more desirable. These aspirations also fit with the dominant heteronormative masculinity described in section 7.3, providing another source of local value. Because social mobility is such a difficult and wrenching process, especially through the UK’s middle-class education system, perhaps it is time to redefine success outside of the traditional educational improvement discourse (Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014;

Lott 2016; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). Attribution and recognition of value needs to be widened beyond individualistic, middle-class aspiration, as not everybody can be at the ‘top’ of the narrow ‘ladder’ (Reay 2013; Fishkin 2014; McKenzie 2015; Calder 2016; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018). As Reay (2018) argues, instead of rising out of class, we should rise with it. For this, as I argued in Chapter Six, investment in communities is essential.

#### 7.4.2. *From the outside looking in - Views on the middle-class university*

Similar to the troubled educational narratives explored above, there was often a distancing from university education as it was seen as something that was alien, expensive, and a privilege. Where there were stories of family members going into higher education, being grounded and avoiding pretentiousness were essential in order to maintain kinship and class relations (Lawler 1999; 2005; Friedman 2016a; Mallman 2018). The importance of authenticity and being true to yourself whilst reaching your potential underpinned many residents’ narratives (Skeggs 2005; Reay 2018). Diane and Jeremy (70s) discussed their niece’s success:

**Diane:** I don’t know, she works in the city

**Jeremy:** Canary wharf

**LF:** Canary wharf

**Jeremy:** Yeah she’s got an office in there [LF: oooh!], so she’s done quite well out of life as well

**Diane:** She has, but, there’s no air and graces on her, she comes down, she kicks her shoes up, off, sits up on the settee and um

**Jeremy:** With a glass of wine

**LF:** \*laughs\*

Important to both Diane and Jeremy was this notion of being grounded and not being above your station (Lawler 2005). As they described various family members who had been through university, their main source of pride came from the fact that these family members never lost touch with where they came from. As Diane said of her niece, “there’s no air and graces on her”, even though as Jeremy noted, “she has done quite well out of life”. The importance of recognising and knowing your class position is essential to avoid the accusation of pretention when returning home, which can be difficult to manage when you are a working-class person entering a middle-class sphere (Mannay 2015a; Bathmaker et al 2016). Alex (30s), who attended university as a mature student despite not having A-levels, reflected on her mixed experience:

**LF:** Oooh! So how was uni if you know, was it a load of like eighteen-year olds?

**Alex:** Yeah [LF: \*laughs\*] yeah [LF: was it horrible?], and I felt quite out of place like, I felt, cos it was obviously I hadn’t been in education since I was like, seventeen, and I was twenty-eight, and I, and I felt like, and I felt like it was quite posh as well, um, no, no, no like, no judgement on that but just different to my [LF: yeah] you know, different to how, what my life was like, and you know, it was, I did find it quite difficult to fit in, especially being a mature student and like class-wise as well, I felt I wasn’t [LF: mm] I felt it was like, full of middle-class people, and I’m not, like, I didn’t feel like I was that so you know,

I, I, I found I didn't really make any friends in uni, I'm not in touch with anyone from uni I didn't really [LF: yeah] click with anyone, didn't really, I just kind of, did it and then [LF: yeah] and I was working as well, you know, so I was working like twenty odd hours a week doing care work as well because like, you know, had to support myself and whatever so, it was um, yeah it was, like, it, when uni, what it did for me it was like, opened my mind, like, all different, like learning about all different like theories and like, understanding that there's like [LF: mm] different points of views on stuff and all that kind of stuff and like, I, I'm, it's one of the best things I ever did.

Alex distinguished in her account between the “quite posh” university she attended, and what her life “was like”, working to distance herself from the middle-class university as someone who does not belong on both class and age grounds. Added to this is the financial pressure Alex was under, as she, like many working-class university students, had to work part-time to support her studies (Bathmaker et al 2016). Although her time at university is described as a difficult transition that entailed periods of unease, ambiguity and uncertainty, Alex reflected on the experience as “one of the best things I ever did”. Similar to Garland's (1994) work with Welsh female mature students, Alex constructed her attendance at university as something which provided self-fulfilment and broadened her knowledge. Loveday (2015) warns against the assumption that working-class people who enter higher education should be seen as symbolically indebted to the university, the ‘creditor’, providing the appropriate capitals to become ‘middle-class’. Although Alex was grateful for the experience, she was resistant to the dominant discourse which sees higher education as a route to social mobility and moving away from working-class culture. For Alex, university education was about widening her approach to learning and her degree's intrinsic value, instead of the accumulation of capitals in what Skeggs (2005) terms ‘middle-class possessive individualism’. For some in Hiraeth, however, the idea of doing a degree for its intrinsic value without knowing it will lead to a well-paying career was too much of an economic gamble:

**Lisa:** Yeah, the farmhouse was still there and that was, huge, it was gorgeous [Rob: And then three or four houses in an L shape] it was like a big, yeah, and then all around this lovely big courtyard, and his sister had gone to uni but she did um, was it like dance and drama? And I thought, they were obviously so, so rich [LF: mm] like I mean, what are you gunna do with a dance and drama degree like? [LF: mm] unless you end up on Eastenders by luck or something [LF: yeah] well I thought it must be nice to just be able to uh

**Anne:** *EastEnders*, that's, that's really classy \*laughs\*

**Lisa:** I feel like, really, like, realistically, your chances of actually [Anne: yeah, yeah] ending up being [LF: yeah] you know, an actor and making your living off, off a drama degree [Anne: yeah] is such a big, it's not much chance is it? Maybe teaching and things like that but [LF: yeah] it must be nice to be able to just do something you love for four years and then not have to worry about getting a job \*laughs\*

Lisa described a family she had visited who lived in a large farmhouse. By extemporising her description of the large estate, Lisa constructed herself as distant from them as they are “obviously

so, so rich”. This explained how they had the luxury and resources to be able to study something at university and not be concerned about employability at the end. Her account appeared to come from a position of constraint when she said, “it must be nice to be able to just do something you love for four years” regardless of the career prospects. This implied that Lisa has not and would not be able to take such a financial risk, demonstrating how social class is experienced through exclusion (Skeggs 1997; Mannay 2015b). What is interesting is how working-class resistance is present in this narrative, which Skeggs (1997; 2004) argues is a method that working-class women use to oppose their regulation and judgement by the middle-classes through overturning this judgement. As a family who have no direct experience of higher education, this resistance is essential to protect the value of their own life trajectories. Lisa’s judgement on the degree choice Dance and Drama is one example of such resistance, whilst her mother’s disdain for *EastEnders*<sup>41</sup> through mockingly describing it as “really classy” is another method of resisting and distancing herself from, and associating the middle-classes with, what she sees as ‘low-brow’ culture through humour (Skeggs 2005; 2011).

Both of these are examples of defending against misrecognition and devaluation by using humour and judgement to question the choices and presumptuous pretensions of the middle-classes. However, this comical critique cannot avoid the fact that it is easier for middle-class graduates to gain employment, particularly in the creative sector, through their pre-existing legitimate social and cultural capitals, precluding those from working-class backgrounds from accessing such positions (Friedman et al 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016).

Experiences and views of university were therefore complex, difficult to negotiate, and troubled across some residents’ narratives. These accounts suggest a certain distancing from university education, from those who have experience of it such as Alex, to those who felt excluded from it such as Lisa and Anne. The need to stay authentic and grounded was also emphasised explicitly by Diane and Jeremy, and implicitly through Alex’s narrative. The dominant social mobility discourse of escaping your class through university education was therefore not readily accepted or accessible to residents.

#### 7.4.3. *Temporal reflections -Hopes for the future, lessons from the past*

This section explores the reflections of participants in relation to both their children’s futures and their lessons learnt from the past. It highlights how fulfilment, success and ontological security are characterised through relationships with others and maintaining respectability, rather than employment or income. When I asked Tanya what her hopes were for her three sons’ futures, the focus was on settling down and being a helping hand in the community:

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<sup>41</sup> *EastEnders* is a popular soap opera based in a working-class community in the East-end of London.

I just want them to grow up and be happy [LF: yeah] innit you know, meet someone nice, get married [LF: yeah] manage to buy a house \*laughs\* [LF: yeah don't leave it late like I have] don't ask me for the money \*laughs\* um, just be nice people isn't it? [LF: yeah, yeah] if they can carrying on with the scouting or something like that [LF: yeah, that's got a lot] yeah they've probably seen us [LF: yeah] as I say, helping with the church, helping with the scouts [LF: yeah] helping with anything else that anyone asks you know [LF: yeah] so you know, yeah, I, I've always said that if you don't want to go to university that's fine [LF: yeah], cos obviously we didn't and we've done alright [LF: mm] but we'll support you.

Two narratives are drawn upon here, the dominant coupledom narrative and the property ladder narrative, as Tanya described her hopes for her sons to “meet someone nice, get married, manage to buy a house” (Taylor 2010). There is a strong emphasis on ‘helping’ others, again constructing a relational sociality where value is created through your ties to others (Skeggs 2005). Tanya does not place importance on going to university as she points out that both her and her husband have done well despite not attending university, before concluding offering her ongoing parental support. Kinship, support, and helping others were therefore constructed by Tanya as her main aspirations for her children.

After hearing about Alex's difficult experiences in education, I was interested to know what her aspirations for her young daughter would be, particularly as Alex found both school and university difficult to adjust to:

**LF:** Do you want her to do the, be more applied at school than you were with your A-levels? \*laughs\*

**Alex:** Not really, it's not important to me [LF: yeah] like, what's important to me is that she learns like she, I want her to be, I want her to be able to think critically, and to wanna learn, like want to learn about stuff [LF: yeah], so if she doesn't engage with school that's not, I wouldn't care as long as she was engaging with some kind of learning activity [LF: yeah], um, what I would be worried about is if she wasn't engaged in school but wasn't engaged in any other type of learning activity as well [LF: mmm, yeah, yeah] so that would be my only worry, but I, I don't care if she doesn't get GCSEs or, I mean I, like, I will encourage her to do that [LF: mhm] with um, and support her to do that I won't be like you don't need them or anything like that [LF: \*laughs\*] cos I realise that like the more pieces of qualification papers you've got, the more doors open for you [LF: yeah] like, like I know she's gotta have English and Maths GCSE at a basic level but it's not, academic achievement is not, the highest on my list [LF: yeah, yeah] of the things that I want for her, but at the same time I do understand that she does live in this society where it, a lot of importance is placed on that [LF: mm, yeah]

Alex constructed academic achievement for her daughter as a low priority, “not the highest on my list”, while equally recognising that “the more pieces of qualification papers you've got”, the more opportunities will be “available”. Alex's account could be read as a rejection of the dominant social mobility discourse, which focuses on investing in education as the key to success, trying instead to encourage the more intrinsic value of education (Loveday 2015; Bathmaker et al 2016). However, Alex recognised the societal importance placed on this individualised, social mobility

discourse. This suggests that this discourse is pervasive, even when people are actively trying to reject it. For some, such as Lisa whose narrative I explored earlier, this discourse is not even accessible. For others, like Tanya, the discourse just simply is not desirable. All parents wanted the best for their children and for their children to be happy, and for most, this did not necessarily require high academic performance or university education (Gillies 2005; Chapman 2018). As Pearce (2011, p.8) contends:

People aspire to more than just the chance to get their child off to university and up the social ladder: they are interested in their standard of living, quality of life and the strength of their social bonds.

When reflecting on their lives, many residents drew on classed and gendered discourses of 'fulfilment' (Casey 2008). Often working-class 'success' and 'fulfilment' is focused around being ontologically secure, having enough, and being 'okay' both materially and emotionally (Walkerdine et al 2001; Casey 2008). As Chapman (2018) notes, many people are happy to remain in their class of origin providing their fundamental aspirations are met, and for many, particularly women, these aspirations were to provide a stable home for the family with food on the table and clothes on their backs. As with the working-class women in Casey's (2008) research, fulfilment was often the "mundane desire to do working-class and woman more effectively", and to ensure everyday struggles over money were eased. There was pride in the fact that fulfilment was decoupled from wealth and occupation. This was demonstrated through Diane's (70s) reflections on her part-time job as a lunchtime supervisor/dinner lady in a local school:

I must admit, it was only an hour and a quarter [LF: yeah] a day, but it was, one of the most happiest six years [LF: really? \*laughs\*] we had a ball up there!

Often participants, in an unprompted manner, provided some conclusions to their narratives through reflecting and ascertaining their overall experience of living in Hiraeth. Mary (80s) and her son Carwyn reflected upon their lives and their fulfilment:

**Mary:** ...we had a very happy life there [LF: mm] you know and um

**Carwyn:** Yeah it's been independent [Mary: yeah] of money hasn't it? Happiness [M: yeah] yeah

**Mary:** It is yeah

This sentiment of being happy regardless of how much money you have featured in several participants' narratives. Reay (2013) argues that the crude desire for money and power only exist among the few, and the desire for money and power certainly was not evident amongst participants. Reay (2013) suggests that we should value and strengthen working-class communities rather than push for social mobility 'out' of your class. It is clear from these reflections that there is pride in being working-class and also a sense of mundanity in what constitutes a fulfilled, valuable life (Casey 2008). Despite the rhetoric of meritocracy and social mobility being focused on moving 'upwards' in relation to occupation, class and income, this

does not equate to being happier and more fulfilled (Littler 2018). For many participants, as long as you are able to provide a secure home for your family and the necessities such as food and clothes, this was all that was needed for fulfilment<sup>42</sup>. This value appeared to be shared across generations, for example, in the narratives of Rosemary (70s) and her daughter Kathryn (40s), who were interviewed separately on different days in different locations:

**Rosemary:** Yes, but at the same time don't make money the only thing, be happy, be happy

**LF:** Yeah exactly, that's the thing, I'm not really in it for that so

**Rosemary:** No, I mean, it's nice to be able to buy clothes that you want and eat properly and all that kind of thing [LF: yeah] but um, big bank accounts are, are, don't make you happy

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**Kathryn:** No, none of us need to be rich, you just need to be able to keep a roof over your head

**LF:** Yeah, and just, have some enjoyment

**Kathryn:** And people do get carried away with wanting to be rich, I've always been the same, as long as I earn enough, to feed myself and clothe my kids that was [LF: mm] just as well really, in nursing \*laughs\* you're never gonna be rich! [LF: no]

This 'fulfilment' discourse was constructed in contrast to the individualised social mobility and self-improvement discourse. There was much more of a focus on relationality, providing for others, and fundamentally a sense of ontological security, something which is often unachievable in an ever-changing 'entrepreneur of the self' model (Walkerline 2003; Skeggs 2011). Income and occupation (and the gaining of appropriate capitals which go along with this) were therefore not the driver of fulfilment or success for some residents within the working-class community of Hiraeth.

This section explored residents' narratives of education, employment and life reflections to demonstrate their response to individualistic and competitive social mobility/self-improvement discourses (such as those espoused by Communities First). Some of the residents constructed themselves as 'other', distancing themselves from the education system, unable or unwilling to 'invest' in the dominant social mobility discourse as it is not for 'people like them'. Higher education was presented as an unaffordable middle-class luxury, and the importance of remaining true to your class roots was emphasised. Temporal reflections from the past and for the future highlighted a common theme underpinning narratives, what I called a working-class discourse of fulfilment. This entailed being able to look after your family and being secure in

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<sup>42</sup> I am aware that for many working-class families, this aspiration is a very difficult struggle, especially in unregulated private renting markets and the current crisis in the availability of social housing (see Minton 2017 for more). Please see Chapter Four, section 4.4 for a justification as to why the majority of my participants were homeowners but who I would still consider being working-class.

your home, without an emphasis on wealth, income, and employment status. I argued that the dominant social mobility discourse was not accessible and/or was rejected by participants, and that a relational sociality centred on kinship ties and support was dominant. Next, I will draw together the sections of this chapter to discuss more broadly what these findings mean in relation to understandings of social mobility.

### *7.5. Reflections on working-class value, fulfilment, and selfhood*

The underlying argument of this chapter has been for the need to reassess how value, aspiration and social mobility are constructed through dominant policy and lay discourses. As Reay (2013) argues, social mobility is a ‘mirage’ which is brought to life through such dominant discourses and rhetoric. For Reay (2018, p.146), “social mobility is one such optimistic fantasy that ensnares and works on both the individual psyche and collective consciousness”, and this is what I argued featured in the Communities First programme with its individualising employability-focused projects. I provided examples where both gender and class worked to exclude (sometimes voluntarily) participants from accessing the dominant social mobility and self-improvement narrative, suggesting that although a ‘widening access’ approach is important, essentially there needs to be a widening of ‘valuable’ aspirations and trajectories outside of the middle-class ideal (Fishkin 2014; Lott 2016; Littler 2018).

Skeggs (2011) notes that attempts to introduce individualism into working-class communities in the UK have been unsuccessful, and value gained through a ‘capital loaded fetish’ approach is therefore not desired by all working-class communities. It did not appear to be desired by the residents included in this chapter. Instead of the individual mobility of a few and encouraging the working-class to leave their values behind, Bradley (2018) and Reay (2018) argue for an alternative to social mobility whereby upward movement entails whole tiers of people, including a redistribution of wealth element, rising with class and not out of it.

Although I cannot draw such idealistic conclusions from a small-scale study, this chapter argued that ‘meritocratic’, individualised and competitive notions of selfhood promoted through dominant social mobility discourses were not what created local value and were often rejected by participants. Drawing on the work from both Bradley and Reay, I suggested that investment in communities such as Hiraeth instead of investment in individuals may be a method of shifting the rhetoric towards a more collective understanding of merit, and valuing people outside of material terms such as employment status, income and consumption (Lawler and Payne 2018; Littler 2018). This would be more compatible with the model of selfhood invested in by participants. Not everybody can be ‘middle-class’ nor want to be, and often it was the desire for family security and support that drove participants, which is why the chapter argued that a relational sociality and selfhood was what provided value in the local community (Skeggs 2005; 2011; Pearce 2011;

Chapman 2018; Reay 2018). The working-class discourse of fulfilment drawn upon in the final section is therefore fundamentally at odds with the individualising social mobility narrative.

The importance of family, kinship, and having ‘enough’ were central to residents’ narratives, often drawing upon more widely accessible resources such as the heteronormative ‘dominant coupledness’ narrative and the ‘property ladder’ narrative (Taylor 2010; Mallman 2018). Often these narratives took not only a classed but a gendered nature, whereby the roles of both men and women were largely influenced by the inheritance of narratives over time and generations. Women inherited their roles as ‘caring subjects’ whilst men inherited the centrality of hegemonic masculinity over time. The local value of these narratives is largely absent in dominant social mobility discourses, as they go beyond the individual to consider kinship relations and the importance of classed and gendered narratives across generations.

This chapter drew on the work of Communities First as a localised example of the Welsh Government’s policy approach to ‘improving’ disadvantaged communities, albeit largely through more individualistic projects encouraging individual social mobility. I highlighted how this approach was met with resistance from staff, who were frustrated with the way the programme was ran and its limited scope to improve communities. Projects of self-improvement can induce what Tyler (2013) terms ‘stigma governmentality’, whereby responsibility and blame for life trajectory and low-income are placed on those with the least resources, distracting from the social and economic structure of neoliberal society that is inherently unequal (Skeggs 1997; 2005; Walkerdine et al 2001; Tyler 2013; 2015; Littler 2018; Shildrick 2018). The chapter illustrated that value, fulfilment, and success exist beyond the limits of supposed meritocratic and neoliberal projects of self, calling for a recognition and value appreciation of working-class culture and narratives. Fulfilment and success are about more than the individual and their middle-class capitals, and for participants it was about having ontological security for your family and systems of kinship support. Although this may be read as a romanticisation of working-class life and culture, this chapter has demonstrated some of the tensions and difficulties inherent in this value system, particularly surrounding exclusion due to class and gender.

The next chapter will bring the thesis together, considering the key findings and situating this study within wider academic and policy discussions around social mobility. It evaluates the study, highlighting some of its limitations which could be addressed in future research. The chapter also discusses the political implications of this study and suggests a future direction for social mobility policy and research.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusions and Reflections – The Contribution of this Thesis to Social Mobility Studies

#### *8.1. Introduction*

Having identified how Hiraeth residents developed their own value practices through constructing narratives of fixity, anchorage and relationality, this final chapter draws out the main contributions of this research, situating it within wider academic and policy discussions about social mobility. The core of the argument presented throughout the thesis has been the critique of individualised notions of selfhood and self-improvement within a neoliberal ‘meritocracy’. To situate the study, the Welsh Government’s improvement intervention, Communities First, has featured throughout, demonstrating the regulatory nature of self-improvement for ‘underperforming’ populations. The thesis has illustrated how social class, place-attachment, and gender are interconnected within narratives of social (im)mobility, working to shape the horizon of participants’ trajectories, resulting in the construction and maintenance of alternative value practices. As the data analysis took a narrative-discursive approach, the findings from this study cannot be read as insights into the inner psychological workings of participants, but rather as intersubjective performances of identity work (Edley 2001; Burr 2003; Taylor 2006; 2010). Local discursive resources such as the born and bred narrative, and previous tellings of the same narrative, helped to construct consistency and continuity. My role as a researcher was also important in the construction of participants’ narratives, and this chapter provides a reflexive space to describe the experience of undertaking research on a topic which holds personal significance.

This chapter aims to bring together the previous chapters and reflect upon the study’s contribution to social mobility studies by reiterating and situating the research findings. It begins with a reassertion of the importance of studying social mobility in today’s increasingly divided society. The chapter then situates the study and provides an overview of the methodological approach taken, restating the central research questions and establishing how each question has been addressed. As transparency is pivotal to rigorous research, there is a reflection on some of the study’s limitations, including issues of scope and participant ‘voice’, on which future research could build and address. I discuss some of the political implications of the study, making suggestions for the direction and scope of future social mobility policy and research. Although cautious of overstating and overstressing the findings from a small-scale, qualitative study, I argue that this research does raise serious questions about how to conceptualise social mobility, and how social justice is commonly understood. Therefore, this chapter aims to illustrate the purpose and significance of the study undertaken and reiterate why it is important to be critical of the dominant social mobility discourse.

## 8.2. *The social mobility chimera*

At the collective level, social mobility is no solution to either educational inequalities or wider social and economic injustices. But at the individual level it is also an inadequate solution, particularly for those of us whose social mobility was driven by a desire ‘to put things right’ and ‘make things better’ for the communities we came from and the people we left behind.

Reay (2013, p.674)

Although a frequent social policy buzzword over the last twenty years, social mobility and how to address issues of social inequality and justice are increasingly pertinent in today’s fractured and uncertain society. The political disarray caused by the divisive Brexit vote in the UK has led to many class-based discussions about the opportunities and frustrations of working-class communities. It is surely no coincidence that such a political crisis in the UK has occurred at a time where inequality between the top and the bottom has been continually widening (Raworth 2017). As the hollow echoes of recent governments such as ‘Aspiration Nation’ and ‘The Great Meritocracy’ focused on the social mobility of *individuals*, issues of wider structural inequalities were ignored and continued to bubble under the surface. Arguably, the political fallout from the Brexit referendum has brought these concerns to the fore, making discussions about *collective* social mobility evermore timely and apposite.

The aim of this research has been to question the social mobility ‘chimera’. The established political narrative convincingly suggests that social mobility in the UK is falling, and that it is up to individuals to make the most of the opportunities available to them in order to self-improve and become mobile. Within a neoliberal meritocracy, widening access to educational opportunities is seen as a solution to problems of mobility. Chapter Two was dedicated to the critical evaluation of UK social mobility policy and how it is framed as a problem for (working-class) individuals to overcome. Although difficult to critique the dominant social mobility narrative because of its congruence with lay understandings of social justice, for example, equal opportunities for all, and doing better than your parents, this study has dismantled the concept of social mobility, widening it beyond the scope of narrow, individual improvement. As Reay (2013) contends, social mobility in its current form is not an adequate solution to prevailing inequalities. What this thesis has argued is for a reconceptualisation of social mobility, as a collective as opposed to an individual endeavour, with a plurality of value that recognises trajectories outside of the current dominant symbolic. Consequently, an important part of this study has been the role of social class and the maligned identity of the working-class.

Tropes of a failing, feckless working-class have long been established both in political rhetoric and in popular culture (Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2015; Scambler 2018; Shildrick 2018). Moral panics around worklessness have worked to stigmatise people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, especially welfare claimants (Horton 2013; Carson 2015; Jenson and Tyler 2015;

McKenzie 2015). This stigmatisation has a productive role in the continual perpetuation of the dominant social mobility narrative, encouraging intervention to improve the behaviour and choices of ‘underperforming’ populations. This thesis has questioned the marginalisation of working-class culture and demonstrated how the individualising social mobility narrative was subverted by participants. The silencing of working-class voices and the misrecognition of value within working-class communities inhibit any genuine attempts to address social inequality and encourage collective social mobility. This study gave some people living in one small working-class community the opportunity to share their narratives and reconstruct the notion of social mobility, and what it means to be ‘successful’. The shielding of precarity through the construction of entrenched, collective belonging helped to develop a sense of ontological security in uncertain times. In the current instable political climate of increasing precarity where working-class voices and values are ignored, this study is a timely call to reconceptualise social mobility so that it incorporates more socially just aims, improving the lives not only of a few individuals, but of entire communities. The next section shows how this study is situated within the field of mobility studies and reiterates the methodological approach taken and the research questions.

### *8.3. Researching social mobility qualitatively*

As social mobility studies have been heavily dominated by quantitative approaches with a focus on the measurement of social mobility, qualitative approaches are relatively new to the field (Lawler and Payne 2018). Qualitative approaches to social mobility allow for the exploration of subjective experiences of mobility, often drawing upon methodological approaches such as ethnography, narrative approaches and in-depth interviews (Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999; Bathmaker et al 2016; Friedman 2016a; Mallman 2018). These studies informed the methodological decisions made in this research. Instead of looking at measures of mobility including occupational level or income, qualitative approaches document the stories and meanings attached to otherwise hollow explorations of social class and mobility. As Chapter Three highlighted, Bourdieu is frequently drawn upon within these qualitative approaches.

Where this study departs from previous research is not only in its move away from the reliance on Bourdieusian theory, but also in its conceptualisation and questioning of social mobility. Instead of focusing on the painful and difficult experience of individual social mobility as experienced by members of the working-class, this study focused on collective narratives; and how ‘success’ and fulfilment had been defined outside of the dominant social mobility discourse. As I critiqued the political discourse for its individualising nature, by ignoring relationships to people and places, qualitative social mobility research often does not forcefully question individualistic and compartmentalised notions of social mobility. Although experiences of individual mobility are important to understand, arguably these should be used to critique the dominant social mobility discourse. Instead of attempting to discover ways to help the socially

mobile working-class 'fit' into this narrow narrative, the approach taken to this research aims to redefine the narrative, allowing for a multitude of value practices and trajectories to be recognised (Fishkin 2014). This demonstrates how this study aims to contribute and build upon previous qualitative approaches to understanding social mobility. It is now important to revisit the methodological approach taken and how this was most suited to answer the research questions.

### 8.3.1. *Ethnographic insights into social mobility*

The questions this study was seeking to answer invariably led to its ethnographic approach. Situated in one working-class urban suburb in south Wales, a variety of methods were used to gain the level of richness required, drawing upon previous ethnographic approaches (Skeggs 1997; Williamson 2004; Evans 2006; McKenzie 2015; Ward 2016). Aimed at widening the notion of social mobility, the study focused on answering the question *How do participants accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?* with subsequent questions focused on the interrelated impact of social class, place, and gender upon the social mobility narratives of residents. Acquiring a holistic and rich understanding of Hiraeth required a considerable amount of time to be spent in the community, and over a fourteen-month fieldwork period I attended a wide variety of community events and groups. Although not explicitly about social mobility, the ethnographies of Skeggs (1997) and McKenzie (2015) inspired the approach taken as I began to gain an understanding of the everyday realities of living in Hiraeth.

As an outsider to the community, one of the biggest benefits of spending such an extended period of time in Hiraeth was being able to understand the context within which residents' narratives were constructed. This inevitably impacted not only how the data were read, but the construction of narratives themselves, as I contributed to and appreciated more fully participants' narratives. The contextual information gained from fieldwork was essential in attending to the research questions as it demonstrated how social, spatial and historical contexts were continually constructed across a variety of spaces within the community. It also added an undefinable level of richness to the data analysis, although I am cautious to note that a multitude of data sources do not add 'truth' to the analysis which is ultimately based upon researcher interpretation and reading of the data (Burr 2003). Fieldwork, however, was not always easy, and Chapter Four closely explored some of the reflexive insights from the fieldwork journey.

Working ethnographically allowed freedom and adaptability to respond to the opportunities that arose in the field. Often this led to new approaches being used that were not planned, for example, the walking interview with Father Paul. This was frequently how visual methods were employed as participants drew upon personal artefacts when telling their narratives such as family photographs and local history books, in an unprompted manner. Large maps of the community further aided some participant interviews, an idea that I was introduced to by participant Phil.

This open approach was best suited to the research questions as it gave participants freedom and space in which to comfortably construct their narratives. As this study is focused on *widening* narrow conceptions of social mobility, a constricted methodological approach would not have been conducive to the production of such rich and varying narratives. As such, a wide variety of data were produced providing strong empirical support for the arguments made in this thesis.

### 8.3.2. *The role of class, place and gender in reconceptualising social mobility*

It makes sense to consider the findings collectively as narratives were overlapping and complex. Although presented in separate chapters, it was difficult to separate place-based and gendered identities, particularly as they were both heavily intertwined with class. Participants did not explicitly reject the dominant social mobility narrative; however, class, place and gender were central to their narratives and shaped their trajectories. Frequently, alternative narratives were provided which fell outside of the narrow, dominant social mobility narrative. Chapters Five and Six explored in close detail how attachment to place was constructed by participants and some of the ‘trouble’ within these narratives. The attention given to place across these two chapters reflects the importance given to place-attachment within the narratives. A part of the dominant social mobility discourse actively encourages *geographical* mobility in order to become socially mobile, however, participants’ narratives suggested a resistance to this through their deep-rooted place-attachment. The dominant discourse encourages individuals to act continually to self-improve, arguably constructing psychological strain as individuals are expected to be flexible and adaptable in neoliberal society (Walkerdine et al 2001; Walkerdine 2003; Skeggs 2011). In contrast to this individualising approach, which encourages insecurity and instability, participants drew upon a model of relational selfhood, constructing ontological security through their ties to place, kinship and community.

A key component of this strong anchorage to place was the value attached to generational continuity. The ‘born and bred’ narrative was a key discursive resource drawn upon by participants, providing continuity to their narratives and demonstrating how their narratives are socially, spatially and historically located. As narratives of social *fixity* as opposed to *mobility* were constructed, Chapters Five and Six illustrated the importance of place-making and belonging as a continual, relational and dynamic discursive process. Anchorage to the community through kinship ties and relationships with others was highly valued as the ‘born and bred’ narrative was arguably constructed as a local alternative to the dominant social mobility narrative. Place-attachment did not occur unhampered however, as Chapter Six demonstrated. Economic disparities, cuts to public funding, and locally constructed boundaries troubled some participants’ place-attachment, highlighting the underinvestment within this working-class community. What Chapters Five and Six illustrated, through a wide array of empirical evidence, were the complexities of Hiraeth. Often working-class communities are considered homogenous and as

lacking value; but these chapters displayed the everyday, complex discursive processes of meaning-making that occur, as class and place intersect, often resisting a discourse of lack that is associated with working-class communities.

All the chapters referred to the Welsh Government's area-based anti-poverty initiative Communities First. As a devolved nation, Wales does not have its own specific policy on social mobility, however the SMCPC (2013b) identified the Welsh Government's poverty-focused approach through Communities First as a policy aimed at improving social mobility. This programme, I argued, was a localised example of social policy within Wales that had moved towards an interventionist approach aimed at the improvement of 'underperforming' populations. Originally a collaborative, innovative, and representative place-based programme, I have argued that in its final years, this focus was lost. Rather than investment in communities as decided by residents, the programme began targeting the 'risky' behaviour of individuals (Dicks 2014). This was contested and resisted by many Communities First staff in Hiraeth who were uncomfortable with the regulatory and prescriptive approach of the programme.

Throughout, I contended that the Communities First rhetoric perpetuated the dominant social mobility narrative, further stigmatising those who have been unable to 'self-improve'. The complexities and nuances of the community could not be attended to through this individualistic approach. Despite the social mobility discourse encouraging the responsible and choice-making individual, programmes such as Communities First can be seen to contradict this notion, as its programmes targeted those deemed to have made the 'wrong' choices, adding to the moral discourse of lack (Tyler 2013). Chapter Seven explored in detail the scope of the employability and education projects that ran in Hiraeth, alongside some of the barriers to engagement recognised by staff. Ignoring the structural problems that prohibit the 'choices' many residents could make, Communities First provided a local policy lens through which to view social mobility. It is important to reiterate that many staff were uncomfortable with the changes to the programme as it deterred their attention away from meaningful community development work, which is precisely what I argue is needed in communities such as Hiraeth.

As education and employment feature so heavily within discourses of social mobility, it was necessary to explore participants' educational and employment trajectories, particularly how social class and gender intertwine within them. As touched on previously, the 'born and bred' narrative is heteronormative and gendered, with women seen as being responsible for maintaining the family home and care work. This notion featured heavily within participants' narratives as women constructed a moral imperative to care, as caring provided a sense of moral responsibility (Skeggs 1997; Hollway 2006). As the home was constructed as a pivotal space when sustaining place-attachment; keeping close, care work and the upkeep of a good family home were often

central to maintaining an acceptable working-class femininity (Barker 1972; Skeggs 1997; Mannay 2016). Women of all ages recognised their domestic responsibilities and the important role it played in maintaining the family unit, whether or not they were ‘happy’ with such arrangements. The ‘dominant coupledom’ narrative was also highly valued in Hiraeth, as all participants (except one) were married. Domestic responsibility inevitably influenced the employment trajectories of the women in this study.

It appeared that gendered norms shaped the trajectories taken by both men and women in Hiraeth. Whilst some women left employment altogether to care for their family, others were in paid employment, often part-time, in caring work such as teaching or nursing. Men, on the other hand, were often employed in skilled, masculine labour. Women’s identities were constructed through their capacity to care and the provision of kinship support whilst men’s identities were more linked to their labour market positions, although still reliant upon the emotional and domestic support from their wives (Gardiner 1976; Betts 1994; Dempsey 2000; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011). Chapter Seven demonstrated the cultural significance and local value that gendered norms held in Hiraeth, arguing the importance of a relational as opposed to an individualistic model of self. Continuing a strong kinship network across generations is essential and valuable in the continuation of working-class culture, something that does not feature within the dominant social mobility discourse (McKenzie 2015). Everyday discursive processes helped to maintain and continue these taken-for-granted gendered norms, shaping the narratives constructed by participants.

Negotiating the dominant social mobility discourse often took different forms. Some participants, such as Lisa and Anne, distanced themselves and their family from education as it was seen as something for the reserve of those who are “so, so, rich”. For others, investment in education was permissible and supported, provided that you stay grounded and remember your roots and the importance of family. When parental aspirations were explored, the dominant social mobility discourse was either negotiated or replaced by another narrative which held more value in the local community. For instance, Alex proclaimed that academic achievement was not the highest on her list of things she wanted for her daughter, but equally, she recognised that society places importance on the number of qualifications gained. When Tanya was asked about her hopes for her sons’ futures, her narrative was much more localised and relational, arguably constructing value outside of the dominant ideal. Meeting someone nice, getting married, buying a house, and helping out in the local community all featured before any mention of university education. The narratives explored in Chapter Seven illustrated differing negotiations and rejections of the dominant social mobility discourse. Place-attachment, social class and gendered norms were all interwoven and informed the construction of participants’ narratives. Although a variety of

narratives were constructed, many participants shared similar values surrounding fulfilment and ‘success’.

For many participants there was recognition that fulfilment in life came separately from money and occupation. Although frequently recalling stories of times in their lives where they had struggled financially, a sense of fulfilment and value was not contingent upon earning power and job status. Strong communal and familial support were often deemed essential for fulfilment, emphasising the importance of relational selfhood in Hiraeth. For some participants, jobs that would commonly be described as ‘low-pay’ and ‘low-status’ brought significant joy to their narratives, for example, Diane’s reflections on being a school lunchtime assistant – “The most happiest six years”. A common assertion amongst participants was that as long as you had enough to provide a home and food for your family, that was all you needed. This reflected the stripped back and mundane construction of value within the community that was based on relationality, providing for others, and a sense of ontological security (Casey 2008; Walkerdine 2016). The value attached to a relational sociality, this thesis has argued, provides the basis for the reconceptualisation of social mobility. This study sought to attend to the following three research questions:

- How do participants accept, reject, or negotiate the dominant social mobility narrative?
- What role does classed place-making and attachment play in participants’ (im)mobility narratives?
- How do class and gender intersect within participants’ (im)mobility narratives?

What this section has aimed to demonstrate is that, in fact, it is difficult to answer each question discreetly as social class, place, and gender were all enmeshed in the construction of an alternative value system and narrative of ‘success’. As the pseudonym ‘Hiraeth’ means a longing, yearning, or nostalgia for something, the findings of this study suggest that this longing was for a sense of continuation. Anchorage to the community, home, and kinship ties were constructed as essential within Hiraeth, indicating the centrality of a notion of self in relation to others. This engendered the construction of certain classed, place-based and gendered identities, which were concurrent with previous research findings focused in working-class communities (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001; Evans 2006; Mannay 2015a; McKenzie 2015; Morgan 2015; Walkerdine 2016; Ward 2016). The findings appear to suggest that a notion of social mobility that is based on *individual* improvement does not appreciate the value of relationality in a community such as Hiraeth. Therefore, instead of encouraging individuals to rise out of their class to improve their ‘selves’, the findings presented here indicate that a *collective* understanding of social mobility would be more conducive to the meaningful improvement of people’s lives and living conditions (Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018).

### 8.3.3. *Giving voice? Limitations of representation*

There were many limitations of this study relating to representation in a myriad of ways. Although these have been addressed in Chapter Four, it is important to reiterate the limitations in this final chapter. One of the main concerns pertaining to representation is that the community studied has been anonymised, therefore reducing the visibility of the community and the voices of its residents. This was a difficult judgement to make, however, ethical and methodological factors led to this decision. Firstly, as Hiraeth is a small suburb, it meant that community workers would be open to identification by their job title. This was something that was essential to protect against as community workers shared their frank views on the work they did, and it would be unethical for these views to be identifiable and impact them in a professional capacity. Equally, some of the information shared in interviews with family members was highly sensitive and specific, so anonymisation protected against identification by other family members or other readers who may be familiar with the community. Anonymisation of both the community and the participants was crucial to uphold the ethical commitments outlined in the information and consent forms provided to participants (see Appendices D to I). The decision to anonymise was also influenced by the scope and purpose of the study, which was to develop social mobility as a theoretical concept. Naming the community would not have contributed to this aim.

A second concern relating to representation surrounds whose voices were heard and recognised throughout the study. As was discussed in Chapter Four, it would be easy to accuse this research of only including white middle-class families. All participants except one were homeowners, which many stratification scholars may suggest shows that the participants were middle-class. However, using such discrete indicators ignores the relational and dynamic aspects of social class that underpin this study (Lawler 2005; Tyler 2015). This research demonstrated the political nature of social class, something which discrete indicators such as housing do not consider. Furthermore, policies such as the 'Right to Buy' helped many working-class families to buy their homes. There was also an over-representation of participants over the age of seventy in the study, which could explain the higher incidence of home-ownership. Although the sample cannot be described as precarious in terms of their housing (except for one participant who was privately renting), their narratives exemplified how class impacted upon their lives in other ways. Future research could work to address this gap by ensuring that those who socially and privately rent are adequately represented.

The ethnic homogeneity of the sample is a further weakness of this study, although arguably reflecting the ethnic make-up of Hiraeth. It is recognised that other ethnic groups may construct differing narratives to those explored here, and so future research could address this gap. Many of the sample's limitations reflected the difficulties of recruiting participants as I argued in Chapter Four. If Communities First struggled to engage a large proportion of the community, a

lone researcher had little chance. From fieldwork observations, it became apparent that ethnic minority residents were underrepresented at community events. It was therefore difficult to recruit participants from wider ethnic, racial and cultural groups.

A final concern about representation is linked to the scope of the study. Adhering to a qualitative paradigm, this study was never aiming to be representative of the community of Hiraeth or of working-class communities more broadly, and so does not claim to be. There has to be caution when considering the implications of this research, as it is a small-scale, ethnographic approach situated within one community. What this study has aimed to do is to contribute theoretically to the field of social mobility studies, which can then be built upon in future research. This can help to inform future policy approaches to social mobility, which are explored in the following section.

Caution is also needed when interpreting the study's findings, as although it subscribed to a social constructionist approach emphasising narrative co-construction, the analysis is based upon researcher interpretation. There are a multitude of ways to read the data, and perhaps if participants had been consulted in the production of the analysis, their interpretations would have varied. Despite offering strong support for the ways I interpreted the data; other readings may be possible. Therefore, it is important to remember that there are always multiple 'truths' when using a social constructionist approach in research.

#### *8.4. Moving beyond the current social mobility discourse*

As each findings chapter provides its own discussion around how the findings of this study relate to notions of social mobility, this section will provide a brief overview of the implications of this study and what this could mean for the future of social mobility. What the thesis has aimed to achieve is a widening of the concept of social mobility, allowing for the recognition of other value practices and trajectories. Often those who are static instead of 'mobile' are seen as 'backwards', and attachment to place, home, and relationships with others are ignored, undermining the value present in working-class communities such as Hiraeth. Anchorage to home, the community, and to others is highly valued and is maintained across generations to ensure continuity. The dominant discourse's individualised emphasis on getting out and getting away from working-class communities disregards the relational nature of selfhood, which is deemed as valuable in some communities such as Hiraeth. The main recommendation of this thesis is to move the current discourse of social mobility away from the individual towards the collective. Initially this could begin with a softening of the language used within political literature covering social mobility, recognising other value practices. However, a fundamental shift is required in how the relationship between social mobility and social justice is understood.

It is a commonly held assertion that a neoliberal 'meritocracy' based around notions of 'equal opportunities' is a system that (re)produces and legitimises inequality (Boliver and Byrne 2013;

Bathmaker et al 2016; Calder 2016; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). This narrow conceptualisation of social mobility, defining individual success within the fields of education and employment, is often equated with social justice – the more individuals that can be socially mobile, the more socially just our society is. But as scholars have time and again highlighted, a handful of mobile individuals is not enough to make the UK a fairer society, suggesting the need for a collective element where people rise with their class instead of out of it (Pearce 2011; Payne 2012; Bradley 2018; Littler 2018; Reay 2018). Not only are certain values reified and positioned as morally acceptable, devaluing other value practices and trajectories, but ‘bottlenecks’ are caused as the majority of people aim for the same trajectory. Opportunity pluralism may be a theoretical solution to this problem, as argued in this thesis, where value is appropriated to a variety of differing paths (Fishkin 2014). Social mobility in its current form will never be enough to tackle the entrenched inequalities of the present neoliberal, capitalist system. Although equality of opportunity is important, some notion of equality of outcome is also necessary, where the quality of life on a collective level is the ‘measure’ of success and social justness (Pearce 2011; Calder 2016; Littler 2018). This would require a large political shift in ideology.

There is the obvious question of what a new political approach to social mobility should look like. One approach that has been drawn on throughout is the Deep Place Approach endorsed by Lang and Marsden (2017). Instead of focusing on encouraging competition between both individuals and communities, they propose a semi-autonomous local economy approach, investing in communities and encouraging community well-being. Lang and Marsden (2017) argue that measures of ‘success’ such as employability and economic growth are no longer viable for understanding how well people and places are doing. As residents of Hiraeth demonstrated their anchorage to the community, new conceptualisations of social mobility could extend beyond neoliberal individualism to incorporate notions of collective well-being, providing opportunities within communities that enhance community togetherness whilst improving communities’ living standards. Evans (2016) notes that the political focus should be on providing opportunities *within* working-class communities, challenging the demonising discourse that suggests that staying home equates to failure.

Chapter Six highlighted the place-attachment trouble that can ensue when communities are overlooked and underfunded. A way to ensure the maintenance of strong place-attachment would be to invest in publicly shared communal spaces (Minton 2009; McKenzie 2015). It is therefore important to have locally available, sustainable employment opportunities as well as spaces outside of work in which to engage collectively. Although seemingly a utopian suggestion built upon collectivist ideals, the idea of investing in economically disadvantaged communities is not new, this was the original approach of the Communities First programme after all. But where this suggestion differs is in its focus on communal well-being *outside* of employment, discovering

ways of investing in communities so that those who do not choose to leave can live in a connected, prosperous and fair community. The discourse of needing to get out to get on would then be rendered redundant.

The entrenched social mobility discourse is difficult to criticise because of its everyday, taken-for-granted nature within UK society (Calder 2016; Littler 2018). Although I have argued for the reconceptualisation of social mobility throughout this thesis, suggesting a more collective and inclusive notion of social mobility, I am under no illusion that this will be picked up on by those in political circles. My biggest hope is that the work presented here can begin to open up discussion and debate about social mobility within academia, especially around the discourse used within mobility studies. Qualitative studies that explore working-class experiences of mobility through established routes such as higher education are unquestionably important, however, we must be careful not to fall into the ‘widening participation’ trap as an apparent solution (Bathmaker et al 2016). The argument should be for a wider array of valuable trajectories, ensuring equal access across opportunities therefore reducing ‘bottlenecks’ (Fishkin 2014). Hopefully when there is more academic traction on the reconceptualisation of social mobility, political influence could result.

### *8.5. A final thank you and reflection...*

The process of undertaking this research has been challenging and emotional, and it would not have got off of the ground if it was not for the amazing people in the community of Hiraeth. I extend huge appreciation to the Communities First and Hub staff who brought me on board as a volunteer and who were fantastic at keeping me in the loop and inviting me along to community events. Their enduring interest and support helped to kickstart the fieldwork and provided me with links to many people within the community. I also need to thank all of the amazing families who were interviewed for this study – they opened their doors to me, welcomed me, and treated me like a friend. I will never forget the kindness I was shown by all participants and I hope I have done their narratives justice. There was an unwavering community spirit in Hiraeth, and on reflection, it is something to be envious of. I learnt so much over the course of the fieldwork and I hope one day I can live in such a connected, caring community.

What I have aimed to demonstrate is how value can be constructed within spaces of contestation. In attempting to open up the concept of social mobility and encourage recognition of other value practices and trajectories, it is hoped that the value of working-class communities can be recognised. For too long, the trope of a feckless, lazy and valueless working-class has dominated popular culture and politics. This study highlighted the ways that value was discursively constructed outside of the dominant symbolic. Discursive processes in the construction of classed, place-based, and gendered identities shaped the horizon on which social mobility occurred. As a

result, participants worked to reconceptualise social mobility, as value was attached to relational trajectories anchored in the community, kinship ties, and social networks. Far from a discourse of lack and failure, participants' narratives were rich, encompassed by a sense of relational giving, constructing 'success' in terms of their relationships to others and to the community. 'Keeping close' was something to be proud of. Residents of Hiraeth cared about their community and were political in their attempts to get their voices heard. It was not the case that they were apathetic or disengaged, but that their voices were frequently ignored. I can only imagine that there are communities all over the UK in a similar position to Hiraeth, where working-class voices and values are dismissed (see for example: Paton 2013; McKenzie 2015; Jeffery 2018; Shildrick 2018). Perhaps a move towards a collective understanding of social mobility could be the linchpin of working-class recognition.

Reflecting back on my own social mobility trajectory, conducting this research has allowed me to realise how duped and shepherded I allowed myself to be by acting in accordance with the dominant narrative. I am angry and upset with myself for believing the story that was sold – that I somehow needed to prove myself and my worth through leaving my family and community behind, in search of a more 'valuable' way of life. Class is inextricably linked with shame, as we judge ourselves in accordance to the norms and judgments of the 'middle-class' other (Skeggs 1997). But as I come to the end of this long, challenging journey, I feel ashamed with myself that I did not recognise the richness of the value inherent in where I came from. As a consequence, I always feel one step removed from my family and their everyday experiences. If I were to take only one thing away from this process, it would be the importance of recognising and celebrating the diversity of value practices of all communities. After all, humans are diverse and creative beings: it is not in our nature to all strive for the same goal in life. The attribution and recognition of value needs readdressing to incorporate such diversity.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A. Summary of Community Worker Interviews*

*Table 1: Table showing names, roles and interview lengths of each community worker interview*

	<b>Name (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Interview length</b>
	Abi	Volunteer Coordinator/ Learning Team in Communities First	33 mins 51 secs
	Alex	Participation and Communications Officer for Communities First/ Local Community Charity Trustee	18 mins 41 secs
	Anna	Neighbourhood Development Librarian	1 hour 4 mins
	Father Paul	Church in Wales Priest at local church	32 mins 30 secs
	Harriet	Prosperity Officer for Communities First	46 mins 40 secs
	Ian	Learning Officer for Communities First	42 mins 4 secs
	Jane	Hub Officer	19 mins 14 secs
	Johnny	Schools and Families Officer for Communities First	26 mins 46 secs
	Lucy	Health Officer for Communities First	28 mins 41 secs
	Tanya*	Leader of After-school Club (Voluntary)	55 mins 47 secs
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>10 Interviews</b>	-	<b>6 hours 8 mins</b>
* denotes this participant's interview fell under both 'community worker' and 'family' interview			

## Appendix B. Summary of Family Interview Information

Table 2: Table showing the number of families, family members, and generations that took part in the research, the number of interviews undertaken, the use of any visual/creative methods and the total interview length

	<b>Family name (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Number of interviews undertaken</b>	<b>Total number of family members interviewed (and generations)</b>	<b>Visual/creative methods undertaken</b>	<b>Total length of interview(s)</b>
	Evans	1	1 (1 generation)	Use of map of the area & old photographs	1 hour 12 mins
	Peters	2	3 (2 generations)	-	3 hours 26 mins
	Morgan	1	2 (1 generation)	Use of map of the area & old photographs	1 hour 3 mins
	Jones	2	6 (3 generations)	Use of map of the area; aspirations drawing x2; important things inside my home x1; suggestions to make the community better x1	3 hours 54 mins
	Wood	1	3 (2 generations)	Use of map of the area & old photographs	1 hour 34 mins
	Smith	1	2 (2 generations)	Use of map of the area & old photographs	1 hour 27 mins
	King	1	2 (2 generations)	Aspirations drawing x1; important things inside my home x1	2 hours 14 mins
	Baker	3	5 (3 generations)	-	4 hours 48 mins
	Davies	1	1 (1 generation)	-	55 mins 47 secs
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>9 Families</b>	<b>13 Interviews</b>	<b>25 Participants</b>	<b>6 Families used visual/creative methods</b>	<b>20 hours 36 mins</b>

## *Appendix C. Demographics of Family Members*

*Table 3: Table showing the demographic information of individual family members*

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Housing area</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
a) Phil Evans	50s	Divorced	1	Private	Homeowner	Hiraeth	Army recruiter after serving nearly 30 years
b) Rosemary Peters*	70s	Married	4	Private	Homeowner	Other Pencaer suburb	Retired. Previously: community dentist
b) Charles Peters*	70s					Other Pencaer Suburb	Retired. Previously: carpenter and worked in double glazing
b) Kathryn (Rosemary and Charles' daughter)	40s	Married 2 <sup>nd</sup> time	3	Private & Council	Homeowner	Hendre	Nurse
c) Diane Morgan*	70s	Married	3	Private	Homeowner	Hiraeth	Retired. Previously: dressmaker, office work, nursery nurse, carer, dinner-lady
c) Jeremy Morgan*	70s					Other Pencaer Suburb	Retired. Previously: communication technician, steelworks, FE technician
d) Lisa Jones*	30s	Married	3	Private & Council	Homeowner - in family for generations	Hiraeth	Teaching assistant
d) Rob Jones*	40s					Hendre	Carpenter
d) Brendan Jones	Under 10					-	-
d) Chloe Jones	Under 10					-	-
d) Adam Jones	16					-	-
d) Anne (Lisa's mother)	70s	Widowed	3	Private & Council	Homeowner	Other Pencaer Suburb	Retired. Previously: childminder

e) Michael Wood*	50s	Married	3	Private & Council	Homeowner - Family built home	Other Pencaer Suburb- Lived in Hiraeth since 5 years old	Carpenter, FE lecturer in carpentry
e) Tracy Wood*	50s					Hiraeth	Foster carer
e) Lucy (Michael and Tracy's daughter)	30s	Married	2		Homeowner (in nearby suburb) but live with parents	Hiraeth	Unknown
f) Carwyn Smith	60s	Married		-	No longer in Hiraeth	Hiraeth	Retired. Previously: Director of communications company
f) Mary Smith (Carwyn's mother)	80s	Widowed			Homeowner	Town outside Pencaer	Retired. Previously telephonist
g) Alex King	30s	Married	1	Private	Private renting	Town outside Pencaer	Community development worker
g) Lexi King (Alex's daughter)	Under 5	-	-		-	Hiraeth	-
h) Roger Baker*	70s	Married	2	Private & Council	Homeowner	Surrey	Retired. Previously: social services management
h) Maureen Baker*	70s					Yorkshire	Retired. Previously: social worker
h) Lesley* (Roger and Maureen's daughter)	40s	Married. Peter's 2 <sup>nd</sup> time.	3	Private	Homeowner	North Wales	Stay-at-home mum. Previously: psychiatric nurse
h) Peter*	50s					Hiraeth	Music teacher
h) George (Lesley and Peter's son)	Under 10	-	-		-	Hiraeth	-
i) Tanya Davies	30s	Married	3	Private & Council	Homeowner	Hiraeth	Dinner-lady. Previously: stay-at-home mum
* indicates married couples							

## Appendix D. Information Sheet for Parents



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

### **Research Information Sheet: Understanding the biographies and community life of families living in a South Wales suburb**

My name is Louise Folkes and I am a researcher at Cardiff University. I would like to invite you and your child to take part in a new research project looking at the biographies and community life of families living in Wales. This information sheet explains why the research is being done, and what is involved in taking part. Please read the following information carefully. If you have any questions, please ask.

#### **Why is the research being conducted?**

The aim of this research is to better understand the biographies of those who live in Wales, and the role of the community within this. It aims to understand the importance of community and place when looking at the differing decisions and choices made by people. I am undertaking this research as part of my PhD at Cardiff University. It is hoped that the findings of the research will be able to provide recommendations to improve services in Wales.

#### **What does participation involve?**

- *Your child* will be asked to take part in an interview with myself which will vary in length depending on your availability, and how long your child would like to speak to me. The interview will focus on your child's view of the community and its amenities, what they see themselves doing in the future, and whether they would stay in the community in the future. There will be an option for your child to use creative methods to help visualise their ideas. These may include: collages, use of photographs, mapping and drawing. These methods can be interpreted and used in any way your child chooses, and what is produced will be used to centre the discussion in the interview. All resources will be provided. Visual items may be produced before or during the interview and can be kept by your child.
- *You* will be asked to take part in a separate interview with myself which will vary in length depending on your availability. The interview will ask you about your biography (education, employment, family milestones etc.) and your views on the community. There is also an option for you to use creative methods to help visualise your ideas. These may include: collages, use of photographs, timelines, mapping and drawing. These methods can be interpreted and used in any way you choose, and what is produced will be used to centre the discussion in the interview. All resources will be provided. Visual items may be produced before or during the interview and are yours to keep.

#### **What will happen to the information from the interviews?**

I will audio-record the interviews and produce a written record of what is said. This will not contain any information that identifies you, your child, or any other people or places.

Any other work created by you or your child (such as drawings, maps or photos) will remain the property of you and your child, but I may ask to take copies of these for use in published works or presentations at conferences. All identifying information will be removed.

All data will be stored securely, in line with the Data Protection Act. Only my supervisors, Dr. Eva Elliott and Dr. Dawn Mannay, and I will have access to the files. These will be securely stored for up to five years after the research has taken place in line with Cardiff University's data retention regulations.

I will analyse the information and use this as the basis for my PhD thesis. This may include use of non-identifiable extracts from the interviews. In the future, results from this project may also be used in published works and presentations at conferences.

### **Confidentiality and safeguarding**

I will not repeat anything that is said in the interviews, unless you or your child report an incident where someone's well-being is seriously at risk or where significant harm has already occurred. In this case, my supervisors and I would follow the safeguarding procedures of Cardiff University. If this happens, we will first discuss it with you and/or your child, as appropriate.

The research has been given ethical approval by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University.

### **Do my child and I have to take part?**

No. It is up to you and your child to decide whether or not **they** take part. It is up to you to decide whether or not **you** take part. If you and your child are happy to take part in the project, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will both be asked to sign a consent form.

### **Can I decide to withdraw from the study later on?**

You and your child are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. If you/they withdraw I will not use the information collected from you/them.

### **Contact details**

**If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors using the following details:**

**Louise Folkes**  
PhD Researcher  
[FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk)  
075313 57849

**Dr. Eva Elliott**  
Supervisor  
[ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 9138

**Dr Dawn Mannay**  
Supervisor  
[MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 4774

***If you are happy for yourself and your child to take part in the research, please sign the consent form. Your child will also be asked to sign a consent form to take part.***

Appendix E. Consent Form for Parents



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

**Research Consent Form: Understanding the biographies and community life of families living in a South Wales suburb**

**If you are happy for yourself and your child to take part in the research project, please fill in and sign the consent form below. Please note that your child will only be able to take part in the research if *both you and they* are happy for them to do so, and both give consent.**

Please circle YES or NO for each statement, as appropriate	
I have read the information sheet.	YES / NO
Someone has explained the project to me.	YES / NO
I understand what the project is about.	YES / NO
I understand what is done with information I provide.	YES/ NO
I agree that work that I or my child produce as part of the project (such as drawings) can be used in published work in the future.	YES/ NO
I have asked the questions that I want to ask.	YES / NO
I understand that I can choose to take part or not.	YES / NO
I understand that it is up to me and my child to decide whether or not they take part.	YES / NO
I understand that I or my child can stop taking part at any time.	YES / NO
<u>I agree to take part in the research project.</u>	YES / NO
<u>I agree for my child to take part in the research project</u>	YES / NO
SIGNATURE .....	
FULL NAME.....	
DATE .....	
Researcher's signature .....	
Date.....	

## *Appendix F. Information Sheet for Children*



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

### **Research Information Sheet: Understanding the lives of families living in South Wales**

My name is Louise Folkes and I am a researcher at Cardiff University. I would like to ask you and your parent/carer(s) to take part in a new research project.

This information sheet tells you all about the project and what is involved. You don't have to take part, so please read through this information carefully before deciding. If you want to, you can talk it over with your parent/carer or someone else. If there is anything you don't understand, please ask.

#### **What is the project?**

I am carrying out a research project to find out more about the lives of families living in Wales. I would like to find out more about where people live and whether this affects what they do with their lives. This information may help to improve services for people living in Wales.

#### **What is involved?**

- If you are happy to take part in the project, I will ask you to take part in an interview with me where we will talk about your view of where you live, what you would like to be when you grow up, and whether you would live in the same place as an adult. The aim of the interview is to find out about your thoughts and ambitions, so there are no right or wrong answers.
- You will be offered the opportunity to create/make something which shows your ideas. This may include making a collage, drawing a map, taking photographs- whatever you feel most comfortable with. You do not have to do this if you don't want to, it is your choice. I will provide you with materials you will need. If you do choose to do this, we can talk about what you have created in the interview together.
- I will also ask your parent/carer(s) to be interviewed separately from you, to find out what they think about the same topic.

#### **What will happen to the information from the interviews?**

If you agree, I will voice-record the interviews and produce a written record of what is said. This record will not contain your name or anything that identifies you, your school or any other people or places.

You will be able to keep anything you make during the project (such as drawings) but I might ask to take copies of these, to use in pieces of writing or to show to people in public talks. I won't show anyone anything you have made/written that identifies you or anyone else, and you don't have to let me take copies of things you have made if you don't want to.

#### **Will anyone know what I've said?**

I will not tell anyone that you are taking part in the study, or anything that you say in the interviews, unless I think that you are in danger or someone has been harmed. If this happens, I would have to tell someone, to make sure you are safe. If this happens, I would discuss this with you first.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. It is up to you and your parent/carer(s) to decide whether or not you take part. If they say it's OK for you to take part but you don't want to, you don't have to.

**Can I decide later to stop taking part in the project?**

Yes. You can decide to stop taking part in the project at any time, and you do not have to explain why. If you don't want to be in the project anymore, I will not use the information you have given me. This will not have a negative effect on you in any way.

**Any questions, please feel free to ask me ☺**

**If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors using the following details:**

**Louise Folkes**  
PhD Researcher  
[FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk)  
075313 57849

**Dr. Eva Elliott**  
Supervisor  
[ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 9138

**Dr Dawn Mannay**  
Supervisor  
[MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 4774

***If you are happy to take part in the research, please sign the consent form. Your parent/carer will also be asked to sign a separate consent form.***

*Appendix G. Consent Form for Children*



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

**Research Information Sheet: Understanding the lives of families living in South Wales**

**If you are happy to take part in the research project, please fill in and sign the consent form below. If you have any questions, please ask.**

Please circle YES or NO for each statement, as appropriate	
I have read the information sheet.	YES / NO
Someone has explained the project to me.	YES / NO
I have had the chance to talk about the project with an adult.	YES/ NO
I understand what the project is about.	YES / NO
I have asked the questions that I want to ask.	YES / NO
I understand that I can choose to take part or not.	YES / NO
I understand that I can stop taking part at any time.	YES/ NO
I understand that the information I provide will be kept securely, without any identifying details.	YES/ NO
I agree that information I provide and work that I produce as part of the project (such as drawings) can be used in published work in the future.	YES/ NO
<u>I agree to take part in the research project.</u>	YES / NO
FULL NAME.....	
DATE .....	
Researcher's signature .....	
Date.....	

## *Appendix H. Information Sheet for Community Workers*



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

### **Research Information Sheet: Understanding ‘success’: An exploration of aspirations and life transitions of families in a South Wales suburb**

I would like to invite you to take part in a new research project looking at aspirations and life transitions of families living in Wales. This information sheet explains why the research is being done, and what is involved in taking part. Please read the following information carefully. If you have any questions, please ask.

#### **Why is the research being conducted?**

The aim of this research is to better understand the variety of aspirations and life transitions of those who live in Wales. It aims to highlight the value attached to different aspirations, and to demonstrate what factors impact on people’s abilities to achieve them. I am undertaking this research as part of my PhD at Cardiff University. It is hoped that the findings of the research will be able to provide recommendations to improve services in Wales.

#### **What does participation involve?**

Should you choose to take part in this research, your participation will involve a brief interview (twenty minutes minimum) with myself about your role and experiences of working/living in this particular community. If you have any artefacts you wish to bring along regarding your experiences (photographs, newspaper articles, newsletters etc.) this may aid the interview.

#### **What will happen to the information from the interviews?**

I will audio-record the interviews and produce a written record of what is said. This will not contain any information that identifies you, your colleagues, or any other people or places.

All data will be stored securely, in line with the Data Protection Act. Only my supervisors, Dr. Eva Elliott and Dr. Dawn Mannay, and I will have access to the files. These will be securely stored for up to five years after the research has taken place in line with Cardiff University’s data retention regulations.

I will use this data for my PhD thesis. This may include use of non-identifiable extracts from the interviews. In the future, results from this project may also be used in published works and presentations at conferences.

#### **Confidentiality and safeguarding**

I will not repeat anything that is said in the interviews, unless you report an incident where someone’s well-being is seriously at risk or where significant harm has already occurred. In this case, my supervisors and I would follow the safeguarding procedures of Cardiff University. If this happens, we will first discuss it with you as appropriate.

The research has been given ethical approval by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University.

**Can I decide to withdraw from the study later on?**

You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. If you withdraw I will not use the information I have collected from you in my work.

**Contact details**

**If you have any questions about the research, now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors using the following details:**

**Louise Folkes**  
PhD Researcher  
[FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:FolkesLM@cardiff.ac.uk)  
075313 57849

**Dr. Eva Elliott**  
Supervisor  
[ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ElliottE@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 9138

**Dr Dawn Mannay**  
Supervisor  
[MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk)  
029 2087 4774

*If you are happy to take part in the research, please sign the consent form.*

*Appendix I. Consent Form for Community Workers*



Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

**Research Consent Form: Understanding ‘success’: An exploration of aspirations and life transitions of families in a South Wales suburb**

**If you are happy to take part in the research project, please fill in and sign the consent form below.**

Please circle YES or NO for each statement, as appropriate	
I have read the information sheet.	YES / NO
I understand what the project is about.	YES / NO
I understand what is done with information I provide.	YES/ NO
I have asked the questions that I want to ask.	YES / NO
I understand that I can choose to take part or not.	YES / NO
I understand that I can stop taking part at any time.	YES / NO
<u>I agree to take part in the research project.</u>	YES / NO
SIGNATURE .....	
FULL NAME.....	
DATE .....	
Researcher's signature .....	
Date.....	

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