

“We Was Regenerated Out”: Regeneration, Recycling and Devaluing Communities

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Abstract

This article looks at well documented processes of urban regeneration and community displacement in the inner-city through an innovative anthropological perspective focused on concepts of waste and value. Using the notion of symbolic devaluation of the working classes developed by Skeggs (1997; 2004), it traces their exclusion from recycling practices while at the same time the estates they live on are being regenerated. Raising questions about the parallels and contradictions between regeneration and recycling, it shows how symbolic devaluation of specific areas and their inhabitants are necessary precursors of the physical demolition and removal that characterize regeneration processes. Through an ethnographic approach, the deep connections between people *and* their waste, and people *as* waste, are exposed and questioned, showing how valuable middle class selves are produced through appropriate waste management procedures, i.e. individualized recycling, while inner-city, estate dwellers are remade into uncaring, unworthy citizens who cannot take part in this value-producing circuit.

Key words: regeneration; recycling; waste; class; value; inner-city; gentrification

“We *was* regenerated out.” What a strange expression, I thought, and yet there it was, this was how Mary explained being moved out of her home, against her will, off of her estate, which was then demolished, and onto another one, luckily still in her area, she said. The most interesting thing is that, at the time, I was asking her about her recycling habits, what she did with her rubbish, and how did she take

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it downstairs, and even absurd questions, typical of an anthropologist, such as “what do you see as waste?”

In one statement she had linked the experience of displacement, the ugly side of regeneration and, inevitably in London, gentrification, with a whole set of layers of symbolic mis-representations of working class people, poor inner city dwellers like herself, and their homes, often conflated and portrayed as dirt, waste, scumbags, wastes of space, sink estates and so on.

This statement intrigued me, especially because the research I was conducting at the time focused on something entirely different, specifically the ways in which people on housing estates in inner-city London dealt with their waste and recyclables. I had asked her explicitly about waste and she had answered, just as explicitly, describing the wastage of her entire estate and community: “We *was* regenerated out.” It was at that point that I started to consider what was happening *to* the estates as well as *on* the estates: were they really being wasted, as Mary said? Was it too crude a metaphor, would it be too facile a parallel to make to be taken seriously analytically?

This process was of course nothing new, as the extensive literature and debates on gentrification both in the UK and around the world, by anthropologists and other social scientists, testifies (Glass 1964; Smith 1979; Smith and Williams 1986; Ley 1994; for a classic anthropological approach, see Perlman 1976 and 2006 on the slums of Rio). This article, however, aims to address the questions raised by Mary’s statement by considering the social implications of urban regeneration from an anthropological perspective centred on concepts of waste and value. It is concerned with the symbolic devaluation of people, their homes and communities on inner-city estates in south-east London in the early twenty-first century.

I wish to reflect upon how symbolic devaluation of people is crucial to the actual demolition of buildings, and the following removal of communities from regenerated areas. Specifically, I am interested in how waste disposal practices, and recycling in particular, represent one of the many ways in which working class people are systematically stripped of value, as argued by Skeggs (1997) and Tyler (2013) in arenas as diverse as education (Evans 2006), the media (Skeggs and Wood 2012; Jensen 2013) and their housing arrangements (Back 1996; Henley 2007; McKenzie 2012; Smith 2012), to name but a few.

Setting the Scene: Symbolic Devaluation As a Precursor of Regeneration

Research for this article was carried out in Peckham, an inner-city area in the London Borough of Southwark (LBS) between 2006 and 2008. It was funded by the EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Science Research Council) to further understandings of how people living in inner-city estates practically dealt with waste and recycling issues, and

how to provide them with better services. It consisted of ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews and many hours of unstructured conversations and participant observations with a variety of respondents, from councillors to residents, from planners to religious leaders and housing workers. It also relied on substantial historical and archival research, as well as a limited amount of quantitative data, collected from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and other public databases.

In 1994, local politicians in a Labour led council submitted a bid to the then Conservative central government for funds to regenerate Peckham through a financial scheme called the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). This was one of a number of schemes that, starting from the 1980s, aimed to increase tenure mix in UK inner-city areas. It was preceded by Estate Action, which had run approximately from 1985 to 1994; SRB was active mainly in the mid-nineties, followed by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and then later in the noughties by the New Deal for Communities (Tunstall 2012, 35). At the same time, and possibly inspiring the British efforts, across the Atlantic in the US similar schemes were being rolled out under HOPEVI (Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere), which demolished public housing projects and dispersed their inhabitants through different strategies (Lees, Butler and Bridge 2012).

According to this bid, the London Borough of Southwark (LBS) believed that the key to regenerating this area of Peckham was the radical transformation of what were known as the “Five Estates,” its most densely populated area. They were described as “a continuous area of 60 hectares of local authority (LA) housing containing over 4,600 dwellings with a population of around 11,000 people” (LBS Brief for Development Partner Selection, April 1994). The Five Estates were defined in the bid as “an area of unquestionable social need.” Regeneration, it was claimed, will “reverse this cycle of decline, building a desirable residential area, a stable and prosperous community and a competitive and thriving commercial area” (p. 3).

The bid sketches out a “vision” for Peckham (p. 5) at the end of the regeneration: first in line were a reduction in density (from 4,532 units, or individual homes—and this could be one bedroom flats or four bedroom maisonettes—to 3,694 homes, with a net loss of 838 homes, approximately 2,000 people) followed by diversification of tenure (from 4,314 local authority homes to 2,154 local authority, 915 housing association and 625 privately owned homes, meaning a net loss of approximately half of all council homes) and a remodelling of the Five Estates.

This is perfectly in line with what we know was the aim of SRB grants, namely the creation of “mixed communities” by effectively displacing less affluent tenants. Nonetheless, even given the different demographic context of the eighties, where inner-cities were emptying

rather than expanding, the fact that by the mid-nineties a council could plan to displace over 2,000 people without making any plans for them, or ameliorating the loss of social and council housing incurred by the scheme, is remarkable.

The bid continues by listing the main “problems” affecting the area as: high density; a high percentage of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) people; and the young age of the population. It then focused on various statistics that list Liddle ward’s (now incorporated as Peckham ward) poor performance against many deprivation scores, pointing especially to long term unemployment. Deprivation data showed that Liddle was the second most deprived ward in Southwark at the time, and scored extremely highly on a wide number of deprivation indexes. An average of 38% pupils in the schools serving Liddle Ward spoke English as a second language. This figure went as high as 61% and 59% at two local primary schools, 90% of whose intake was from Liddle ward. Employment figures, according to the 1991 census, showed that only 7.6% of males and 7.2% of females were from professional/managerial/technical social classes. Unemployment was at 24%, while the average in Southwark was 16.5%, and just 9% in England and Wales. In June 1994, according to a Mori survey, 57% of children in Liddle ward lived in non-earning households.

This is a powerful narrative, but it is important to remember that it was put together in the bid with a very specific aim, which was to attract funds from central government. As Allen (2008) argues, these narratives have to be critiqued and contextualized as all other data, rather than used as a neutral or objective starting point to begin or frame a description. They constitute a frame and are, therefore, part of the story in and of themselves, as Alexander (2005) argues when considering the importance of framing devices when assessing environmental and generally speaking bureaucratic processes. In this light it is useful to consider what two councillors, Steve and Brandon, who were working on the bid at the time had to say about it during interview. Steve is an established local politician, a middle aged long term resident who was a councillor at the time of the regeneration of the Five Estates.

The deal was, it was.. was a unique scheme at its time, it was under Conservative government actually, the deal was that if Southwark agreed to knock the estates down and rebuild them the government would give them money towards this, was that Southwark would have to build properties in mixed tenure, basically it was envisioned by a central government at that time that the problem was you had large, large numbers of council tenants.. ehm... who they believed were generally less educated, and their children... you know... were less... you know... inclined to to to... study or, you know... hang about in the streets, and what the solution was by the government was to say that, you would have to have mixed tenure, and therefore the deal was that... there would be a reduction in density, which is incredible now when you think about it, because now

everybody is saying we need more density to to... for city living. But that was the agreement at the time, there was a reduction in density, there would be a lot more low rise properties, houses with gardens, and... there would be housing associations properties, council properties and private sector properties.

Brandon on the other hand is much younger, and had moved out of Peckham by the time the research took place, but he used to live on the Five Estates when he was younger and was also a councillor in the early '90s, when the regeneration of the Five Estates took place. He is very energetic and motivated, and his words convey a sense of the opportunities and chances that the Peckham Partnership (PP, the council body that run the regeneration of the area) brought to the area, even though some people, he said, failed to take full advantage of them. While the initial impetus of the programme was to address the housing situation, the physical landscape of the area, the main idea was to rebalance its demographic profile and draw in young professionals, to change the dynamics of the area. He acknowledged that this was not an easy task to achieve:

Although of course decanting is always a very very fraught issue for a lot of people, who are of course attached to an area, and a community goes around an area, and of course, they don't necessarily understand the reasons why the council are regenerating the area. That creates a lot of resentment. In the process communities were destroyed, a number of local facilities that did exist were taken out as part of the regeneration process, with the understanding that they were going to be replaced, new. And that wasn't always the case... If every one of the tenants had exercised their right to return to social housing, it wouldn't have worked. 'Cause of course, the reason why the council won the funding from the government at the time, and it was a Conservative government, the actual government who approved this SRB scheme, was that the council was to reduce its stock of council housing in the area. *That was the aim.* Southwark still remains I think one of the largest landlords, biggest housing assets, and the key reason to get SRB funding was to reduce that. In the bid for funding that was one of the reasons, to regenerate the area, and to reduce the council housing stock in order to attract inward investment from developers.

An interesting point that Brandon made was the way in which the Five Estates were portrayed in the funding application for SRB (Single Regeneration Budget). While he agreed that the statistics looked really bad on paper, he was keen to stress that they had to make them look that way in order to get the funds. Nothing of course was made up as such, but there was a clear agenda when compiling those figures, which was to make the area look as desperate, needy and dilapidated as possible.

It wasn't as if the area was all a sink estate, although, when you read the big document, you'd imagine this area was sort of beyond repair, sinking sinking, you know there were some social problems, but you know maybe in some respect some bits of that document blow your head off, even though there were

figures and analysis, yes, there were some problems, there were problems with crime, low level crime, educational achievement, single parents, family breakdown, quite some indicators, you could argue, put together a compelling case. I am from the area, and I've got a friend who succeeded and left the area, went to university, so it wasn't as if the area was falling to pieces, really really bad and dire, it was just that maybe certain components of the housing stock was (sic) in disrepair, and had encouraged some behaviour, in terms of concentrating population, and in terms of concentrating certain problem families, with some kind of issues.

Brandon's words are useful in understanding the ways in which the project worked from his perspective, and need very little in terms of explanation. For the purpose of this article, the main thing to focus on is the need to make Peckham look at his worst in order to attract the funds, to the point that even he would not recognize it from the description. Secondly, what runs throughout is the clear aim to reduce the amount of social housing in order to reduce the number of social tenants in the area. Thus we have the symbolic devaluation through a powerful narrative of neglect and despair devised and signed by the council, paving the way for the demolitions that will then remove the old inhabitants of the area to make space for the new, regenerated Peckham.

Does this constitute recycling? Is this a way of regenerating people out, as Mary would have it? The rest of the article will weave through these two themes to bring together the similarities and differences that characterize them. It is unfortunate that I have not been able to follow the lives and stories of the residents who were actually, physically displaced by these processes, and that by a conservative estimate would be at least 2,000 individuals. Two years of solid research did not unearth any reliable, solid data on where they went, what choices were offered to them, whether they were happy in their new homes? Not even a simple breakdown of who the displaced were, by gender, age, ethnicity or household type.

In different contexts, scholars have argued that such gaps in data can be significant. Tarlo (2003), working on slum clearances in India, has shown how detailed archival research—of a scope that was beyond that of this particular project—can lead to very interesting data that can be extracted from what the records do not say, extrapolated from what is not there. Silences in the archives are part of the process of historical production (Trouillot 1995, 26). The fact that some data were deemed not important enough to be kept, as in the case of those 2,000 people who moved out of the Five Estates, could be data in itself, as Trundle and Kaplonski (2011) argue. It could at least suggest that their housing situations were not a pressing concern for the council at the time: they were not valued?

Wasting the Estates

Waste Is a Social Matter

Marcuse (1985) distinguishes between indirect and direct displacement, and what happened in Peckham in the nineties is certainly an example of both of these phenomena. The focus of the article, however, is on the symbolic devaluation of inner-city estate dwellers, rather than a study of displacement per se. I will consider this here through an anthropological lens focused on ideas of wasting and valuing (Douglas 1966; Thompson 1979; Alexander 2005; Darling 2009; Alexander and Reno 2012; Graeber 2001; Hart 2001; Reno 2009), applied to things and people, houses and communities, both in terms of literature and ethnographic observations of people’s waste behaviours on the estates.

Mary Douglas’s classic text *Purity and Danger* (1966), and its analysis of dirt and pollution, still constitutes the bedrock of anthropological understandings of waste, which is where this article originates. This was a book about “primitive” religions, and it was an attempt to demonstrate that the taboos in these religions were neither pointless nor irrational: instead they were responses to threats, both internal and external, to the current order and structure of any given society. The main thrust of the argument was that it is impossible to understand pollution behaviours in isolation: they had to be related to the rest of the social structure to become comprehensible. Pollution and dirt are never absolutes, but always socially determined.

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements (Douglas 1966, 44).

According to this argument, dirt is disorder, and eliminating it is not just a negative response to fear of disease or misfortune but a positive, creative effort to organise an environment according to ideas of what a person, home, city or society should be like. We can thus start to see how dealing with waste is much more than simply removing what is dirty and smelly: not only the definitions of what is dirty and smelly are socially constructed, but their appropriate removal and management affirm and re-constitute social structures in our everyday lives.

These processes are so practical and mundane that they can easily go unnoticed: however they become apparent when things go wrong—which is often the case, as Graham and Thrift (Graham and Thrift 2007; Graham 2010) argue—and rubbish is not collected from our doorsteps, for instance: strikes by refuse collectors can easily bring a government to its knees. Another poignant example is when artists decide to make art out of rubbish, which then goes on to sell for hundreds of thousands of pounds. The popular outcry that regularly

follows such events is indicative of supposedly inappropriate disposal practices: by acquiring huge monetary value waste crosses too many boundaries and threatens a social order in which waste is valueless and art is valuable, or invaluable, even (but see Thompson 1979).

In her most explicit formulation of a theory of waste, Douglas (1966) argues that there are two stages in the process of imposing order: in the first phase, dirt, meaning bits and pieces which are out of place and do not fit, are rejected and brushed away. At this stage they are still recognisable for what they are, they retain their identity and are therefore still dangerous. In the second phase, through processes of rotting and dissolving their identity is lost and they become common, unthreatening rubbish, especially when placed in their “right” place, be it a bin or a landfill.

In this final stage of total disintegration, dirt is utterly undifferentiated. Thus a cycle has been completed. Dirt was created by the differentiating activity of the mind, it was a by-product of the creation of order. So it started from a state of non-differentiation; all through the process of differentiating its role was to threaten the distinctions made; finally it returns to its true indiscriminable character (Douglas 1966, 198).

Understandably, there are a number of issues that can be raised with Douglas’s argument, mainly to do with its rigidity, which was typical of her structuralist approach. A few years later another anthropologist, Thompson (1979), worked from this approach but moved beyond it, creating a system divided between transient, durable and “rubbish” objects, focusing on “the relationship between status, the possession of objects, and the ability to discard objects.” He argued that it was always those at the top of the social hierarchy who established what was durable and what was transient: this meant not only that what they owned was therefore by definition durable and valuable, but also that they were the arbiters of taste, due to their power to name objects as durable or transient. This of course relates to Bourdieu’s seminal work on taste and distinction in France (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). Waste is seen by Thompson as a social phenomenon, a necessary feature of human life: “Rubbish is a universal feature, not necessarily of the human mind, nor of language, nor of social interaction, but of socio-cultural systems” (Thompson 1979, 88).

If waste is a social phenomenon connected with hierarchies and taste, it is but a short step to start unearthing the political and class connotations of the various practices of sorting through the stuff. In the US, at the turn of the twentieth century, Strasser (1999) documented the ways in which talking of the poor and talking of the problems of waste and waste disposal was essentially the same thing, highlighting the political nature of waste practices. A social historian, she has traced the changes that took place in the United States during what she called the transition from a culture grounded in reuse to one

based on throwing away and disposal, emphasising how trash-making was a complex social process. She described trash as a fluid, dynamic social category created by sorting and characterised by a spatial dimension—what to keep and what to discard, where to put things—which somehow tends to end up at or near the margins of the household or the city—in the attic, in landfills out of town. In this sense she agrees with Douglas's (1966) definition of dirt as matter out of place. However, Strasser pushes things forward by adding a political element to her analysis of waste: "But above all, sorting is an issue of class: trashmaking both underscores and creates social differences based on economic status" (1999, 9).

Discarding, Strasser argues, had always been used as a way of demonstrating power, whether through potlatch or conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899). Furthermore, discussions of marginal places and marginal behaviours, such as dealing, collecting or living off waste, often merge with discussions of marginal people, the poor, who thus become subtly (or very explicitly at times) identified with waste itself. At the beginning of the twentieth century poverty and trash were seen as deeply connected, and refuse was treated as an issue of poverty: reuse, recycling and bricolage became associated with the poor, and particular concerns were raised about the habits of the immigrant poor (Strasser 1999, 136). It was not only the poor's ways of making a living that connected them with waste: before municipal collections, the rich living in wealthy neighbourhoods paid private collectors to take away their rubbish, while the poor simply had to live with it, throwing it out of their windows and into their streets. We can see then how structural inequalities were translated into a cultural understanding of the very close relationship, if not full identification, between the poor and waste in the US at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the UK, Skeggs' contemporary ethnographic work on class, gender and respectability (1997) still resonates with Strasser's historical work, showing how British working class women are only too aware of the ease with which they are symbolically conflated with waste by those in power, which is why they attempt to remove themselves as much as possible from the label "working class," in a constant struggle to "pass" as respectable. Thus they avoid at all costs anything that is dirty or scruffy by carefully monitoring their clothes (Skeggs 1997) and their homes (Madigan and Munro 1996; Evans 2006) for cleanliness, which they equate with respectability.

Recycling Subjects

In recent years, recycling has become imbued with so many positive layers/evaluations that to challenge its orthodoxy can be seen in itself as morally dubious. For example, public opinion does not like it when commentators point out that recyclable materials circulate on

international markets and are sold and bought as commodities (Hickman 2009; Gregson and Crang 2010; Alexander and Reno 2012), or that for some materials recycling only makes sense up to a point in terms of the energy needed to collect them and transform them, if the material themselves are inert in landfills and easily available—such as glass, made of sand.

According to sociologist Martin O'Brien (2007) the amount of waste produced in the UK that can be traced back to individuals varies between 4% to 9%. Even using the highest available data of 9%, that means not even a tenth of what goes to landfill is attributable to the behaviour of individual households. The current highest targets to recycle up to half of all household waste would still, in fact, only divert from landfill up to 5% of total waste arisings: this would be a very optimistic estimate. Considering these numbers, O'Brien (2007) argues that individual recycling in the UK gets a disproportionate amount of attention by the public, media and policy makers alike, compared to its actual size.

Why the attention then? Luke (1993), a political scientist and environmentalist, argues that this is to do with fashioning “caring,” “moral” and individualized selves that are, crucially, uncritical of and unconcerned with production processes. This is much preferable to the threat of a movement—as opposed to individuals—intent on challenging production processes for their impact on the environment, both socially and ecologically. By focusing on individuals and their individual actions—both in terms of waste and recycling to “save the planet”—larger questions about capitalist production and its social and environmental impacts are kept at bay (Luke 1993).

Social anthropologist Hawkins (2006) writes about the wellbeing generated by following appropriate recycling practices and equates them with purification rituals that Douglas (1966) referred to when she argued that ordering and discarding practices are not just about hygiene or disease prevention, but about constituting society and its members in the appropriate way, socially and culturally. Hawkins describes mundane activities such as washing, sorting and ordering glass bottles and jars before they are collected by the waste collectors early in the morning, and the satisfaction engendered by these practices in respondents who enjoy feeling they are doing the right thing, for themselves and for the planet. Recycling households, Hawkins (2006) argues, perform practices that are valuable in a symbolic and moral sense, accruing value for themselves as caring—if maybe politically unaware, according to Luke (1993)—citizens in the process.

This argument is certainly worthwhile, but what this article tries to do is problematizing the “we,” or “us” that Hawkins refers to. Critically, I would argue that the “problem” with waste is not so much what people do with it, but rather how differently various people do it,

and are expected to, and how they are allowed—or not—to do very different things with the materials they chose or had to discard. The wellbeing generated by the purification rituals of recycling that Hawkins (2006) beautifully describes was definitely not available to all of my respondents: the question becomes then, what happens to those who cannot take part? Those who do not have the space, time or possibility to engage with waste rituals that society deems so intrinsically worthy, ethical, and good? What kinds of people and affects are created in this way?

Skeggs (2004) argues that working class people are continually created, named and represented by the middle classes as valueless, backward, uncaring and fixed in space, both physically and metaphorically, so that the middle classes can be seen as valuable, progressive, caring and mobile. This happens through representation across different sites—education, the welfare system, popular representations, legislation and various regulations that working class people are subjected to (Skeggs 2004). Recycling, I would argue, is another arena in which people, specifically poor, ethnically diverse, inner-city dwellers, are stripped of value by being actively excluded from a value-producing practice that has become a defining trait of active middle class citizenship and belonging.

An Ethnography of Recycling: Or Not?

Moving Waste on the Estates

Let us now consider some—of the many—examples of waste behaviours I encountered on the estates of Peckham: I shall focus on two residents and two officers in charge of their estates, as well as considering the borough wide policies that shape and constrain their behavior.

Julie lives in a two-bedroom maisonette, which is a flat distributed on two floors accessible via internal stairs, in a block on Grey Stones Estate, with her husband and their two sons, aged seven and nine. To go and visit her, I needed to gain access to her block via an entry phone system: I entered the number of her flat and she let me in the first door, inside the block. I took the lift to the second floor and then needed to buzz again, to get into her corridor, which is shared by another five maisonettes; she let me in, and then opened her own front door to welcome me in.

Julie’s family recycles paper, cardboard, plastic and glass; the children are aware of what is “rubbish” and what is recycling; recyclables are left in the hallway, so that the children can pick out of it any materials they may need for their school projects. It is usually her husband that takes the recycling downstairs to the “recycling bank,” which is the only recycling provision on her estate: it consists

of three large bins specifically set aside for cans, glass, plastic and paper that the council collects periodically and separately from other types of household waste. These special bins are painted black, as opposed to the other bins that are metal, and are physically separated from the others, located in the open air between two blocks, as opposed to the other bins that are located in the bin rooms.

The rest of Julie's waste is collected in a bin in the kitchen until it is full, or if it is meat it goes outside straight away, or at most stays on the balcony, but not inside the flat. Normal rubbish gets taken out by any of them, or sometimes even visitors are asked to take it downstairs, or to the chute. The chute is a hole in the wall that connects with a long pipe, or chute, running all the way from the top floor of the block and down to the paladin bins located on the ground floor, in the bin rooms. There is a chute room on each floor in most blocks, or sometimes, like in this case, on alternate floors where there are maisonettes that take up two floors, and therefore the corridors only run every other floor. The chute rooms are tiled and meant to be clean, empty and clear of any rubbish. Julie's chute room is the cleanest I have ever seen, and crucially it does not smell: usually chute rooms smell quite badly and are sometimes used to store bulky items to be discarded, or bikes, or rubbish that didn't quite fit in the chute hole and is left to fester until the cleaners deal with it.

The rubbish chutes are not meant to be used between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m., probably to avoid disturbing those living right next to them, as Julie explains to me, so if they want to get rid of something later than eight at night they have to take it down in the bin rooms themselves. The bin rooms are located on the ground floor, directly below the chutes running through the floors. They are accessed through outside doors, meaning Julie, or her children or husband, need to go outside the block and then enter the bin rooms; these have very heavy metal doors, that need to be pulled back to gain entrance to the rooms, which again are often smelly and quite dirty. This is because bin bags are often left next to the bins, as opposed to being put inside them: the cleaners are not meant to pick them up and so they often fester there for quite a while. I have never met anyone who admitted to leaving their bags outside the bins, and the general consensus from my respondents was that those who do that are just lazy and dirty. Having lived in an estate with similar facilities myself I can also add that the paladin bins are very tall, and throwing a bin bag in there requires a considerable degree of shoulder mobility, and strength if the bag is particularly heavy, which may also be a reason why some bags are left next to the bins.

Both rubbish and recycling have to be physically moved a rather long way from Julie's home to get to the place from where they will be collected from the council. Through the corridor and into the chute room during the day for normal rubbish, if not down the stairs or the

lifts, through the entry doors, into the bin rooms and into the paladin bins, or in the recycling bank. What these spaces have in common is their communal nature: they are not private, i.e. the responsibility of Julie or any other individual resident, nor public, like the street, where everyone is allowed to walk, cleaning is the council’s responsibility and citizens’ inappropriate or criminal behaviour is dealt with by the police.

Teresa, on the other hand, lives very close to Julie, but not on an estate: she is a homeowner, being part of a shared ownership scheme¹ for key workers in London. Her house is terraced, and she has a small front garden, as well as a large back garden. She lives there with her two sons, two dogs and two cats. The council collects her waste from her front door, as well as her recycling. She has a “wheelie bin”² for her general waste, which sits in her front garden and is emptied by the council once a week, and a recycling box, which she keeps just outside her front door. Teresa’s kitchen is very close to the front door, and whenever she has anything to recycle she puts it in the box outside straight away, which is handy because her kitchen is rather small and doesn’t allow for a lot of storage.

In the blue recycling box Teresa has to separate glass from cans, and she has an extra bag, also provided by the council, for paper and cardboard, of which she recycles quite a lot, hence the need for the extra bag. She is very happy with this system and on good terms with the “recycling guys,” as she calls them, because “they do a great job”; she doesn’t know the waste collectors because they often come when she is out of the house, so she doesn’t have a chance to see them. Crucially, Teresa does not have to go through any “communal” spaces to deal with her waste or recycling, which are both collected straight from her front garden:

We put them just outside the door, it’s a brilliant system, I’m sure you could improve it but no, you just pop it outside the door on Friday and they come and take it away, I don’t know what [it] is like with the flats and to be honest it’s all very well sitting here gloating saying yes we recycle but, the guys in flats and things, actually is not as easy as you think, I don’t know if I could be bothered to take all my things down from the thirteenth floor or whatever downstairs, on a

¹ Shared ownership schemes in the UK allow local key workers on low salaries (nurses, teachers, policemen, etc.) to own property where they would normally not be able to afford them because of very high house prices. They work on a part-buy part-rent system, where individuals buy part of the property and pay rent on the portion they do now own. Conditions and details vary not just across region but even across London, according to whatever borough and housing associations are running the scheme.

² Traditionally councils in the UK collect rubbish from individual dwellings in “wheelie bins,” large capacity bins that residents push to the front of the house weekly for collection, as well as their recycling, depending on what system their local council runs.

certain day at a certain time, and have to live with all that waste for a week, in my kitchen until then... I don't think I would be as happy.

Teresa's and Julie's experiences of recycling and waste are clearly very different. Julie is committed to recycling, and this is due not in small part to the pressure that her children put on her, from a school that tells them that recycling is good and something that "helps saving the polar bears." She does not want her children to feel they are not doing the right thing, or that they are different. However it is not always easy, and what we have not considered here, due to lack of space, are the millions of reasons why people like Julie may find it hard to recycle. Teresa hints at taking things down from a thirteenth floor, and I can easily remember how residents found it hard enough to take themselves and their children, often small, up and down the stairs when the lifts were invariably broken. Or how small their kitchens were, making the storing of recyclables simply impossible, especially materials like glass, who could be dangerous for curious toddlers and pets. Or how far even the recycling bins themselves often were, so that taking loads of materials there, often while pushing a pram or minding a couple of children, was not just impractical but simply impossible. But was this just a technical problem, or was there more to it?

Officers, Politicians and Policy

Tom is the Housing Officer in charge of the estate that Julie lives on. He thinks estates residents lack the necessary discipline to engage in recycling, and is not at all convinced that door-to-door recycling schemes should be introduced, not without an extensive educational campaign before hand at least. Having worked on an estate that did have such a scheme in operation, he became aware of a number of difficulties involved in the scheme. Tenants were constantly leaving bags out for collection on the wrong day, or in the wrong place; putting items that could not be recycled in the bags, thus contaminating entire loads; and bags were being ripped open by foxes and rats, usually because residents had not washed cans properly before putting them in the bags. And all this, he stressed to me, was on an estate for older people, without any children or teenagers around—he stressed the lack of children a number of times—and with what he called the "ideal" types of property for recycling, meaning terraced houses with ground floor access and a front garden for residents to leave their bags out without causing any nuisance.

Tom's views and fears were echoed by the local councillor, Terry. Much as both men were always ready to come out and defend estates and their residents from outside criticism, and both worked hard for their residents, Tom and Terry did not think it would be a good idea to introduce a scheme that required so much "discipline" of the residents. They both used the same word, discipline, and clearly expressed their

lack of trust in the residents’ ability to cope with such a system. This lack of trust in estates residents, and especially those in high rise blocks, and doubts about their ability to engage effectively with recycling practices is echoed and institutionalized in Southwark’s own Waste Management Strategy for 2003–2021

The use of chutes to collect the majority of waste arisings and the proliferation of high rise accommodation limits the actions the council can take to stem the growth in Southwark’s waste. For example, where in other areas of the UK, authorities may limit bin size and move to biweekly collections, this is unrealistic and unlikely to have any effect where residents are simply able to push full bags down a chute. (p. 25)

This quote suggests that people provided with communal, as opposed to individualized, waste collection services are not likely to take part in any kind of waste reduction strategy. Skeggs (2004) and others, following Bourdieu (1984), have argued that judgments to do with classifications tell us more about those doing the judging than about the ones they are supposed to be observed and regulated for. Talking specifically about recycling, it seems that estates residents are perceived and mis-represented by their own councils as being unconcerned with environmental issues, which in turn shapes the policies that are put in place around them.

I have argued above that waste behaviours are socially significant practices; moreover, I have posed the view that recycling can be seen as a socially agreed moral imperative to do with creating caring, valuable selves who are concerned with the environment and their area. The activities and rituals of recycling described by Hawkins (2006)—but essentially denied through policies to the Peckham tenants—serve to create a caring self which is the same as that identified by Skeggs (2004), able to accrue value onto themselves through correct engagement in the right sort of practices.

Valuations

The ethnography has shown that certain people and certain places—social tenants and housing estates—are routinely excluded from processes of value creation, such as recycling, by virtue of not having access to them, or having very restricted access compared to those who live in single dwellings like detached and terraced houses. The unregulated tenants on the estates—who are regulated in every other respect of their lives, of course—cannot take part in this circuit of value creation because of their positioning in spaces both physical and social that are not conducive to the accrual of value. If recycling is about adding value to waste and turning it into something useful, valuable again, it would make sense that those at the bottom of the social hierarchy would be represented—and created, through policies

—as unable to participate because lacking in value themselves, and therefore disrupting of the value creating process.

On the one hand, this can be seen just as another manifestation of the widespread framing of social problems, such as poverty, or in this case the incorrect processing of waste materials, whose causes are largely structural, as outcomes of individual failures, and symptomatic of some sort of moral lack on the part of the poor, usually a lack of middle class discipline. This aspect is undeniably true, but there are perhaps other layers that can be highlighted through theories of value specifically.

Talking about value means understanding people's cosmologies and their ideas about society at large, about who they consider to be part of it, as "the range of people who are willing to recognise certain forms of value constitutes the extent of what an actor considers a 'society' to consist of" (Graeber 2005, 452). This is an idea that social anthropologist David Graeber has developed from another anthropologist, Turner, who also had something very important to say about value and power. Turner (1979) argued that in every society the real context is not over value per se, but over the ability to define what value is. This insight is crucial to this article, and closely related to what Thompson (1979) argues about the role of rubbish, as we have seen above. By defining waste as the dynamic category that mediates value between durables—such as antiques—that are liable to increase their value over time, and transients—such as cars—that are liable to lose value, Thompson shows how it is always those at the top of their societies' hierarchies that are in a position to name and define objects as durable, therefore effectively establishing what value is.

This article is therefore about the tensions generated when different groups of people and their values—what they consider valuable amongst themselves—clash with each other. It is about the complex situations created by groups generating value at one level—of the individual household through "correct" recycling practices, for example,—clashing with other groups trying to change an area by generating different types of values—economic, fiscal (more council tax and less benefits) and social. These issues are to do with what people value, how this value is expressed and produced always in a social context (Graeber 2001) vis-à-vis a hierarchical power structure that allows only certain types of individuals to accrue value onto themselves (Skeggs 2004) and therefore name value as they define it (Turner 1979; Thompson 1979).

Ultimately, valuing and wasting are always interlinked and complementary processes: in order to value something, something is devalued; whenever we add value to something, something else is wasted. The regeneration of the estates in Peckham rested on a narrative that said that what was wasted did not matter. Symbolic devaluation—the narrative of the bid created by the LBS—aided and

allowed the physical destruction to take place, in fact it was instrumental and implicated in it. It was only by symbolically devaluing working class people and their homes that it was possible for “redevelopments” to take place: if they did not matter, if they were like waste already, then it was acceptable—morally right, even—to demolish the estates, and also, crucially, it was not important to consider where the people would end up. To “regenerate them out,” as Mary said. What the ethnography did now was showing how through exclusion from specific value producing processes—recycling in this case—people, estates, homes, communities were practically and symbolically devalued. Decanting and expulsion from the area were the logical outcome of a process of cleansing of people and communities that were deemed to be beyond improving, and whose only contribution to the betterment of the area was moving away.

Conclusion

The article began with the statement “We *was* regenerated out,” made by a woman who lived through the regeneration of Peckham in the early nineties, explicitly bringing together the apparently separate issues waste recycling and urban regeneration. I have tried to make sense of this connection by exploring parallels and contradictions between these two processes, moving from the macro level of wastage of the urban environment to the micro-level of waste disposal inside of people’s homes, through dirty corridors and down smelly chutes. I have juxtaposed the story of Mary, who lost her home in the process, to the practices of other residents who couldn’t deal “appropriately” with their waste, and to the accounts of officers and politicians who regulated, in an institutional capacity, both processes of regeneration and recycling.

The ethnography explored the ways in which estates inhabitants were routinely excluded from practices such as recycling, because they were not deemed disciplined enough to be able to take part, or possibly because their extremely low positioning in the social hierarchy prevented them from taking part in a morally loaded practice that involves adding value to both materials and human selves. At the same time, it also showed how the estates that were demolished had to be symbolically remade as waste in order to attract government funding, and then be purged of their own original inhabitants so that regeneration could be effectively achieved.

This analysis positions the article clearly in the field of critical urban studies, responding to the call of Slater (2006) and Allen (2008) for a more critical appraisal of processes of urban gentrification, and follows in the footsteps of Lees’ (2007) work on gentrification and social mixing on the nearby Aylesbury estate. Indeed, the hypothesis that the process that took place in Peckham was about changing the

population rather than improving their housing is supported by the latest plans the council has approved for those areas.

The original plans for regenerating the Five Estates in the nineties relied heavily on reducing density in order to turn the area into a “desirable” residential location. The predicted outcome of the process was to reduce density from 350 h.r.h (habitable rooms per hectare) to 270 h.r.h (Peckham SRB Bid, p. 15). This meant the loss of 1,363 individual homes, which by a conservative estimate would mean at least 2,000 people had to move without the possibility of returning to the area. As we have seen previously, density reduction was one of the main reasons—together with changes in tenure and dwelling sizes—why people could not go back to their homes, even when they wanted to, which many did.

By 2011, however, density policies had changed, and the area covered by this research, Peckham, has been designated as an “action area” within an “urban zone.” Density targets for “urban zones” vary between 200 and 700 h.r.h, and within “action areas” “the maximum densities may be exceeded when developments are of an exemplary standard of design” (Southwark Residential Design Standards 2011, p. 8). This means standard developments in Peckham can be as dense as 700 h.r.h, which is twice as much as the original density in the nineties, and potentially could go higher if the council deems the development to be of a high enough standard.

This outcome, the displacement of low-income citizens to be replaced by the young, affluent middle classes, is clearly in line with the aims of the SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) funding that supported the scheme, which as we saw at the beginning of this article was part of a much larger series of programs that aimed to foster regeneration through the development of “mixed communities.” This was also not simply a UK phenomenon. In Chicago, for example, Betancur (2002, 794) has shown how in the area of West Town these ideas had very real impacts on the people they are supposed to “help,” including “highly destructive processes of class, race, ethnicity and alienation involved in gentrification.” Lipman (2012), strengthened this argument for Chicago by showing, for example, that the supposed nexus between educational achievement of African American students and their residential location and/or segregation was negligible, and that the dislocation of families and school age children caused much more harm than any supposed disadvantage they suffered from living in “non-mixed communities.” Bridge, Butler and Lees (2012) have thoroughly buried, under the staggering weight of comparative evidence they collected from across the globe, the notion that the various “mixed communities” policies were ever anything but harmful to the dwellers they were bestowed upon, regardless of the stated aims of the individual programs.

Within this context the statement “we *was* regenerated out” is no longer far fetched, but can be read as a rational explanation for a phenomenon experienced by a respondent whose home and neighbourhood had been put through an enormous amount of change, stress, physical and social disruption. Mary understood perfectly well that what had happened was not for her benefit, nor for her children or grandchildren. The area that she managed, only just, to remain in, certainly looks better now, but this was not done for her: her shattered community was the by-product of regeneration, which far from being similar to recycling simply wasted what was there in the first place—poor, inner-city, diverse communities—to import, or buy in, a new population of middle class, home-owning professionals.

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