Moving away or staying local: the role of locality in young people's 'spatial horizons' and career aspirations.

Social mobility has been a central tenet of UK Government public policy, viewed as a silver bullet to creating a socially just and 'fair' society as well as an economically successful one. Within policy discourse young people's aspirations are deemed of critical importance to achieving educational success and in turn social mobility. However, within both popular and policy rhetoric 'place attachment' is routinely posited as a serious hindrance to successful realisation of aspiration, putatively because it embeds young people in 'place' (e.g., a particular community or geographical location) and prevents them from accessing employment in national labour markets. This paper, however, problematises the notion that 'place attachment' and 'spatial mobility' are necessarily mutually exclusive. Calling on data from a qualitative study of young people's aspirations in two distinctive regions of South Wales, UK, the analyses reveal that despite the largely localised 'imagined futures' of these young people they held very 'high' aspirations for professional forms of employment, which for some young people meant moving away from home and locality in order to achieve. The paper calls for a rethinking of how young people's aspirations are conceptualised both in government policy and academic research.

Keywords: *aspirations, place, mobility, education, opportunity.*

Introduction

Young people, place and aspirations.

> *'People getting better jobs is the essence of social mobility' (UK Cabinet Office, 2009)*

Preoccupation with social mobility has been a key feature of New Labour, Liberal and Conservative public policy for well over a decade in the UK (Cabinet Office, 2011) bringing young people's educational and career aspirations sharply to the fore of public policy. Within this policy discourse, however, 'working class' young people in particular have often been lambasted and pathologised for their putatively 'deficit' aspirations (Telegraph, 2013) and as

such have been blamed individually for the failure of social mobility in Britain (Bright, 2011).

Concern over young people's educational and career aspirations has been closely entwined with questions about their 'spatial horizons' (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). More often than not, however, popular and 'official' policy commentaries have derided 'place attachment' as a serious hindrance to the 'successful' realisation of young people's aspiration and by implication, their social mobility. Their argument goes, if only young people were less socially and emotionally attached to their home locations and broadened their 'spatial horizons' they would be able to achieve their educational and career aspirations and in turn social mobility. Arguably, the postmodernist celebration of individualistic life-styles, consumerism, choice and mobility (Bauman, 1992) may also have helped cultivate the notion that communities which foster strong place attachments are obstacles to young people's capacity to realise their aspirations. As such, in popular, political and academic discourse, place attachment of the working class has acquired connotations of pathology, defeat, fixity and failure (Skeggs, 2004).

Furthermore, within popular commentaries in the UK and elsewhere (see Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) 'aspiration' is constructed essentially as an individual attribute, a product of free choice and agency (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Hatcher and Jones, 2011). However, this reductive notion of aspiration has been roundly critiqued by many researchers who emphasise the social and spatial structuring of aspiration (MacLeod, 1987; Ball et al; 2000; Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Much of that research, informed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), attests that 'objective probabilities' are internalised as 'subjective hopes' or aspirations and consolidated as 'habitus.' Indeed, Allen and Hollingworth's (2013) extension of this work suggests that habitus incorporates both class and place-based dispositions which in turn orientate understandings regarding 'what people like me do' and spatial dispositions regarding 'what people around here do'. Yet habitus does not determine behavior and action; rather, as MacLeod (1987) has argued, the relationships between objective opportunities and subjective aspirations are both contingent and complex, mediated by multiple influences which inform the 'subjective rendering of objective possibilities' leading to nuanced pathways taken and trajectories followed by individuals. Ball and colleagues (2000) have also shown how aspirations are forged in a relationship between 'structural and material limits and

possibilities and various individual factors' as young people creatively manipulate seemingly 'contingent geographical circumstances' (Harvey, 1993, p294), according to their hopes and aspirations for becoming particular identities within particular places.

The data below offer some significant endorsement of the above mentioned critiques, but also extends them as they highlight the complex social, economic and psychological contingencies which influence how local contexts frame spatial aspirations, in this case, of young people living in two de-industrialised regions in South Wales. Both of these places can be described broadly as 'working-class localities', however, they each have unique social and economic histories, present day local employment opportunities and characteristic social landscapes which together prohibit any straightforward analyses of place, opportunity and aspiration. Fundamentally, the paper poses a further challenge to dominant political discourses which position working-class young people's career aspirations, including their mobility aspirations (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013) as 'deficit' and/or fixated with place or location. As we shall see, young people's aspirations are multifaceted and informed by their social and spatial contexts, as well as by desires, dreams and hopes for future selves, and also critically by their relationships with their home localities.

How do local contexts inform young people's career aspirations and horizons for spatial mobility?

The study and its method

The paper takes as its focus two 'working-class' locations in South Wales: the Rhondda Valley and Newport. The Rhondda Valley (referred to as the 'Rhondda Valley' or 'the Rhondda' from here on) forms part of Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority and covers a broad geographical area in South East Wales. It stretches from Cardiff in the south to the Brecon Beacons in the northern corner of 'Southern Wales' and covers rural, semi-rural and urban areas. Newport by contrast is situated in South East Wales and is the third largest city in Wales after Cardiff and Swansea. Newport is located on the river Usk twelve miles from Cardiff and approximately 32 miles from Bristol and is much more accessible to both than the Rhondda Valleys.

The data are drawn from an ESRC funded research project centred in South Wales which explored qualitatively young people's aspirations, decisions and prospective transitions, the

wider findings of which are discussed elsewhere (author, 2014). The study involved qualitative individual interviews with 57 young people approximately half of whom were male and half female, aged 16-18, who lived in either Newport or the Rhondda. Young people of this age were selected because of their recent completion of compulsory schooling (at age 16 in Wales) and transition to post-16 education, and because they were nearing the transition to either further education, higher education, training or work (typically leaving post-16 education at age 17/18). Capturing the voices of young people at this age lent itself to careful consideration of prospective aspirations and transitions as they moved from post-16 education to elsewhere. Interviews conducted in school settings during the academic year 2010/11 explored a range of topics including prospective educational transitions, career aspirations and 'imagined' and anticipated spatial mobilities. All interviewees were in post-16 education and attended English-medium comprehensive school 6th forms; approximately half attended a school in Newport and half in the Rhondda.

 While young people from the Rhondda and Newport could be described as largely from working-class backgrounds, they were as a group, in other senses, internally fractured and heterogeneous. A small minority of young people from both locations came from homes which might be described as 'middle-class.' Six out of the 31 young people from the Rhondda and four out of the 26 from Newport had at least one parent in a professional or higher managerial occupation. The remaining majority of young people had parents with employment positions ranging from unskilled manual, skilled manual and skilled-non-manual occupations. Twelve young people from Newport had at least one parent who was long term unemployed or currently not working (not counting parents at home with children), compared to seven from the Rhondda. These were import social structures which informed young people's educational attainment, and in turn their aspirations and expectations for future spatial mobility. However, as we will see, young people's mobility aspirations were not only informed by their educational capital, structural and material limits and possibilities (Ball et al, 2000), but also mediated by their affective relationships with place which render their subjective interpretations of 'objective possibilities' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The young people from each location differed in the duration of their own and their families' residence in their locality. Amongst those from the Rhondda, all but one was born there and 25 out of 31 had lived in exactly the same area within the Rhondda all their lives. All of the students had at least one parent who was born and brought up locally and many also had

grandparents born and bred in the Rhondda as well. In contrast, while the majority of the young people from Newport (21 out 26) were born in Newport, they were much more likely to have moved within Newport than those from the Rhondda and while the majority (17) had at least one parent born in the area, their parents were much more likely to have been born outside of Newport and in other parts of the UK, mainly England. A small number (seven) had parents who were born in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Kenya. On the whole, students from Newport, and their families, were much less 'rooted' in their locality in the sense that their inter-generational duration of residence was shorter. As we shall see, differences in the extent to which young people were 'embedded' in their localities by their duration of residence informed their relationships with their place of location and in turn their aspirations for future mobility.

The two localities were selected as much for their commonalities as their distinguishing features. Less than 30 miles apart and sharing heritages associated with manual forms of labour, today these de-industrialised localities have quite distinct social landscapes and local employment opportunities. However, as both locations were characteristically 'working-class' with strong 'working-class' heritages their spatial nuances and specificities were illuminated. This enabled exploration of the role of place in young people's lives when social class characteristics of location are more or less held constant.

As geographical areas both were large enough to warrant undisguised use of their names without threatening the confidentiality of individual places and people who became the focus of the inquiry. However, pseudonyms are used for smaller places within each locality and for the young people in order to preserve their anonymity. A brief overview of the socio-historical and cultural differences between these two localities is necessary precursor to exploring their significance for young people's career and spatial aspirations.

The Rhondda Valley

The South Wales Valleys generally, including the Rhondda Valleys, are often represented in the UK public imagination as having been the centre of coal mining in South Wales in the early part of the 20th Century. Widespread de-industrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s brought the collapse of the coal mining industry, the effects of which are still being felt today

in the form of chronically high levels of unemployment; in 2010 unemployment stood at 11.6 per cent at the end of 2010, a figure higher than the national average of 8.4 per cent. The industrial heritage of the Rhondda Valleys has not only left an imprint on its economic landscape but also its social landscape. The dominance of a single 'male dominated' industry in the area and the common working experiences of miners and its relatively undeveloped hierarchical structure had a number of effects; the working class itself was relatively undifferentiated and there were relatively few within the area who could not be defined as belonging to it (Massey 1984). These common working experiences, combined with a lack of variation in wages amongst families, and the shared and repeated experience of poverty and hardship throughout lifetimes, undoubtedly bound its working-class members together in Wales, as elsewhere (see Jackson, 1968).

This industrial working-class heritage provides the canvas for today's social and economic landscape in South Wales. The lengthy duration of inter-generational family residence, coupled with the densely packed terraced houses and communities which grew up around the mines created the conditions for a distinctive social fabric characterised by strong, locally based kinship and social networks. This distinct social fabric, to an extent, endures today (albeit refined and modernised) and was reflected in the young people's depictions of their locality. They very commonly characterised it as having a strong sense of 'community' using phrases such as the '*closeness of people*', '*close-knit*', and '*community feel*' to describe the local area. As we shall see, these conditions underscore their relationships with their home localities, which, coupled with the scope of employment opportunities that existed locally, have profound bearing not only upon their aspirations for spatial mobility, but also their construction of their career aspirations.

Newport

Like the Rhondda, Newport has an industrial heritage centred on manual labour and has retained an image associated with an industrial working class. Yet while the Rhondda was dominated by a single industry (coal mining) for decades, Newport experienced a more varied industrial heritage centred on its docks and steel works and, to a lesser extent, ship building. Like the Rhondda, Newport suffered badly from the effects of de-industrialisation in the 1970s and 80s, and the steel industry has continued to contract in recent years. Today, Newport experiences high levels of unemployment and manifests high levels of social and

economic disadvantage. Unemployment levels at the end of 2010 were roughly similar in both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Newport where unemployment levels stood at roughly ten per cent of the working age population compared to eight per cent in Wales (StatsWales, 2013). In contrast to the Rhondda, however, Newport has extensive transport networks to cities in England and South Wales which means that employment opportunities in these places are much more proximal and accessible, as reflected in its daily influx of employees.

While Newport shares with the Rhondda an image of a working-class locality centred on an industrial past, in contrast to the Rhondda which is overwhelmingly white and working-class, Newport is much more ethnically diverse. This is due in part to its proximity and extensive communication and transport networks to major cities in England and South Wales which have attracted both temporary and permanent residents over time. Given Newport's social and ethnic diversity it does not have as homogenous a social landscape as the Rhondda Valleys but, rather, a variety of them which characterise its various localities. Young people here rarely made references to a 'sense of community' or the 'close-knit' character of local residents when describing their local areas and only seldom used the phrase '*everybody knows everybody'*.

Whilst these places share an industrial heritage associated with (male dominated) manual labour and both have retained their image of industrial 'working-class' localities, there are stark differences in the structure of opportunities available to young people living in these localities today. Despite being badly hit by the global economic 'down-turn' of the last decades and having suffered from the effects of de-industrialisation, Newport's economic base is becoming increasingly diverse and its expanding service sector and proximity and extensive transport networks to other cities provides it with relatively greater scope for opportunities in comparison with overwhelmingly white, working-class, geographically isolated Rhondda. These differences have profound implications for young people's relationships with their homes and localities which in turn inform their future career aspirations and attitudes toward spatial mobility.

'Getting out' or staying local? Local employment opportunities and future spatial aspirations

The 'imagined futures' of young people from both locations were strikingly 'local.' Irrespective of gender, class or culture, young people from both locations tended to envisage

their futures as being in 'close' geographical proximity to their homes, typically less than 25 miles away. However, marked differences emerged in the extent to which young people from each location envisaged their futures as being either inside or outside of the Rhondda or Newport. Those from Newport were much more likely to imagine their futures in Newport than Rhondda students were to imagine themselves in the Rhondda. While more than half of young people from the Rhondda expected to live relatively *close* to the Rhondda in the future, an overwhelming majority (21 out of 31) voiced either a hope or an expectation that they would leave the area and live outside it, typically in nearby Cardiff. Robert articulated this aspiration to leave in particularly visceral terms

> *I[1]. Do you have any ideas about where you might look for jobs?*
>
> *R. It wouldn't be in the Rhondda Valley, you can guarantee that cos there's no jobs up here, it's like our MP, when he came up here he was saying it would be nice if people come back to the Rhondda Valley to do jobs, there's just no, how can we? I wouldn't come back to the Rhondda Valley, if I got a degree and stuff and, there's just no jobs out there, it wouldn't stick to the door would it? You gotta go out and look for work, there's no work in the Rhondda Valley, it's not like before where we had all the mines open and stuff and there was work here, there's nothing here!* (Robert, Rhondda)

For young people such as Robert who voiced hopes and expectations that they would leave the Rhondda in the future, the scarcity of jobs for school leavers and in particular of professional forms of employment acted as a major incentive to leave. Faced with severely limited local employment opportunities, these young people's spatial horizons were distinctively *not* characterised by insular orientations to place, but rather, strong aspirations to be geographically mobile, albeit, remaining not too far away from the Rhondda in the future, in order to pursue their aspirations:

> *I. Do you think about where you might be able to find jobs in the future, like do you see yourself finding jobs around here or...?*
>
> *H. No definitely not around here. I'd have to move to a city, Cardiff, London.*
> (Hannah, Rhondda)

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[1] 'I' denotes 'interviewer' throughout

Spatial mobility was then, for these young men and women infused with future imaginings of 'self' in which questions of *who I will become* and *where I am* become intimately bound (Prince, 2014). Those who expected to progress to HE (23 out of 31 did so) expressed particularly intense expectations and aspirations to leave; their future imaginings of 'self' as 'professionals' following completion of HE were viewed as contradictory to a life in the Rhondda which they saw as parochial and lacking employment opportunities. Mobility was therefore viewed as essential to the realisation of 'professional identities' associated with attainment of a degree. These powerful 'escape' narratives are reminiscent of Jones (1999) and others' (Furlong and Cooney, 1990; Green, 1999) notion of 'getting out to get on' in which mobility is the means of accessing the middle-class 'good life' (Jones, 1999). 'Getting-out' (of the Rhondda) was synonymous with 'getting on' in life and accessing middle-class life-styles characterised by choice and consumption. Staying 'local' evoked connotations of imprisonment, 'failure', exclusion from consumption and a lack of choice (Jones, 1999) as evident in Lewis's response when asked how he felt about staying in the Rhondda:

> *I…the thought of that depresses me, this topic has come up with my friends and they say 'I don't want to move anywhere else, I'm happy here for the rest of my life'. It's not somewhere I could live from childhood to my death, it's er, it would be a depressing life. It's like Groundhog Day living round here, it's the same thing every day and I'd need a bit of change I think. It's going downhill round here as well I think, it's getting worse every year.* (Lewis, Rhondda)

However, a blanket interpretation of 'escape' belies the complex and contradictory nature of Rhondda young people's spatial horizons. Not only were there differences between young people from the same location, but also complexity and contradiction within some young people's narratives regarding their spatial aspirations. These young people's migration plans were not then simply a response to local disadvantage, but rather, a product of the relationship between their own emotional attachments with place and their aspirations for future self-development (Jones, 1999). For some, this resulted in the juxtaposition of 'escape' aspirations with expressions of intense loyalty and attachment to the Rhondda, which underpinned their longings to 'stay local'. Shaun, for example, when asked how he would feel about the prospect of living in the Rhondda in the future retorted:

I wouldn't mind what so ever, no, because I think it's a lovely area and the people are nice and, it's just the job sort of opportunities, there is not a great deal of them up this end. (Shaun, Rhondda)

His sentimental emotions towards home and locality were both circumspect and qualified as he recognised the potential need to move out in order to secure employment. Clearly, his career aspirations conflicted with his interpretation of his opportunities locally; the sorts of employment he envisaged obtaining were not those that existed in the Rhondda. Others in the Rhondda displayed a similar conflict of interest and ambivalence, as in aspiring teacher Ruth's response:

I. Where would your dream place to live be?

R. I'd like, I'd love to still live in the Valley but it's, that's more of a dream than anything I think.

I. So where do you think you'll actually likely to be living?

R. In like Cardiff or Swansea or something, like a bigger city or something. It seems to be like there's more different options and that down there, there's more like schools and stuff you could apply for, there's not that many here really.
(Ruth, Rhondda)

Like Shaun, Ruth's longing to remain in the Rhondda is antagonistic with her career aspiration which she recognises as unobtainable if she were to stay. For her however, there was to be no defeat, fixity or failure (Skeggs, 2004) as she, like the majority of those from the Rhondda, recognised the need to leave in order to fulfil career aspirations. Evidently, emotional attachments with place did not stifle career aspirations. These young people's aspirations were consequently characterised by 'conflict' (Hektner, 1995); they dreamt of staying in the area but recognised the need to 'move out' in order to meet personal and economic needs.

In contrast Newport's young people rarely voiced such attitudes or regarded leaving the area as a necessity for realising future career aspirations. Newport's dominant service sector, its proximity and accessibility to Cardiff with its visibly vast employment centres underscored a perception that there were plentiful employment opportunities existing in the local area. Hence they envisaged *staying* local. Both Mark and Jonathan exemplified this attitude:

I. Do you have any ideas about where you might want to live in 10 years' time?

M.. I wouldn't move far away like abroad or anything, I probably wouldn't more to England either…no I'd probably stay in Wales. I'd probably end up staying in Newport to be honest or somewhere near. (Mark, Newport)

Probably start off local, so Newport, Cardiff, that sort of area, and then if nothing's happening there then a bigger area of Wales and you can always go to like Abergavenny hospital or…preferably in Wales I'll start out looking for. (Jonathan, Newport)

Mark and Jonathan had both obtained relatively high levels of academic attainment at GCSE[2] and consequently anticipated progression to HE and professional forms of employment. (They held tentative aspirations for careers in journalism and physiotherapy respectively). For them, like other high achieving young people in Newport, remaining local following HE was not considered antagonistic with their career aspirations as it had been for high achieving young people of the Rhondda. In contrast, young people from the Rhondda with lower levels of GCSE attainment tended to expect, if not aspire, to a local future. This was poignant illumination of the way in which young people's 'objective possibilities' (defined by their structural, material and educational resources) are internalised as subjective hopes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and projected into their 'mobility aspirations'. For these lower attaining young people geographical mobility associated with higher education, with its connotations of privilege and a middle-class lifestyle, fell beyond the boundaries of their 'plausibility structures' (Skeggs, 2004). Laura, for example, from the Rhondda whose relatively low levels of educational attainment deny her the prospect of entry into middle-class forms of employment cannot imagine a future of geographical mobility. Her aspirations embodied Bourdieu's (1984: 471) notion of the transformation of 'objective limits into a practical anticipation of objective limits', and she self-excludes from opportunities which she is already objectively denied.

I. Where would your dream place to live be?
L. Abroad!

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[2] GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is a qualification typically studied by 15-16 year olds in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. At the time of interview the grades ranged from A*-U (highest to lowest). Jonathan's GCSEs consisted of 5 A*s, 2 As, 5 Bs and 2 Cs. Mark's GCSEs consisted of 7 Bs, 4Cs and 3Ds.

I. And where do you think you'll actually likely to be living?
L. Probably still in the Rhondda, I dunno cos all the family live here so probably still here (Laura, Rhondda).

This practical anticipation of objective limits was also apparent in the imagined futures of young people from Newport who did not anticipate progression to HE. These young people also tended not to imagine mobility away from their local area. For example, in the perspectives of Paul and Amir,

I. Is there anywhere specifically you imagine yourself living?

P. Na not really like, they're [family] all still in Clayton [the district of Newport in which he currently lives] so probably still Clayton (Paul, Newport).

I'll probably, probably stay here to be honest… it's just where I grew up, I just can't think of anywhere else (Amir, Newport).

Both spatial and social structures are entangled within these young people's spatial horizons (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). The extent to which they either longed to 'escape' on the one hand or expected a local future on the other, was forged in a relationship between local opportunities, and young people's interpretations of them, and their material and educational resources. Young people from Newport tended to imagine living in Newport just as much as they imagined leaving, while young people from the Rhondda, especially those most high achieving, tended to express intense 'escape' aspirations in order to avoid the severely limited local employment opportunities. For young people in both locations, however, those with limited material and educational resources could not fathom a future characterised by movement away from home and were effectively 'trapped by space' (Harvey, 1973) by their limited educational, social or material resources.

Place attachment, family ties and spatial aspirations

To emphasise, Rhondda young people expressed more intense expectations and aspirations to leave their locality than those from Newport who more commonly expressed an *expectation* to stay without expressing particularly strong emotional attachments to the physical locality of their home. A minority of young people from both the Rhondda and Newport (11 from the Rhondda and 7 from Newport) did, however, express intensely positive emotional attachments to the physical locality of 'home' and this underpinned their hopes to remain in the locality in the future. Young people from the Rhondda expressed these emotional

attachments most intensely, with roughly equal numbers of young men and women expressing their longing to stay local to the Rhondda in no uncertain terms. Ellie and James for example, when asked where they thought they would look for jobs in the future, replied:

> *E. In the Rhondda Valley I'd go definitely.*
> *I. Why in this area?*
> *E. I don't think I'd like to move, I like it too much.* (Ellie, Rhondda)

> *I. And where do you imagine, say in like 10 years' time, where do you think you'll likely to be living and working?*
> *J. I dunno really, it's dependable on my job and stuff isn't it. But um, I couldn't see me moving away, I do, I like it around here I do, with all my friends and everything here as well* (James, Rhondda).

We might interpret these particularly intense emotional attachments to place as at least in part expressions of the history and social landscape of the Rhondda. Its close-knit kinship networks of family, friends and neighbours have had powerful bearing upon these young people's 'imagined futures' fostering particularly strong emotional attachments with home, family and wider community (Stone, 2003):

> *I. Do you have any ideas about where you'd like to be living in 10 years' time?*
> *C. I think I wanna stay in Glynteg, I like it.*
> *I. Why is that?*
> *C. I dunno it's just everyone knows everyone and it's friendly and I just like living here.* (Chloe, Rhondda)

The Rhondda's social and industrial heritage has not only seeped into local consciousness and constituted the local identity of the Rhondda, but also young people's 'sense of place' (McDowell, 2003) forging their intensely positive emotional relationships with 'home.' This in turn informed their spatial horizons and aspirations and their sense of 'rootedness' in the Rhondda. The prospect of leaving the area for these young people jarred with the dispositions of their habitus which orientated their thoughts regarding not only 'people like me' but also 'people from around here' (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Staying local was not only a hope and dream but a rejection of a 'cosmopolitan habitus' (Nava, 2007) associated with a middle-class subjectivity antagonistic with Rhondda's familiar and provincial character, at least as perceived by young people.

I. So what's it like to live there?

H. I really, well I've never known any different but I personally I like that sort of community, I love sitting on my windowsill talking to my next door neighbours, I like that see, um that sort of simple folk like, I enjoy, I just enjoy living in a small knit rather than walking down the street and not knowing anyone you see. (Hywel, Rhondda)

In marked contrast, those young people from Newport who hoped for a local future tended to frame this aspiration primarily in terms of a desire to remain close to their family rather than a wider locale. This was particularly so amongst Asian young women for whom the 'pull' of the family operated particularly intensely over their spatial horizons. For example, when Zairah (a Newport born Muslim) was asked why she expected to live in Newport in the future, she replied:

I think it's just to stay with my mum probably, just like, keep local. If I was offered a job somewhere else then I would go for it as well, but that would take time (Zairah, Newport)

Similarly, Sheena (who described her ethnicity as Indian), replied:

Even if I get a job I'll, even if I get qualifica... even if I pass nursing I'll try looking for a job in Newport because my parents are here, my family's here so then I won't have to move away from them so I'll try looking for a job in Newport or... I don't think I'll, Wales, I'd live around Wales probably (Sheena, Newport).

For these young women staying close to home and family was both positive choice and necessity, a means of supporting family both practically and emotionally, as Karimah, (a Newport born Bangladeshi young woman) revealed:

I. Is it important to you to be close to family in the future?

K. In a way yeah, I do find it's best to be closer especially cos I've got like my nan to look after, cos they're all growing old and I'm the oldest so everyone depends on me as well, like everything it's like, everyone's going to look up to me so basically I've got to be a role model so if I go away, then it's just, it doesn't go along to be honest. (Karimah, Newport)

Evidently, young people from Newport and the Rhondda experience similar social structures. However, their gendered and ethnic identities and their experience of unique sets of opportunities and constraints form a complex canvas on which highly differentiated and nuanced spatial aspirations are formed.

Local employment opportunities and career aspirations

The above data reveal an intense sense of loyalty and attachment to home underpinned the aspirations to remain within the Rhondda for approximately a third of young people. However, out of the 11 young people who expressed a strong aspiration to stay, seven expected to progress to HE and enter the sorts of professional employment associated with it. Those who aspired for a local future appeared to strategically set their sights on careers in employment that would enable them to live locally, for example, by aspiring for employment in the public sector, a dominant sector within the Rhondda. Their emotional relationships with place mediated their 'subjective renderings of objective possibilities' (Macloed, 1987). For example Hywel's intense fondness for the Rhondda rendered his interpretation of his objective possibilities; while geographic mobility was feasible given his educational resources (he was high achieving and expected to make the progression to HE) remaining within the Rhondda was crucial to the formation of a future identity firmly rooted in the place he grew up. As such, he saw himself finding employment either in teaching or nursing within the Rhondda.

> *I. Imagine in say 10-15 years' time, where do you imagine yourself living and working?*
>
> *H. The local community. Well working in, if I got into teaching the nearest primary school, if I got into nursing the nearest hospital, but living around here.*
> (Hywel, Rhondda)

Indeed, nearly half of the young people from the Rhondda aspired to employment in either the education or health sectors. This reflected the dominance of public sector work, public administration, teaching and health care, which at the time of writing accounted for over a third of all employment within Rhondda Cynon Taf. What's more, approximately half of these young people had at least one parent who was employed in the public sector, particularly in education or health care. Perhaps unsurprisingly these young people aspired to forms of employment which were known to exist locally, which they can 'see' and which

were most likely to allow them to live locally. Ellie for example, exemplified this aspiration to live and work in the Rhondda.

> *I. Where would you kind of look for jobs in the future?*
> *E. Around the Rhondda Valley way and probably go to Cardiff but I wouldn't go any further.*
> *I. And why not?*
> *E. I dunno, it's just the fact of travelling so far on my own. Yeah.*
> (Ellie, Rhondda)

It must be emphasised, however, that the aspiration to *stay* within the Rhondda was an aspiration of the minority and so does not explain the contradiction between the frequency with which these young people aspired for public sector employment which was a significant area of employment in the Rhondda (such as teaching and health care) on the one hand, and the overwhelming aspiration to *leave* the Rhondda on the other. Arguably, this aspiration has its origins in the industrial history of the Rhondda and the relatively recent dominance of post-industrial, public sector employment. A local culture has emerged in which private sector employment is considered marginal and public sector employment a culturally and socially acceptable norm, reaffirmed by the types of employment enjoyed by their parents. However, at the same time, these young people regarded their chances of securing such employment locally as very slim and so viewed mobility as a necessary means of securing work.

In contrast to those from the Rhondda less than a third of young people from Newport aspired to employment in the public sector, directing their hopes towards more varied job destinations and with marginally more young people aspiring towards employment in the private sector reflecting the structure of job opportunities locally. Newport has a large service sector and public administration, health and education is its largest area of employment, however, there are also increasingly diverse opportunities in a growing number of businesses. Furthermore, over a quarter of Newport young people's parents were employed in the public sector, in health care or education while the majority worked in local or national private businesses. Newport's young people's career aspirations reflected this structure of opportunity:

Like I wanna go in a bank and like do courses in a bank and work my way up and eventually I wanna save as much money as I can and then go into business, like maybe start up my own business or invest in a business somewhere, something like that, along those lines. (Natalie, Newport)

The visible presence of particular employment sectors locally gives expression to the more diverse career aspirations of students from Newport. Natalie, like other young people from Newport neither voiced a strong sense of needing to '*get out to get on*' (Green, 1999) nor felt constricted to narrow, 'realistic' job choices. Newport's diverse employment sectors were made visible to them by the types of employment their parents held. Friends and peers commonly aspiring to careers within one sector or another further tended to reinforce their appearance as socially and culturally acceptable ones to enter. This helps explain why young people overwhelmingly aspired to public sector employment in the Rhondda and a varied scope of sectors in Newport. Yet, young people from the Rhondda were all too aware of the scarcity of employment opportunities, a perception garnered from their own and their friends' parents' status as unemployed and through media representations of the Rhondda as a place of decline. It is not surprising therefore that the aspiration to 'escape' was so dominant amongst Rhondda's young people.

Rhondda's young people's imagined futures were then more polarised than those from Newport; they expressed more intense aspirations and expectations to leave, on the one hand, but also more intense positive affective relationships with their locality on the other. These affective relationships, for a small but significant minority, underpinned their aspirations to stay. These binary longings to stay and leave reflected both the structure of local job opportunities, in particular the scarcity of employment which 'pushed' them towards leaving and the social 'cement' which embedded them in the Rhondda. By contrast, Newport's young people expressed less intensely positive feelings of belonging and attachment towards their locality but were also less likely to express aspirations to leave the locality. Their 'imagined futures' were characterised by less conflict and ambivalence, reflecting the greater social heterogeneity of their city and the structure of opportunities which pertained there.

Discussion

Following the May 2015 UK general election 'aspiration' has once again been thrust to the political fore, with newly elected Prime Minister David Cameron pledging to 'turn Britain into an 'aspiration nation'' during his Conservative Party Conference speech (see The

Independent, 2015). But there is little doubt that the current preoccupation with 'aspiration' and social mobility more generally in political discourse has led to a fixation on the aspirations of working-class youth. 'Aspiration policies' (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011) represent working class youth in particular (and by extension their parents too) as aspirationally deficit, holding them and their communities personally responsible for their purported lack of ambition and aspiration. However, if the evidence of this research is anything to go by, in striking contradiction to the claims of popular media and political commentaries, there is little evidence of any aspirational deficit, either in terms of the spatial or career aspirations of young people from the Rhondda and Newport. The study does, however, reveal the centrality of both place and social and material structures in framing young people's future spatial mobility as well as career aspirations, thus contributing to the growing critique of the asocial and aspatial discourse of aspiration (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). It has also shown how young people subjectively render their spatial and structural 'objective probabilities' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and how these processes are informed by their class, gender and ethnic identities, their affective relationships with place and their individual preferences, dreams and goals relating to personal and social development.

Growing up in places characterised by severely restricted employment opportunities does not curtail career aspirations. In both locations, young people aspired for employment within professions associated with health, education or law or banking and for those from the Rhondda, they aspired fiercely to leave the Rhondda in order to realise these aspirations. This aspiration to leave was not, however, mutually exclusive with strong emotional ties with 'home' which 'pull' young people towards their home localities (Coffield et al, 1985). Indeed, as we saw, young people's relationships with place were often complex, multifaceted and contradictory and were not characterised by binary positions of 'late-modern' detached-leaver or 'traditional' attached-stayer (Jamieson, 2000) but rather by conflicting aspirations. These complex and contradictory relationships with places were manifest most profoundly amongst the young people from the Rhondda who longed for local futures yet recognised the necessity and inevitability of outmigration. These may be the 'attached migrants' described by Jamieson, (2000) whose relationships with 'home' offer little support to Baumanesque late modernist sociological theorising which attests that place has little importance to people's

identity. Clearly, for these young people, their future spatial mobilities were inextricably entwined with the formation and realisation of their future identities.

Indeed, as we saw, an important minority of young people from both the Rhondda and Newport expressed deep longings to stay local, underpinned by ties with family for young people in Newport, and fondness and attachment to the social landscape and a 'community feel' for young people from the Rhondda. These emotional relationships with place revealed glimpses of a habitus constituted socially and spatially which orientated their spatial horizons and compelled them to want to stay. As such, this study has suggested that social class cannot alone (any more than gender or ethnicity) explain young people's aspirations and anticipated migration behaviour, as young people's spatial mobility is also fundamentally informed by spatial nuances. While the two locations of this study can be described as 'working-class' localities, the structure of opportunities available for young people is distinctly different in each location, as is the character of their local social landscapes. These local nuances and peculiarities inform young people's relationships with their localities and in turn their career and spatial aspirations. Moreover, their affective relationships with their home localities are inescapably informed by historical patterns of residence and kinship in the locality relating to the area's industrial heritage and geographical landscape.

Nonetheless, while place is clearly important in constituting young people's dispositions and their horizons for spatial mobility, as we have seen, social class forms a 'stickiness' which mediates people's experience of place (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Material and educational resources define the boundaries of their opportunity structures (Roberts, 1968) in that they determine the extent to which young people are able to realise aspirations to leave should they wish to do so. Thus, while some young people manipulate 'seemingly contingent geographical circumstances' (Harvey, 1993: p294), constructing aspirations to leave places in order to fulfil career aspirations, just as subjectivity is an unequally distributed value (Grossberg, 1996), then so too is the capacity to 'transcend space' and to imagine life through mobility (Harvey, 1973). Evidently, spatial mobility (or the potential to be mobile) is as much social as economic resource and neither is equally distributed. Where young people remain in places where employment opportunities are severely limited they may face severely restricted life chances and prospects of fulfilling their career aspirations (Ball et al, 2000; McDowell, 2003; Roberts 1995). If there is 'solution' to be found, it clearly resides in political will and inward economic development rather than making abject and pathologising

the aspirations of the young. It also requires asking critical questions of social mobility discourse and working class 'aspiration' as proffered by Reay (2013) who has problematised the political preoccupation with social mobility for effectively side-lining attention to the 'gapping' and persistent equalities of the 2010s. On the evidence presented in this paper, much rethinking around the politics and ethics of social mobility and aspiration yet needs to be done.

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