



# **Safety, Fear and Belonging: The Everyday Realities of Civic Identity Formation in Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is concerned with questions of citizenship and identity as they are experienced by a group of white, working class teenagers, living in a deprived neighbourhood in Newcastle upon Tyne, North East England. Early empirical findings from my doctoral fieldwork are used to outline how tensions and frustrations expressed by these young people may enrich understandings of ‘citizenship’ in this context. Challenging the predominant image of ‘urban youth’ as alienated, apathetic and uninvolved in their local communities, the paper argues for a much broader understanding of ‘youth citizenship’ informed, for example, by young people’s involvement in voluntary and unpaid care activities – initiatives which often go widely unnoticed. The paper outlines why young people in Fenham find it difficult to identify with their local area, but also points to the ways in which they are making efforts to resist and overcome these challenges. The paper calls attention to some of the strategies these young people employ for feeling safe, and

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outlines the importance of a young person's sense of belonging in the construction of a personal and highly specific 'civic identity'. The paper demonstrates that forming a civic identity is a complex and fragile process, and suggests that further grassroots research is required to uncover the diverse ways in which contemporary youth citizenship(s) are constructed.

## Introduction

This paper is concerned with issues of exclusion, identity, safety and belonging as they are experienced by young people living in a particular part of the UK today. The paper problematizes current conceptions of 'citizenship' and suggests that they are largely irrelevant to 'disadvantaged'<sup>2</sup> urban youth.<sup>3</sup> The observations and findings here are not intended to be representative, but relate specifically to the young people involved in a research project within a particular space and time. Nonetheless, the narratives which have arisen offer a tentative opening for discussion and debate as to the salience of safety and fear in investigating citizenship.

The paper begins with a description of the fieldsite (Fenham in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK) which sets the context and introduces key themes of deprivation, decline and fear. I then describe my own particular experience and background as a researcher, those of my participants, the nature of my interactions with them, and details of the methodology used in the fieldwork. This section describes the ways that the individuals I am working with experience both personal and context-specific types of disadvantage, characterised by their own social status within the

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'disadvantage' as a process, both social and spatial, which works to limit an individual's participation in social activities, their access to material resources and the well being enjoyed by the majority of citizens within a society. While accepting that this is a controversial term, the paper aims to demonstrate that there are a range of very real, context specific exclusions at work at certain times and spaces within Fenham itself and these are often overlapping, and therefore can be experienced multiply by certain young people living within the area. In this way, the young people describe a 'magnified' form of exclusion, very specific to the type of social and economic marginalisation felt within the area itself.

<sup>3</sup> The paper supports recent work which argues against taking 'youth' as a universal category defined by age, and outlines the importance of rethinking and unpacking the category (e.g., Wyn and White 1997), that conceptualizes youth as a socio-cultural concept (e.g., Daiute and Fine 2003), and that shows the diversity of youth perspectives. Overall, the paper illustrates 'youth' variability, based on age, social status, gender and ability in contributing towards a more comparative understanding of the diversity of what it means and what it is like to be 'young' in different cultural contexts.

neighbourhood, their gender, age and presence or absence of a disability such as a learning difficulty. The paper suggests that these young people suffer stigmatisation because of who they are, what they do and how they look, and I argue that this impacts, first, on their ability to identify with the local area, and subsequently, on their formation of a civic identity.

The second section of the paper briefly discusses recent conceptualisations of citizenship, before outlining the alternative debates and understandings that I am drawing on. I argue for a much broader, bottom up definition of youth citizenship, which is both more accessible and more appropriate to the young people who are involved in the research project. The paper presents evidence from preliminary fieldwork for my doctoral thesis to explore the construction of Fenham youth identity, and suggests that these young people are local experts in the day to day dealings of their neighbourhood. The research participants are active in their attempts to “make the area better”, and because of this I argue that they can be usefully conceived of as active citizens in their own right. The complex relationships of trust, norms and networks between young people in Fenham are significant, and could be utilised in strengthening relationships and creating a sense of safety amongst the whole community. I argue that these understandings are critical in formulating a new and more relevant definition of youth citizenship. This section suggests that an innovative and spatially nuanced way of thinking about young people’s civic identities could be useful here in encouraging more appropriate ways for the wider society to engage with young people today.

Subsequent sections then outline some of the difficulties faced by these young people in developing their own civic identity. The significance of place is identified, with particular reference to ethnic tensions felt within the area. Uncertainties related to fear are a dominant discourse in these young people’s everyday lives. In response, they employ a number of strategies for getting a handle on their own fears – two of these are outlined in the paper. Firstly, the young people utilise “crime talk” (Sassen, 1995) and rumour as part of their quest to feel safe in the local area. Secondly, the young people attempt to appropriate local space. I detail how these fears (and resistances to fear) have an important influence on the formulation of their own sense of self, and their sense of belonging. This argument informs the final main section of the paper, which demonstrates how feelings of safety and feeling at home are an essential part of the process of identifying with an area and, ultimately, of the formation of a civic identity.

The paper concludes that further unpacking of the lived experiences and lifestyles of young people in their everyday lives is necessary in order to understand how quality of life issues are represented, expressed and incorporated into their personal conceptions of citizenship. To make sense of young people’s civic identities, these ‘lived citizenship’ experiences also need to be understood in

fluid terms, cutting across fixed theoretical categories. In this way, I seek to show that place, space, safety and fear are integral to the constitution of civic identities, and suggest new ways in which the experience of citizenship could become more accessible to young people today.

### **Growing up in Fenham – Generation Fear(ful)?**

The research was conducted with young people living in Fenham, a ward in the stigmatised west end of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Fenham is an extremely polarised area, with severe social deprivation and unemployment nestled in close proximity to pockets of affluence. Traditionally one of the city's main immigrant reception areas, Fenham contains Newcastle's highest non-white ethnic minority population (which is still less than 10% of the total population of Fenham), most predominantly of South Asian descent. The ward also supports a large youth population, but there is considerable tension between the local youth with fairly low levels of educational achievement, and the high number of university students increasingly choosing to live in Fenham. Having lived in the area for three years, I have observed that networks of rumour instil a sense of fear amongst people from outside the area. When I mention the area in passing conversation, I have noticed that people imagine a crime ridden, deprived, dirty and dangerous 'ghetto': a place that they would prefer to avoid. These stereotypes seem to be connected to the high level of crime in the area – largely committed by white people – as well as prejudice towards the South Asian population. As a consequence, Fenham residents suffer on-going stigmatisation and discrimination.

The west end of Newcastle is a challenging area for young people to grow up in, yet there is very little research about young people who live there, and even less focused on their own concerns. My pilot study was designed in response to this.

I am a white, female, middle class PhD student, and while I have lived in Newcastle upon Tyne for 9 years, I am not originally from the region. The young people who participated in my pilot fieldwork are diverse in terms of their age, gender, ability and social standing, yet they are all white, unemployed, working class young people, who have left – or intend to leave school - at the earliest opportunity. They experience particular types of disadvantage on a daily basis. Participants were accessed through developing contacts with youth groups in the area. I made it clear that I was interested in gathering young people's thoughts and feelings about growing up in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne. The fieldwork presented here is one part of my larger doctoral study, which investigates how and why people experience (and resist) fear in their everyday lives. A number of youth workers were essential in helping to organise and encourage initial interest in the research, which was based around informal focus groups and interviews.

The sessions that I carried out were entirely voluntary, with the young people being able to opt in or out at any stage of the research. The young people were consulted in initial planning sessions, to get an idea about the kinds of methods that they would prefer to use, and they were also given a choice of techniques at the start of each subsequent session. In an effort to engage with my participants in a more collaborative research process, I experimented with a number of participatory techniques, including spider diagrams, mind mapping and simple table charts, and the groups were encouraged to be creative with the use of marker pens, ballpoint pens, flipchart paper and post-it notes, with the intention that they could feel free to collaborate in any way that they preferred (see Alexander *et al.*, 2007). Initially 20 young people took part in my pilot fieldwork, and I have been working in more depth with six young people in particular for two years on a long-term participatory project. I continue to build on the relationships that I have fostered with these young people, to try to achieve more inclusive and mutually beneficial ways of working.

The research was designed to explore what it is like to live in Fenham, how comfortable the young people feel about moving around the neighbourhood at various times of the day, and whether they encounter any particular hopes or fears in their everyday lives in relation to their local area. A recurrent theme that I had not set out to investigate became of central interest throughout these fieldwork sessions: how the young people viewed themselves as ‘citizens,’ and how they themselves defined ‘citizenship.’

The first focus group discussed in this paper was with a group of young men aged 16 to 25 who met regularly at their local youth centre, which was located in the most deprived part of Fenham. This group met once a week to play football, although much of their spare time was also spent hanging out together on the streets of their local neighbourhood. The second group were accessed through a different organisation, which was based in a slightly less deprived part of the west end. The group consisted of both young men and young women between the ages of 13 and 25, with learning difficulties, who found it difficult to socialise outside of this weekly youth club. The third group was made up of young women aged between 16 and 20, who had all been involved in the youth justice system. Although they did not have high levels of formal educational attainment, the young people in all three groups demonstrated high levels of understanding about their local neighbourhoods, and exhibited a strong sense of responsibility towards it. While I am not presenting these accounts as representative, they are important in their own right, as they call into question some contemporary accounts of citizenship, and highlight the significance of fear in an individual’s development of a sense of belonging (see Alexander, forthcoming).

The next section of this paper discusses ways in which citizenship has traditionally been understood, before outlining a more appropriate understanding based on the experiences of my participants.

### **Citizenship – (Re)defining the Indefinable?**

There is no fixed definition of citizenship, and there are multiple understandings of what it means to be a citizen. Furthermore, there are fundamental differences between conceptualisations; vocabularies of citizenship and their meanings vary according to social, political and cultural contexts, which reflect different historical legacies (Saraceno, 1997; Bussemaker and Voet, 1998; Carens, 2000; Siim, 2000). A well-established body of literature demonstrates that definitions of citizenship are shifting rapidly (see, for example, Turner, 1986; Barbalet, 1988; Andrews, 1991; Van Steenbegen, 1994; Bulmer and Rees, 1996; Clarke, 1996; Lister, 2003; Faulks, 1998). As such, Hall et al. (2000, 462-63) suggest that "citizenship may best be understood as signifying a field of struggle; an arena in which relations linking individuals to their wider community, social and political contexts are continually discussed, reworked and contested."

Traditionally, citizenship has been narrowly defined as referring simply to the legal membership of a political community. Sherrod (2003) has argued that having some concern for others and having some connectedness, or shared social membership, to a group such as family, community, race, or religion, are centrally relevant to citizenship. Experiences of membership are also a core part of Walzer's (1989) definition of a citizen, and have been well utilised to create broader definitions of citizenship (see Flanagan and Galloway, 1995).

More recently, there has been a gradual shift away from the passive rights based language of citizenship, towards an emphasis on citizen responsibilities and active participation. This has created opportunities to make visible and uncover structured inequalities once hidden by more rigid definitions. An early and key formulation of active participation stresses the basic right of citizens to participate fully in the life of the society in which they reside. The present paper utilises this social and democratic notion of citizenship as a starting point, taken from the influential work of Marshall (1950), who insisted that citizen rights refer not only to the political and civil rights embedded in national constitutions, but also to a spectrum of *social* rights. Marshall therefore made an analytical distinction between different kinds of rights, and drew attention to the possibility that the practices associated with them might shape social, economic and political organization in different ways. This setting of *individuals* into a *structured* relationship with the state (in terms of the *de jure* entitlements of the public), which can be interrogated empirically (to monitor whether, and to whom, such rights are effectively available), is the platform on which the concept of citizenship in social democratic theory lays its credentials (Smith, 1989).

These understandings do not take into account the fact that “citizenship is probably most immediately experienced as a feeling of belonging” (Osler and Starkey, 2005, 9). They do not readily admit to varying, personalized degrees of citizenship, nor do they “allow an appreciation of the qualitative differences in the lived experience of citizenship” (Hall *et al.*, 1999, 501). Furthermore, recent economic, social and cultural changes make shared social membership – a status and identity common to all – problematic, and no longer something to be taken for granted (Hall *et al.*, 1999). Citizenship as it is understood today evokes connotations of commonality and inclusive belongingness, which, I would argue, are increasingly difficult to adhere to in today’s fragmented, diverse and deeply unequal society.

For Osler and Starkey (2005, 21) these complexities are played out under the notion of a *cosmopolitan* citizenship, whereby “globalization has enabled the development of consciousness that identity is multiply situated.” They argue that the reality of citizenship on the ground is increasingly at odds with the narrow definition of citizenship in relation to nationality. As people’s identities are multiple, this therefore requires a reconceptualisation of citizenship. Osler and Starkey (2005) acknowledge that all of us can claim complex identities, and thus citizenship “requires a politics that plays itself out in a multiplicity of different settings, from neighborhoods to nations, to the world as a whole” (Sandel, 1996, 351). It is this notion of a cosmopolitan citizenship that I feel is most relevant to my participants, and this is the theoretical standpoint that I will be using, informed also by a number of feminist perspectives which are outlined below.

Youth represents a critical time in the formation of identity, in the transition to the rights and responsibilities of adult citizenship: a transition that has been made harder for many young people in the face of a changing labor market. I now go on to discuss young people and identity in relation to citizenship.

### **Young People and Space - a Glimpse of the ‘Active Citizen’?**

The way we view childhood and youth is vital in the study of citizenship; most importantly, are young people seen as citizens themselves, or are they citizens in the making? Recently, citizenship has come to the fore as a way of understanding and assessing young people’s move towards adult status (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Coles, 1995). Yet, as Jones and Gaventa (2002) concluded in their recent review of citizenship literature, there has been very little empirical research into the realities of how different people understand themselves as citizens within their everyday lived experiences. It is widely accepted within the literature on geographies of childhood and youth that young people are social actors in their own right (Christensen and James, 2000; Christensen and Prout, 2002), and the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has signaled an

“explicit recognition that children have civil and political rights, in addition to the more generally accepted rights to protection and provision” and that “children’s lack of effective voice in the political, judicial and administrative systems that impinge on their lives renders them peculiarly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and neglect” (Children’s Rights Development Unit, 1994, 3). My view is in support of recent work which maintains that young people should be entitled to have some say in how to define a concept which is so pertinent to their education and future participation (see Olser and Vincent, 2002).

Yet there is an ideological barrier to be overcome before we can begin to ask young people what they want from citizenship. As Dean with Melrose (1999, 105) report, almost a third of their respondents “didn’t know what being a citizen means”, and, as they wryly observe, “most citizens are untouched by the animated debate in political and academic circles about the nature of citizenship.” While numerous communities throughout the UK have begun to articulate and define their own citizenship(s) in light of their particular lived experiences, there has been little attempt to engage young people in their own re-conceptualisations (see Lister, 2003; Olser and Starkey 2005; Valentine and Skelton, 2007). Consequently, a number of recent studies have found that if they are asked to articulate their opinions, young people will define citizenship as merely “good behaviour, doing what you are expected to do, obeying laws”, and so on (Conover and Searing, 2000; Flanagan and Faison, 2001; Sherrod *et al.*, 2002). Significantly and problematically within the policy arena, disadvantaged and stigmatised ‘urban youths’ are often constructed as being to blame for their lack of engagement with conceptions of citizenship. Recent attempts to bridge the gap between the perceived problems of young people and the reality of their experiences in the city have often been based on widespread assumptions about the inability of young people to engage with democratic processes, locating “the causes of non-participation primarily within individuals and their personal deficits” (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001, 335).

It is not surprising, then, that there is growing public concern about young people’s relationship to citizenship in the face of perceived apathy and disengagement (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998; Pearce and Hallgarten, 2000). Speaking in January 1998, the Lord Chancellor argued for a concerted effort to bring young people into a more active conception of citizenship, participation and mutuality with society, in which “people must be ready to fulfil their obligations to each other...in a giving spirit.” In line with many recent pronouncements on the importance of citizenship, these comments were directed at disadvantaged young people in particular.

Yet, as Roker *et al.* (1999) highlight, it is the narrow definition of the ‘political’ remit in current use that presents young people as alienated and apathetic. One way forward, they argue, is for the use of a broader definition of

‘political’, for example to include voluntary activities, which demonstrates a much higher level of political and social engagement amongst youth. This is in line with a number of feminist theorists, who have recently asserted that unpaid care should be acknowledged as an expression of citizenship responsibility alongside paid work (Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Lister, 2003). In this way, Lister (2003) points to one group of children who could be said to have demonstrated at least some of the capabilities for citizenship through providing community care for a parent or relative. Yet, it remains that “their existence in a number of Western European countries has only recently been (partially) recognized” (Lister, 2003, 76)

Taking into account young people’s views, opinions and valuable expertise about their local area could help in conceptualising citizenship from the bottom up. This suggestion, derived from the feminist arguments cited above, provides a second theoretical basis from which the paper considers a reconceptualisation of citizenship. It seeks a reconceptualisation that is more in line with and appropriate to the views, opinions, experiences and exclusions – namely, the everyday realities – of the young people who are participants in the study. The paper will now consider how young people negotiate and mediate their emergent adult identities within Fenham, at an everyday, localised level.

### **The Everyday Lived Experience of Youth Citizenship in Fenham**

While the following comments are tentative, and by no means representative, they nonetheless provide some interesting insights into the everyday experiences of young people living within this deprived urban area. During my period of pilot fieldwork, I did not find any evidence of youth apathy, nor of disengagement from the local neighbourhood. The youth group with learning difficulties in particular were keen to give their opinions, and, despite a number of behavioural problems and barriers to communicating clearly, they made a concerted effort to make themselves heard:

Jack: there should be more centres like this

John: more police walking around would help

Jack: Tony Blair should ask us what we think...he should send us a survey so we can tell him what we think

Caz: he should ban the Charvers<sup>4</sup> and Goths<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Charver is a derogatory slang term in popular use throughout the north east of England. It refers to a subcultural stereotype of a person who is uneducated, uncultured and prone to antisocial

Jack: but nee<sup>6</sup> one ever listens to us...nee one ever asks us what we think

(Youth Club for people with learning disabilities, aged 13-25)

The group were keen to offer their opinions, and were enthusiastic in suggesting ways in which *they* could help. These young people expressed frustration that they had not been included in decisions about their local area which they felt were important and relevant to them, and reiterated that they would be happy to volunteer to take part in decision making processes.

Similarly, in the discussion groups with the football team young people demonstrated keenness and enthusiasm. Tom was training to be a youth worker, and appeared dedicated to this future career path, which he saw as deeply embedded within the local area. From the onset, and without prompting, Tom volunteered suggestions as to what needed to be done to make 'his' area 'better':

Tom: I personally think that the council and government and that should pull their fingers out...and put the money into areas like this rather than, like, the Quayside and that like...spending it all on arts and cultures and that at the Quayside...they should maybe put money into areas like this and then maybe people wouldn't have bad thoughts of this place.

CA: what would you have it spent on? If they were gonna come down here and spend money?

Luke: I divvnt kna like...they spent all that money on the Baltic<sup>7</sup> like

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behaviour. The label is typically applied to teenagers and young people of white working-class or lower-middle class origin.

<sup>5</sup> Goth is a modern subculture associated with gothic tastes in music and clothing. Both these subcultures have caused considerable unease in the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne since the late 1990s, with tensions emerging from local business' perceptions of youth gatherings and the underlying fear of youth dominating significant public space (see Rogers and Coaffee, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Quotes are cited 'in the raw' in an attempt to capture the vernacular 'Geordie' accent of the area.

<sup>7</sup> Gateshead council has invested heavily in Quayside redevelopments that include the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, established in a converted flour mill at a cost of £46 million. The Baltic opened in 2002, and has attracted frequent controversy and criticism for its ineffective cost management.

Tom: they could have more cameras an'that...and have more lights

(Young Men's Football Team, aged 16-25)

During conversations with this group, it became apparent that there was considerable drug use in the neighbourhood. I observed understandings of the local area to be sophisticated – the young men were well informed about the subtle nuances of the control of drug use among young people (see Nayak, 2003a; O'Brien, 2006). The group expressed a very place-specific knowledge of drugs; they knew where drugs were dealt and who was targeted, and they had in-depth knowledge of the differences between various 'hard' and 'soft' drugs. Yet in contrast to the indifferent attitudes often associated with young people, the group described how they had taken *personal responsibility* themselves for policing the drug use of younger children in their local area – believing the police were not able to tackle the problems. Rather than being passive and uninterested, they were actively “doing something about it” as “we canna let that happen, like”. Their very presence at the focus group, and their active volunteering to help out with younger groups at the youth centre, further demonstrates their keenness to *give something back* to the local community. If an active conception of citizenship is one in which citizens are not only members of a community, but also actively realize that membership through participation in communal affairs (Hall *et al.*, 2000), then surely these young men fit the bill.

The third youth group was comprised of young women who had been involved in the youth justice system. Two of these young women were homeless, one was raising three young children alone, and few had the support or comfort of regular contact with their parents or relatives. Their narratives demonstrate an overarching feeling that *all they had were each other*. As such, they utilised their informal networks to provide unpaid childcare and housing for one another.

Lisa: I divvn't kna what I'd do without them. They're like a family to me

CA: and they don't mind looking after Robbie after school?

Lisa: Nah man! they stay over and it works out, it gives them a roof over their heads, like and I feel safer with them about, d'ya know what I mean?

(Young women involved in youth justice system, aged 16 – 20)

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These young women have formed strong social ties, in some cases within a relatively short period of time. This has increased the local opportunity structures of each of the young women, and, significantly, has promoted their personal feelings of safety.

Thus, while citizenship was not part of the language used in the research, and citizenship was not explicitly the focus of the discussion groups, its essence resonates in young people's attempts to make sense of their own positions within society. Issues which are integral to a civic identity featured prominently. They raised their own concerns in relation to feeling responsible for the neighbourhood, and demonstrated a considerable sense of generosity and attachment towards individuals and the wider community around them. These findings begin to demonstrate how the current conception of citizenship is insufficient and unrepresentative of the diverse and multiple realities experienced by young people today. To develop this argument, the next section will demonstrate that an understanding of how young people identify with space and place is an important factor when exploring the formation of a civic identity.

### **Locality and Belonging – The Significance of Place**

Of particular importance here are the ways in which young people negotiate public space in their everyday lives, set against a background of continuing racial, class and gender divisions in an area renowned for a particular Geordie Identity (see Nayak, 2003a). Localism has a particular importance for understanding the spatial orientations of these young, white, working class people, which include a strong identification and pride in their local area (Watt and Stenson, 1998). I utilise Watt and Stenson's (1998, 253) definition of place as a "space in a given locality understood as having a particular history and as arousing emotional identifications, and which is associated with particular groups and activities."

The importance of place identity to citizenship is increasingly recognised within the literature (Jones, 1994; Turner, 1997; Isin and Wood, 1999; Stevenson, 2001; Jones and Gaventa, 2002). Yet while citizenship is seen to constitute a "fundamental identity that helps situate the individual to their context" (Conover, 1995, 805), there continues to be a tendency to conflate citizenship with national identities (Fulbrook and Cesarani, 1996), rather than in specific and personalised accounts of identification with local neighbourhoods. I would argue that an appreciation of local specificity is necessary to citizenship, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where stigmatisation and problems related to deprivation make these areas particularly challenging places for young people to grow up.

The young people I work with negotiate a complex range of issues in developing a sense of where they are from. Detailed discussions of local and national identities were problemaized within my focus groups, due to hostilities felt towards both Asian residents and people seeking asylum in the local area:

CA: so if you could live anywhere, where would you live?

Dave: I wouldn't live in Newcastle. It doesn't feel like this county's mine anymore.

[followed by discussion about asylum seekers who live in the local neighbourhood]

CA: what makes you feel uncomfortable about them living here?

Ian: it's just, like, the influx of immigrants, like. I just think it's gonna get like America, like proper drive-bys and that, just people separated. Gangs on the street corners and stuff like that

CA: so do they cause any problems? What do they get up to?

Luke: they just hang round the place...and there's just loads and loads of them coming all over...nee one ever tells ya they're coming they just turn up and they're taking over.

(Young Men's Football Team aged 16-25)

Such ethnicised conceptions of place are not unique to Newcastle; ethnic tensions are played out every day throughout the UK. However, it is important that these comments be understood within the local context.

Until recently, the north-east has been less ethnically diverse than other parts of the UK, and in many areas of Newcastle upon Tyne this is still the case. The arrival of asylum seekers in significant numbers did not take place until 1999, when the area became an urban dispersal area, and an official dispersal policy came into force. Currently, asylum seekers comprise approximately one percent of the city's total population. In addition, wards in the west end such as Fenham and Benwell are emergency dispersal areas, where people seeking asylum may typically only reside for a month, until they can be re-housed to more permanent residences.

The quote above from the young men is in direct contrast to one earlier in the paper, where we saw the same group express deeply felt affiliations to their neighbourhood. When discussions about the area referred to ethnic minorities, the young men's sense of belonging and attachment to the area became more

problematic. While some individuals in the group did admit “I mean I’m not, like, totally against it...with people who’ve been persecuted n’that” and told of friendships they had made with some asylum seekers, the overall sense was one of hostility, which seemed to be related to changes they felt had been brought to the area as a result. Furthermore, the group described an “influx of immigrants” which demonstrated their ignorance of what an asylum seeker actually is. This echoes nationwide findings from the Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees (ICAR, 2006), who suggest that “asylum seekers and local people admitted that their ignorance of each other was a major factor in their ability to understand each other; central to all local people’s concerns was lack of knowledge of asylum seekers and why people seek asylum.” These young men also seem to feel that they have been excluded, and that their area has been exploited: “its like the country’s proper struggling and that’s cos it’s overloaded...y’ just have to look round here to see that” (Luke, 24).

Research conducted by ICAR has drawn similar conclusions throughout the UK:

In areas of dispersal, local people expressed clear feelings of resentment towards asylum seekers, which reflected a perception that asylum seekers were receiving preferential treatment in terms of their access to resources. Linked to this is the concern that asylum seekers are ‘abusing’ the UK asylum system and the generosity of local communities. In areas where resources were already stretched, asylum seekers were viewed as extra competitors and an additional burden on services. (ICAR, 2006)

The young people in the focus group expressed frustration at not being told about when or why people were seeking asylum in their neighbourhood, nor were they informed when they were leaving. As an emergency dispersal area, asylum seekers may only take residence in Fenham for a matter of weeks – a factor which goes some way towards explaining why they seemed to feel that their neighbourhood was in a constant state of flux.

While I am anxious to state that I do not in any way endorse the racist views demonstrated by some of the participants during the fieldwork, it may be that an area with an apparent predisposition to change may be one that is difficult for an individual to form an attachment to. Clearly there are a multitude of anxieties and worries which may have had an impact on these young people’s ability to identify with their local area. The next section will describe the ways in which young people talk through their concerns about crime within their local area, as a way of coping with their wider insecurities and fears.

## Rumour Mongering? Fear of ‘Crime Talk’ in the City

Concerns surrounding ‘fear’ are more prevalent than ever - from cult literature to popular media - from local to national politics. Yet despite the attention that it has received, the term remains contested, debated, even denied. Fear is not reducible to generalisations, but needs to be viewed as situated, complex and often multiply caused (Shirlow and Pain, 2003). While there is no single adequate definition of fear, for the purposes of this discussion, I will employ Pain’s (2000) definition of ‘fear of crime’ as the “wide range of emotional and practical responses to crime and disorder individuals and communities may make” (Pain, 2000, 367).

Places are a unique blend of historical, political, social and economic circumstances, and patterns of fear reflect this (Shirlow and Pain, 2003). In understanding people’s fear, we need to understand the *situated* character of its reception and appropriation by people in the practical and mundane contexts of their daily lives. A number of studies have shown that people living in disadvantaged areas are much more fearful than the rest of the population (Borooah and Carcarch, 1997; Pantazis and Gordon, 1997). Indeed, Pantazis (2000) employs the notion of vulnerability to demonstrate that the poorest people in society suffer most, both from the insecurities that relate to crime, and from a number of non-criminal incidents including job loss, financial debts and illness.

The young people with learning difficulties who participated in the study suggested that they suffered particularly high rates of victimisation and fear.

John: the charvers mug people in the street

CA: how do you know that?

John: I heard it from me mates...its...what’s the word...intimidating. I divvn’t go out. I’d rather stay in, like, to avoid them

CA: do you believe all the stories that you hear?

John: yea...y’kno the park, y’kno why there’s no swings there? Well we used to go there...but nee one gans there anymore cos there was this lad...and they found him... he’d hanged himself and it was ‘cos he was bullied...so that’s why there’s no swings there nemore”

(Youth Club for people with learning disabilities, aged 13-25)

The group were particularly concerned with “charvers” and “Goths”: these were the imagined criminals and, when probed, the main focus of their fears. It was apparent that networks of rumour were influential in informing them about crime in the neighbourhood, and in suggesting which areas to avoid – namely the park and the local shopping centre – and they adapted their behaviour accordingly to avoid victimisation.

Local ethnographies of fear connect place to social relations, linking social identity and social exclusion with the identity of particular places (Taylor, 1995, 1996; Garland, 1996; Holloway and Jefferson, 1997; Brown, 1998; Loader *et al.*, 1998). Yet these discourses show little understanding of the character and meaning of safety and well being at different levels of social formation. Clearly, the extent to which young people feel safe and the different ways they manage their fears has a significant impact upon of their daily lives.

In the earliest geographical study of fear (and one of few to examine rumour) Smith (1989) suggested that when condemning victims, people develop a mechanism by which to preserve and assert their own social status. In this sense, gossip is “only partly about transmitting information; it is largely an evaluative assessment of morality, and an expression and affirmation of norms” (Smith, 1989, 248). Similarly, the anthropologist Raymond Firth’s (1956) research in Tikopea suggests that certain types of rumour serve as social instruments by which individuals or groups attempt to improve their status, and is one of the chief means by which norms are stated and reaffirmed. By connecting people’s ‘crime-talk’ to their sense of place, a study by criminologists Loader *et al.* (1998) of different interpretations and reactions to teenage ‘incivilities’ highlighted the place that crime occupies in the social relations of Macclesfield. In conducting this ethnography of anxiety, they elucidated how adult ‘crime talk’ (Sasson, 1995) about local forms of teenage disorder is connected with, and helps to constitute, people’s sense of the communities they inhabit.

The very process of *talking* about crime enables people to develop their own sense of place (where place refers both to the immediate conditions of their daily life; and to their sense of place in relation to the wider society) (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). Subsequently, whom and what we fear, and how we express and act upon these fearings, are constitutive of who we are (Firth, 1956; Smith, 1982; Sparks *et al.*, 2001). Clearly, then, an individual’s quest for safety has a considerable influence on the formation of their sense of themselves, and ultimately their civic identity.

In illustration, the following section reports on some of the strategies young people employ for feeling safe.

## Belonging, Exclusion and the Quest for Safety

Feelings of safety are closely related to quality of life and neighbourhood satisfaction (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Parkes *et al.*, 2002). Feeling safe is paramount in developing a sense of at-homeness, as “in an urban environment, part of the feeling of taking possession of space is ‘an urban mentality’...being at home in the city and having roots there and being able to accept differences” (Koskela, 1997, 308).

Yet, the security of feeling safe or at home may be difficult for disadvantaged urban youth:

CA: so where is safe? Where do you feel safe?

Caz: nee where

John: I feel safe here

CA: so you feel safe at the youth club?

John: yep. But we only come here once a week. There should be more places to go

Mark: I feel safe at the matchbox [another local youth centre]...but there's glass everywhere...and kids get drunk at night time

(Youth Club for people with learning disabilities, aged 13-25)

This group described the neighbourhood as an unsafe area, where they were often uncomfortable without the presence of a parent. They were also aware of a considerable amount of local crime; many had personal experience of being attacked or verbally assaulted, and a number of their homes had been burgled. Significantly, a number of young people felt safer at the youth group than they did at home.

The continual struggle that working-class children and young people endure to achieve a sense of safety, place, ownership and independence outside of the parental home has led some writers to view street based activities as class cultural “rites of resistance” (Hall and Jefferson, 1977). In his studies of working class communities, Cohen (1997) has come to understand the development and practices of street gangs as recuperative measures that seek to “assert territorial power over local streets and neighbourhoods to compensate for a broader socio-economic exclusion” (Nayak, 2003b, 310). The street is often the site of the performance of working-class childhood, as these young peoples' lives are more ‘outdoor’ and ‘local’, and so it is here that “young people can gather to affirm their sense of

difference and celebrate their feelings of belonging” (Matthews *et al.*, 2000, 63). Inevitably, “the street corner is the most likely institution open: it is cheap and always accessible” (Corrigan, 1979, 114).

Some of the young people participating in my research carry out their own everyday appropriations of urban space, in their attempts to identify with and develop a sense of belonging towards their local neighbourhoods. The young men’s group described how they meet up every night at the local school playground, even after a CCTV camera was installed in the school. The young men responded to this by ignoring the camera, and continuing to behave as they normally would in full view of the camera. They describe how they have made this urban space their own – refusing to move on even when local police patrolled the area. In a similar demonstration of ‘boldness’ the young women have taken to gathering at a local bus stop, which is well lit in the evenings, and thus they feel it to be a “safe space”. They speak about this part of the neighbourhood in territorial terms – “nee one would bother us there!” – and they describe how they have used graffiti to mark out the area as their own. However, it is apparent that these examples of spatial appropriation are at the expense of the group with learning difficulties, who often referred to feeling fearful when negotiating both these places, especially late at night. In this way, youth appropriation of space in Fenham is a complex process, whereby some young people are seeking to control certain spaces, and yet at the same time feel excluded from other ‘hotspots’ in the same area.

Recent research by social geographers has revealed that young people have complex and specific knowledge of fear and safety in their communities, derived from their personal experiences of their neighbourhoods (Valentine, 1997; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Cahill, 2002; Nayak, 2003b). As such, young people often have highly developed understandings of environmental protocol and can read the environment in specific ways that are at once personal, cultural and social. To illustrate this, Cahill (2002) developed the concept of street literacy: “an interpretative framework that privileges experienced informal local knowledges that are grounded in personal experiences and passed down in forms of rules, boundaries set by parents, neighbourhood folklore and kids’ collective wisdom” (Cahill, 2002, 252). Young people continually develop their own understandings of their local neighbourhood through which to navigate and interpret their own lives. This detailed, “‘lived’ cultural geography of the locality implies that children have a great deal to offer when it comes to challenging crime and its surrounding fear” (Nayak, 2003b, 314). Safety is an important issue in the study of space and fear, and there is a continued need to explore the ways in which places and identities are mutually constituted at the everyday, local scale.

I would suggest that young people’s expertise, and their ability to conceptualise their local areas in new, highly specific ways, draws attention to their

potential to re-define citizenship. Wekerle (1999) has recently connected women's urban participation to modes of insurgent citizenship, as women draw on human rights discourses to make their claims for rights and services in the city. If the sense of community and kinship demonstrated by young people in Fenham could be fostered and encouraged, then I suggest that this would contribute towards a deeper, more informed sense of civic identity, civic responsibility and citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

'Citizenship' has different forms and impacts upon people in different ways, according to locality and situation. This paper has demonstrated that the current conception of citizenship is insufficient and unrepresentative of the diverse and multiple realities experienced by young people in Fenham today. Yet the new understandings fostered in this paper do not necessarily mean rejecting earlier ideas. Instead, the paper has argued that careful reconsideration and unpacking of current conceptions of citizenship are necessary in order to begin to understand how and why young people form civic identities. It underlines the need to weave together more complex accounts of the politics of citizenship.

Many factors impact on young people to create disadvantage and an inability to participate freely and benefit from the opportunities available to other citizens. The paper has demonstrated a number of ways that young people in Fenham are resisting this disadvantage, in an attempt to feel more at home and foster a sense of belonging with the local area. In drawing attention to safety and fear as salient factors in young people's sense of identification with a local area, it is possible to consider that the ways in which they experience urban space contain the potential for strategies for feeling safe and acting out their sense of belonging. It is acknowledged that this appropriation of space can have a negative effect and work to limit certain other groups of young people, and therefore the types of disadvantage and targeting felt, exerted and resisted at various times and places by both individuals and groups of young people in Fenham is complex and multi-faceted. More research is necessary to get to grips with this particular form of resistance and control of urban space.

My own research has shown that young people take seriously the question of their relationship to the wider society. The overriding impression received from the focus group discussions was of highly responsible young people, who wanted more of a say in their local communities. It was clear that constructive social participation in the local community, and the genuine opportunity to have a say and to be heard was at the heart of a number of young peoples' conceptions of citizenship. Although 'citizenship' was not part of the language used in the research, its essence resonated in the young peoples' attempts to make sense of their own positions within society. Individuals frequently drew on a number of

different factors in relation to feeling safe which constituted their feelings of well being and belonging simultaneously. The very process of *talking* about their fearings and concerns about crime, enables young people in Fenham to develop their own sense of place. As Hall *et al.* (1999, 510) have suggested:

A vast amount of learning about local identity and community...takes place at a tacit level. What can, at first, seem like background noise – banter between staff and young people, gossip, jokes, casual discussion – in fact often constitutes a flow and exchange of information in which local knowledge, common sense understandings and individual perspectives are variously affirmed, contested and negotiated over.

The creation of hybrid forms of identity which create links between different forms of belonging have been widely researched (Anthias, 2001), and, as Hopkins (2004, 264) asserts “the national becomes the local, as articulations of national identity are negotiated and acted out in the local community.” Further examination of the everyday lived experiences of young people is needed to understand how quality of life issues are represented, expressed and incorporated into their personal conceptions of citizenship. Thus, to make sense of young people’s civic identities, these ‘lived citizenship’ experiences also need to be understood in fluid terms, cutting across fixed theoretical categories. New, emergent and fluid understandings are required to move towards an innovative and more spatially nuanced way of thinking about citizenship. Such possibilities pose a considerable challenge both to the theorisations and the politics of citizenship.

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