The urban injustices of New Labour's 'new urban renewal': the case of the Aylesbury Estate in London

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Introduction

> 'Regeneration was always ever a gentrification strategy, and we knew it. We knew it from Blair's 1997 launch of New Labour's regeneration policy from the stigmatised Aylesbury Estate in London where the desperate "70s class-neutral language of revitalisation, recycling, renaissance and especially regeneration was revived in the 2000s – a language as deliberately anocdyne as it is ideological and mendacious; an environmentally friendly cover for class cleansing in the urban landscape' (Neil Smith, 2011, on Owen Hatherley's *Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*).

Now that New Labour's era of urban renaissance has hit the buffers of both an economic downturn and a change of government it is time to reflect on the urban injustices it has left in its wake. In this paper I focus on the urban injustices that have been practiced on the Aylesbury Estate in London. I look at how the socio-materiality of the Aylesbury was discursively constructed by those with power in order to further their goals of regeneration, that is state-led gentrification, into a new 'mixed income', new-build community. I question the truth claims that have been made about the Aylesbury as a 'sink estate' and argue that they serve/d dominant interests. I look at how choices have been closed down for the estate's residents and how their support for the regeneration programme has been misrepresented. In so doing I expose a variety of unjust practices that have been, and are being, enacted on the Aylesbury Estate. But importantly I look at what the residents think about the whole process (seeking alternative knowledges, imaginaries, logics) and how they have resisted, and are resisting, dominant interests and practices (cr. Marcuse et al., 2009).

The Aylesbury Estate, built between 1967 to 1977, is located south of Elephant and Castle in the London Borough of Southwark (see Figure 1). It was designed by architect Hans Peter Trenton and was one of the most ambitious post-war housing developments built by any London borough. It was the epitomy of the social aspirations of modernist architecture and planning. It was designed as a mesh of panel system built tower blocks and low rise flats with elevated concrete walkways which would link a number of estates between Elephant and Castle and Peckham (see Figure 2). At the time the 2,700 dwellings were designed to house a population of roughly 10,000 residents. The estate is named after Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire and the various blocks on the estate are named after other local towns and villages, like Chiltern, Latimer, Taplow, etc.

In the 1980s the estate fell into disrepair, deprivation increased as old tenants moved out and new tenants moved in due to changes in council allocation policies, and it gained a reputation for poverty, crime and anti-social behaviour. The decline of the Aylesbury was coincident with the u-turn made by the Thatcher government on council housing and with trenchant critiques in the UK of high rise public housing estates (see Coleman, 1985; also Jacobs and Lees, under review). The Aylesbury is now in the bottom category on the ACORN

classification for inner city adversity, signifying an area of extremely high social disadvantage: 68% of the residents are from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (compared to 48% in the borough, 2001 Census) and in the late 1990s it became a reception area for refugees and asylum seekers. Most of the estate is made up of flats, only 2% are houses, and only 17% of the residences are private through 'right to buy'. With a population of approximately 7,500 (2001 Census) on 28.5 hectares of land the Aylesbury Estate is the largest public housing estate in Europe and is in the process of being demolished and rebuilt with *mixed income* new-build housing[1].

Grammars of In/justice and the policy of mixed communities

The rhetoric of mixed communities policy in the UK echoes the rhetoric of New Labour's 'urban renaissance' (see Lees, 2003; Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2011). In New Labour's urban renaissance the council estate played a symbolic and ideological role as a signifier of a spatially concentrated, dysfunctional underclass. Blair's Social Exclusion Unit was set up to deal with such social problems:

> 'Over the last two decades the gap between these worst estates and the rest of the country has grown....It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division' (Blair in SEU, 1998:1).

And council estates were one of their main concerns:

> '....over the past 20 years, poverty has become more concentrated in individual neighbourhoods and estates than before, and the social exclusion of these neighbourhoods has become more marked' (SEU, 2000:7).

New Labour were right poverty had become concentrated on many council estates, and this itself is part of the history of council housing in the UK. Council housing was one of the biggest social revolutions in modern British history, the radical idea being that the state should provide houses for the working classes. The first council estate, The Boundary Estate, was built in London in 1900. After WWI Lloyd George enacted the 1919 Town and Country Planning Act which charged local authorities with providing houses for those *in need* in their areas. Later the 1949 Housing Act opened up council housing *for all*, as Nye Bevan wanted all classes to live together in a new classless society. In the 1950s and 60s inner city slums were bulldozed through urban renewal programmes that built new council estates in their place, including a number of modernist high rise estates, such as the Aylesbury. The 1960s marked the high point of state council housing construction. By the mid-1970s over a third of housing in the UK was council, this marked the high water point. From the mid-1970s onwards there was a gradual downgrading of council housing, in 1977 under a Labour government council housing was no longer for the masses but only to be allocated to those *in real need* eg. welfare recipients, single mothers and the homeless. Since then a series of 'moral panics' have emerged over the residents of council estates. In the 1980s with the legislation of Thatcher's 'right to buy' the council housing system began to implode (see Power, 1997). New Labour's 'new urban renewal' (I have taken this term from Hyra, 2008, who uses it to describe the US's HOPE VI program of poverty deconcentration in which public housing projects in US inner cities have been demolished to make way for mixed income housing) was the final death sentence for monolithic council estates in Britain.

From 1997 New Labour tasked itself with dealing with the downgrading of council estates. The Social Exclusion Unit and the Urban Task Force both promoted the idea of mixed

[1] The history and fate of the Aylesbury Estate mirrors, in many ways, Cabrini Green in Chicago – one of the largest public housing projects in the US (see Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008: 203-204, on state-led gentrification and Cabrini Green) which is being redeveloped through the federal HOPE VI programme (on HOPE VI see Cisneros and Engdahl, 2009; Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2011).

communities (see Lees, 2003,2008). Drawing on ideas about an 'underclass' (see Murray, 1990) they set about deconcentrating the poverty on British council estates (see Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2011, on the relationship between the US policy of poverty deconcentration and British mixed communities policy; and Wallace, 2010, on New Labour and the governance of poor neighbourhoods). As Levitas (1998) and Watt and Jacobs (2000) have argued their ideas were dominated by a moral underclass perspective even if it came out as a social integrationist one. To New Labour council estates were a product of past failed attempts at social engineering. But they replaced a more benign social engineering with a more revanchist form of social engineering – the goal being a new moral order of respectable and well behaved (middle class) residents. This was especially revanchist on those large council estates in the UK being completely demolished and rebuilt as mixed communities. As Jones (2008:356) has argued:

> 'In many ways the process of realizing urban developments in the UK today, with the emphasis on partnership working, community involvement and sustainability, is significantly different from the process as it operated during the post war building boom. In other respects, however, there are some striking similarities'.

Hyra (2008) discusses similar mixed income projects in Chicago and New York City:

> 'At the turn of the twenty-first century, America is experiencing a new round of urban renewal...communities have gone from being red-lined to green-lined, from the crack house to the coffee shop...It is imperative that scholars uncover the dynamics and consequences associated with these monumental transformations' (p.5).

Like Jones (2008), Hyra (2008) finds striking similarities and differences between post-war urban renewal in the US and the 'new urban renewal'- the differences issue around race and class. Race but especially class are significant in the Aylesbury story too.

Grammars of Injustice on the Aylesbury Estate

On the day after New Labour's general election victory in 1997 Tony Blair made an unexpected visit to the Aylesbury Estate where he launched New Labour's version of the US's 'welfare to work programme', making an infamous speech highlighting the Aylesbury Estate's residents as Britain's 'poorest' and the 'forgotten', many of whom 'play[ed] no formal role in the economy and were dependent on benefits' (Blair, 2007). Very quickly afterwards the Aylesbury was given New Deal for Communities (NDC) status and studies began on how the estate could be regenerated. The NDC was given £56.2m over 10 years in order to lever in a further £400m as part of its proposed stock transfer from council to housing association tenure. But the local community voted in a local referendum against the stock transfer of the Aylesbury from Southwark Council in December 2001. 73% voted to keep the whole estate council (76% of the estate voted). Mr Corbyn, who is the brother of the London Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, said: 'This is a big blow to the gentrification of Southwark!' (Weaver, 2001).

Although there was undoubtedly tenant dissatisfaction with the appearance of the estate, its maintenance, cleanliness, lighting, security and crime, most of the tenants interviewed in a MORI poll at the time were satisfied with their accommodation and with the estate as a place to live (*Southwark News*, 18.04.2002). Southwark Council were forced to retain ownership of the Aylesbury and rethink. But after more studies on 27 September 2005 the Liberal Democrat-led Southwark Council decided that the estate was too expensive to refurbish and that demolition was the most cost effective solution. They set about persuading the tenants that the estate was structurally unsound and a poor quality place to live:

> ‘Over 70% voted to refurbish, because people didn’t want to move. So I’m thinking if it was that bad, everybody would have said – lets’ go, let’s get rid of it. People, including myself, voted to make it better. Instead of moving us out, they could have repaired it. It’s been done on other estates...That’s what people wanted. It was turned down. What people wanted they didn’t agree...’ (interview Head of a TRA, 2011).

There has been research into the ways that ‘outside’ agents/forces like the media, government and others have produced discourses of urban decline, of a ‘sin city’, to further their retaking of the inner city (see Smith, 1996; and Lees and Demeritt, 1998, for a review); there has been less work investigating the purchase of these discourses from ‘inside’ of deprived neighbourhoods. This paper looks at both. In so doing it draws on both archival research and textual analysis of relevant documents (eg. policy and planning documents, newspaper accounts, minutes of council meetings etc), discourse analysis of video documentation by *Spectacle* (an independent television production company specialising in documentary and community-led investigative journalism - see www.spectacle.co.uk) on the consultation process in the early 2000s, and from in depth interviews with tenants organizations, leaseholder organizations, the regeneration bodies and TRAs (Tennants and Resident’s Associations) associated with individual blocks, undertaken in early 2011.

The grammar of the ‘sink estate’

> ‘...It matters little that the discourses of demonization that have mushroomed about them often have only tenuous connection to the reality of everyday life in them’ (Wacquant, 1999:1644).

Morrison (2003) has argued that there is a powerful language at work in regeneration projects which contrasts us (the middle class) with them (the working/under class), that a stereotyping and pathologising language is used. Southwark Council and the Aylesbury NDC did not just have to persuade the tenants that the estate was a poor place to live, but the wider public too. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* (http://aylesburytenantsfirst.org.uk/) allege that the Aylesbury NDC funded a PR press campaign that branded them ‘The Estate from Hell’ in *The Times* and *The Independent* newspapers in 2008.

Here are some excerpts:
From *The Times*:

> ‘Red Lion Row, a tiny South London backstreet overshadowed by one of the bleak grey apartment blocks of the infamous Aylesbury estate, has had a bloody recent history. It was here, last Boxing Day, that a 20-year-old Nigerian-born asylum-seeker named Dipo Seweje was shot dead after being chased through the estate. His body lay undiscovered for 26 hours in a communal garden.
>
> Here, too, in late 2005 an 18-year-old pastor's daughter, Ruth Okechukwu, was pulled from a car and stabbed repeatedly by a teenage Angolan immigrant for failing to show him respect. A bunch of long-dead flowers marks the spot where she died’ (Fletcher, 2008).

From *The Independent*:

> ‘It sounds like the marketing job from hell. A top public relations firm has been hired to give a good name to one of Britain's most notorious housing estates. The 7,500

> residents of the Aylesbury Estate in south London are well aware that their home has become a byword for all that is worst about the concrete jungles built in haste during the 1960s housing boom'(McSmith, 2008).

The tabloids did likewise - *The Sunday People* made the estate an emblem of the government's failure with respect to council estates, one columnist said: 'Estates like the Aylesbury and Heygate are where the new generation of drunks, junkies, muggers and wreckers are growing up now'. *The Daily Mail* said: 'To walk around the sprawling landscape of the Aylesbury estate is like visiting hell's waiting room' (http://mtvgenerationgems.blogspot.com/2009/06/aylesbury-estate.html)!

This media denigration was very useful for the NDC as it branded both the community and its residents as deviant and untrustworthy and thus justifying paternalistic treatment of them. It also stereotyped them as abnormal and needing the influence of higher income neighbours, aiding their pursuit of a newly built 'mixed' community. Staff in Southwark Council's regeneration department underlined their feelings about the Aylesbury when, in 2008, they were ferried to the nearest tube station every night after work to prevent them having to walk through the Aylesbury Estate and risk being mugged. This bus service cost the council £650 a week (and was reported in *The Daily Mail*); it underlined the notoriety of the estate and legitimated their plans for the estate.

In fact by 2005 the Aylesbury Estate had become a national symbol of urban blight, a symbol of British high rise sink estates, when it featured on TV shows like The Bill and Spooks (see Smith, 1996, on 'the gentrification of primetime'). This culminated in Channel 4 using it as a logo to promote itself between programmes (here a camera moves along a grim upper section of a block of flats, the Latimer, and there is a sense of decay, despair and foreboding - see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfOHndPQFw). This was symbolic of material dilapidation and socio-economic marginality.

But what did residents on the Aylesbury, an estate that had been categorised as deprived and stigmatised as a 'sink estate' actually think about their own back yard? Every resident who was interviewed was clear that there was poverty on the estate but that to classify it as a 'sink estate' was wrong. Some of the residents talked about politicians visiting the estate after these media reports were published, actually searching for the 'sink estate', but to no avail:

> 'The best example was many years ago when the regeneration first started with the Aylesbury, was having politicians coming through the estate. Now we just walked them through the estate and they said where are all the youth hanging on the corner, where's all your trouble. I said it isn't here!' (interview A, 2011).

Residents contacted the newspapers and complained about the stories: 'I wrote back and said it's not a hell hole to live in. There's people that live here' ... 'don't just keep telling us we live in shit and that we've got drugs, crime, prostitution and everything around us when we haven't....that really, really angers me' (interview B, 2011). Others could see through it: 'So all this banter about it being full of gunned and knife yielding gangs is all just fantasy and plays right into the hands of the council...as I said, this discourse, this system of statements, behind which is some kind of clear agenda' (interview D, 2011).

Importantly, whatever the truth of the matter, the construction of the Aylesbury as a 'sink estate', helped the Council and the NDC, but they had to prove that they had the support of the majority of the residents for their demolition/regeneration programme.

One of the big selling points of the 'deal' was/is that residents will decide their own futures. This is a cruel deception. The tenants were faced with two unsatisfactory choices, if they rejected the regeneration 'deal' they would continue to live on an estate that needs upgrading and repair (but would be very unlikely to get it) *or* if they accepted the deal (which actually they didn't!) they could have a newly built neighbourhood in which they may not even get a chance to live and even if they did move back their existing community would be broken up and totally changed. Any meaningful choice was/is highly constrained by the neglect of the Aylesbury (and much of the council housing sector) in terms of broken lifts, heating, dirtiness, etc (the most mentioned issues in interviews[2]). Yet those who live on the estate are clear that despite the lack of attention to maintenance and repair, it is, for the most part, sound:

> '... the estates are quite, quite good to be demolished...some of these buildings nothing wrong with them...It just needs some investment' (interview C, 2011).
>
> 'But they're lovely flats. We live in good flats. Why should we have to move? (interview, TRA representative, 2011).
>
> 'I think this is stronger than what they are building now. But this bit about...it's like a pack of cards and is going to fall down and all that...I think that's propaganda stuff, I think' (interview, TRA representative, 2011).

Bennington et al. (2004:270) argue that NDCs in London were in a unique position to lever in funds due to the high land values, property prices and a city–wide context where demand out stripped supply. Watt (2009:235) goes further and argues that the contrast between disinvested local authority stock in London and the highly valuable land it sits on has created a 'state-induced rent gap' with massive capital accumulation potential. The Aylesbury was, and still is, emblematic of this 'state-induced rent gap'.

The grammar of consensus

> 'Wholehearted community engagement has been at the heart of the AAP process from the outset and residents have been integral in shaping the plan. I would like to thank all of the local people who have put so many hours, along with the Aylesbury New Deal for Communities, into shaping this crucial document. 82% of residents expressed support for the plans at the final exhibition...We are confident that the extensive consultation over the last four years, together with a careful master planning process have resulted in an AAP which reflects the aspirations of the local community' (*Revitalise: Aylesbury Area Action Plan*, Southwark Council, 2010).
>
> 'They've made up their minds. So it's full stop. They've made up their minds as to what they're going to do' (interview C, 2011).
>
> 'They're telling you you would be listened to....Yeah you come along and we'll listen to what you're saying. But it's just a bit of show because they don't really take what you said. They make up their minds and they're just saying that so that it looks good' (interview Head of a TRA, 2011).

[2] Baxter and Lees (2009) show that these are also the most significant issues for high rise residents across the whole of inner London.

Ten years after Tony Blair's visit to the estate the Aylesbury NDC's Steve Pearce claimed: 'No social transformation is possible without physical transformation' (Redeveloping the Aylesbury Estate, Regeneration Good Practice Talks, London South Bank University, 15th March 2007; www.lsbu.ac.uk/lepu/regeneration/index.shtml). The NDC and Southwark Council then chose an urban planning and design practice - Urban Initiatives - to draw up a master plan for the £2.4 billion 20 year regeneration of the Aylesbury. Urban Initiatives prepared an Area Action Plan (AAP) over a period of two years which was passed by Southwark Council in January 2010. According to Urban Initiatives an essential part of developing a robust AAP was imaginative and continuous consultation with those with a stake in the area. Indeed, they claim that 'by going above and beyond the statutory requirements we have created a plan with real community buy-in and ownership' (London Calling, 2010:12). They set up a neighbourhood team of 40 individuals representing residents, local businesses and social and community groups in the Aylesbury. Rebbeca Beer, Managing Consultant at Urban Initiatives stated:

> 'We worked closely with the Team throughout the project – we provided urban design training, took them on visits to Paris, Glasgow, Dublin and Amsterdam to demonstrate best practice examples of regeneration elsewhere; and played a bespoke planning game to understand the trade offs between development densities, the provision of open space and community facilities, as well as project funding and delivery' (London Calling, 2010:13).

Beer claims that the regeneration of the Aylesbury has been, and indeed is being, guided by a community-led area action plan. The Aylesbury project has been hailed as a prototype in tenant-led democracy. Anti-gentrification groups would beg to differ and despite the much touted claims about widespread consultation many tenants have not been involved. Significantly whatever the outcome, it will now be the tenants themselves, not the architects or planners, who will be blamed. The group *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* are especially critical of Southwark Council's consultation literature and exhibitions for giving out misleading information. They ask how come the Council ignored the 2001 ballot against demolition (undertaken with the ballot on stock transfer) where 73% of the 76% of tenants who responded voted against demolition. The group are currently investigating the corruption of this process. They ask: If the regeneration plans are community-led, as Urban Initiatives argues, then why was there not support for the stock transfer and the demolition of the estate from the tenants? Further *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* claim that the AAP is misleading in stating that there will only be 250 fewer family homes to rent when in fact there will be 700 fewer homes for ordinary people to rent on the estate. They argue that the loss of social housing is masked by new terms like 'affordable housing' which incorporate more expensive part rent/part buy properties and by the fact that the Council is not obliged to provide for anyone who does not have a secure tenancy. *Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First* clearly allign themselves with wider campaigns over council housing in the UK.

The grammar of consensus that the Council and the NDC constructed is akin to other examples of post-political consensus. In post-political planning contestation and conflict are supplanted by consensus based politics which smother (but do not replace) conflict/dissent through carefully choreographed processes of participation. One interviewee who had been heavily involved in the consultation process said:

> 'there were workshops, displays, consultation after consultation....we even had a mock up flat to show you what these flats would look like'. 'There was fun days so the parents could come and look at these displays and the kids could have free food,

> fairground, bouncy castle...representatives within the estate, the Council and the NDC worked with...the Bengali group, the Turkish women's group...It was bloody hard work...We all came and did it. All free of charge. All that work we've done over the years has all been free of charge' (interview with Creation Trust board member, 2011).

Another resident said:

> 'we were like literally courted by the Council and the developers, the council's PR machine at the time, with fancy sandwiches, and pretty girls showing you all these nice models of how the estate could potentially look' (interview D, 2011).

In doing this the Council and the NDC were able to mobilise the (middle class) strategy that they wanted. The Aylesbury's future was/is being decided in neoliberal times and neoliberal governmentality has replaced debate and disagreement (Sywngedouw, 2009:604). As August and Walks (2011) show dissent and dissenters are repoliticised and cast aside as regressive and parochial, tenants are represented as naive, un-sophisticated, irrational, unreasonable and as trouble makers. Communicative planning was supposed to respond to the issues that emerged over social engineering and collaborative planning was to be overtly consensus based, but neither have solved the top down tradition of planning. In this way the social engineering planned for the Aylesbury was/is no different to that associated with the slum clearances that were part of the story of the birth of the Aylesbury (and many other high rise estates). But although very reminiscent of the past urban renewal, this new urban renewal is different, in that the bulk of the new properties will house rich residents who did not live there before.

The 1960s vision for the Aylesbury was for an egalitarian estate created through architecture and planning, the 1990s vision, which has yet to be replaced, is for an inclusive, mixed community at the neighbourhood level. The demolition and displacement that occurred with the 1960s slum clearances for the initial construction of the Aylesbury is no different to the demolition and displacement that began in 2010 as the first residents were moved out. This is social engineering, social cleansing, sold as urban renewal/regeneration. The arguments put forward then and now are similar - poor quality housing, poverty, crime, etc; but the means to attain redevelopment has changed significantly - from centrally planned mass production to a public/private partnership (and there is a real fear now that it may be a purely private development in the future). The mode of governance, however, remains as top down as it did in the 1960s urban renewal schemes, despite new processes of public participation. As Brenner and Theodore (2002) remind us - neoliberal policy experiments operate in the context of past political projects and their legacy.

In fact, consensus building reached new heights when, in 2010, The Creation Trust, a community development trust (CDT), became the successor organisation to the Aylesbury NDC. Creation Trust is a charity, a local voluntary sector organization, that works as an advocate for tenants and residents in improving their quality of life and developing dynamic partnerships between communities, local and central government and businesses during Aylesbury's regeneration (see www.creationtrust.org/index.php?css_type=3). The reality is that many ex-NDC people make up the Creation Trust and their stance on the Aylesbury is no different despite the change of governance.

The grammar of the 'sim estate'

> ‘A neighbourhood where there is a mix of tenures, incomes, ages and household types. Mixed communities help to overcome the problems associated with areas of deprivation such as reduced local business activity, limited local jobs and employment ambitions, downward pressures on school quality, high levels of crime and disorder, and health inequalities’ (Aylesbury AAP - Preferred Options Report, Southwark Council).

> ‘The people who are going to be living here in the future, which excludes all of us who have been kicked out as part of the scheme, will be better educated no doubt, and will be wealthier’ (interview D, 2011).

Once the decision to demolish the Aylesbury Estate had been made by the Council, the concept of social mix became the discursive vehicle with which to sell the plan to both the public and the residents. The new Aylesbury was going to be more socially inclusive, better designed, and contain more social capital. Social mix has been set up as the alternative to the degeneration and under-maintenance of the housing stock, mirroring the “false choice” (outlined in the above section on the sink estate) between gentrification and neighbourhood decline (see DeFilippis 2004). Given the pressure under New Labour’s 2000 Decent Homes Standard which required better council house standards, but giving local authorities no funding to achieve this, it is not surprising that Southwark Council went down this road (see Watt, 2009). The strategy for the demolition and rebuilding of the Aylesbury estate (The Aylesbury Estate: Revised Strategy) lists the construction of 3,200 private new build homes and 2,000 social rented new build homes. This fulfils the (then) UDP requirement for 40% social housing. But in essence the plan is to demolish the vast majority of the Aylesbury (despite much of it being structurally sound) and to create a new-build development that will attract middle class in-comers. This is a clear example of a policy of state-led gentrification premised on mixed communities policy (see Lees, 2008; Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2011). The plan does not acknowledge the ‘mix’ already present on the Aylesbury, which is already very socially and ethnically diverse, nor does it address issues of social sustainability. Moreover, it undermines the estate functioning as a reception area for people seeking asylum, displacing this function elsewhere.

In the NDC’s promotional material there is no recognition that different social groups may have different interests and middle-class strengths are presented as something that will be advantageous for low-income people – whose social networks are allegedly weaker. But tenants proclaim that their estate is already ‘mixed’:

> ‘I think all this is rubbish to me. We have professionals living among our mix’ (interview C, 2011).

And they can see through the council concealing exclusionary sentiments in the progressive clothing of social mix, indeed they are clear that the idea and rhetoric of social mix is being used to detract from the fact that the council are going to privatise much of the property and land:

> ‘So I don’t think they actually said it in any sort of words. But it was a policy, it was a strategy that they gradually implemented in a very quiet, interesting way. If you look at Southwark, it’s very close to the City, very close to Westminster and what have you. So it would be very attractive to city goers....if it stays the way it is they’re not going to come and live in the estate’ (interview C, 2011).

> ‘I think that (the idea of social mix) belongs to more high level policies. I think these are the dominant discourses that worked their way down from government

> level...where it's proposed that by making more of a mix and not having such a segregated, and such contrasting differences between people in estates (and elsewhere) will have a positive outcome' (interview D, 2011).
>
> 'I don't think they were really trying to sell the social mix...behind closed doors I think what they probably say is that they'll attract new businesses and new people. Obviously guys with the money...So there's a lot of undertone to it, which implies what's going to happen. But nobody is actually saying that we're going to bring people from the City to come and live with you...' (interview TO representative, 2011).

Blomley (2004:99) has criticised a similar 'game' in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where property owners 'deployed a language of balance in the service of exclusion' (see also August and Walks, 2011).

In this particular case it is critical to see the relationship between the notion of creating mixed communities (the new 'sim' estate) and displacement (see also Davidson and Lees, 2010). The physical regeneration of the estate as suggested in current plans will displace approximately 20% of the existing households, the people whom, ironically the regeneration process is being targeted at. The existing leaseholders who bought under 'right to buy' will be priced out. The 1,850-2,050 'left over' social tenants might be appeased with new homes but will have to fit themselves into a new community almost twice the current density and in which the majority of the inhabitants will be middle class gentrifiers. Nevertheless, Southwark Council is going ahead with their plans to bring the middle classes into the Aylesbury, hoping that the middle classes will improve standards in local public services and bring more money into the area. The Michigan born Director of Regeneration in Southwark, Fred Manson, said 'We're trying to move people from a benefit-dependency culture to an enterprise culture. If you have 25 to 30 per cent of the population in need, things can still work reasonably well. But above 30 per cent it becomes pathological' (quoted in Barker, 1999). Manson was very close to the Blairite elite, he even advised on the Urban Task Force Report.

The first phase of the demolition began in 2010 and the impacts of displacement[3] are already being felt:

> '...from the very first day that the demolition was announced, the social bond was affected, because people knew that ultimately within the framework of the next few years, they wouldn't be seeing each other on a daily basis again. They wouldn't be part of the same community. I've got a friend of mine – Terry - he could only afford to move out of the area with what the council was offering him for evaluation and ended up moving into a home somewhere just outside Sidcup. Terry's probably in his late 50s and he lives with his wife. He's lived here all his life. He's got people that would see him on a daily basis and his family lives here in the area. He's now living there isolated just outside Sidcup having broken all of his social ties, he's now suffering from severe depression. I think that is symptomatic of a lot of people. There's a lady...she'll come back and she'll come back because she had to move out to ** Heights....she walks the dog around the estate, she'll call into a few people in the neighbourhood who she knows. She says she hates it where she is now. She's probably again in her late 50s. It's not easy to build new social ties, especially the older you are...I think it's had a profound effect on people...I mean the number of

[3] See Davidson 2009 on displacement.

> people I've heard who've died during this decanting process. I mean okay, they being elderly and you could argue that they would have died anyway. But I couldn't count them on my hands because I haven't got enough fingers, the number of people I heard who've passed away as a result of having to move...I have no way of keeping track of this. But for me, it's genocide' (interview, D, 2011).

And it is not just direct displacement that is an issue, the voices of tenants and lower income community groups are likely to be submerged and subordinated by the incoming middle class homeowners, as this group gain power in the area (see August and Walks, 2011).

Residents have real fears for future:

> 'It's going to be a misery when they sell…people will be suffering with depression when they've got to move out. We've got to get…there's got to be vans and everything that pick us up. It's going to be really, really bad. As I said to you I prefer to stay where I am…Before we were told that if we moved out of where we are living, we could have a right to return. That changed…over the last 10 years the council have changed its regeneration over and over again…They say one thing and they change it to the next. People don't know where they are. It's really bad. It really is. … don't take it away from people who have lived here all their lives and move them away from their children. They've got nowhere to go. They're elderly people…some of these could have a heart attack and die. … Why demolish spaces when they are ok? (interview with TRA rep, 2011).

The grammar of resistance

> 'Many radical ideas have been eclipsed by the neoliberal tsunami and, especially in Britain, radical urban critiques have themselves been regenerated out of existence, "curdled into an alibi" for gentrification...The organised left only ever had a spotty record on housing and community politics and no real opposition to Blair's regenerationism emerged there. More broadly, the political defeats after the mid-1980s left many with little energy to fight, and many otherwise good souls, exhausted by the defensive and broadly failed struggles against Thatcher and desperately keen to see a Blairite alternative, concluded that if they couldn't beat them they better join them. Ex-radicals became frontline regeneration managers for local councils, others even became developers. Architects and planners, not generally given to the language of gentrification, levelled no audible objection' (Neil Smith, 2011, on Owen Hatherley's *Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*).

In the last year or so a small group of geographers have become increasingly critical of the adequacy of vocabularies currently used to encapsulate the geography and place of urban injustice, they have been especially critical of the orthodoxy of Neil Smith's (1996) revanchist city and Don Mitchell's (1997) post-justice city (see Cloke et al., 2010; De Verteuil et al, 2009). They are concerned that these current orthodoxies may lead to, at best, incomplete analyses and at worst, inaccurate portrayals that fail to grasp the complexity of urban reality. Extending this newly emerging critique, and indeed earlier critiques (eg. Lees, 1998; MacLeod, 2002), I want to move away from these dystopian grammars of urban injustice (as much as I am attracted to them; on the perverse allure of this - see Merrifield, 2000). For these are caricatures of injustice that leave little room for first, resistance, and second, alternative visions/possibilities. I want to look for a more hopeful grammar of urban

injustice (see Lees, 2004, Marcuse et al., 2009). As such I turn to the grammars of resistance on the Aylesbury Estate.

The fact that the state and public policy became so heavily involved and invested in gentrification in the UK under New Labour, especially in London, made, and still makes, it a complex process to resist. Hackworth and Smith (2001) argued that 'effective resistance to gentrification has declined as the working class is continually displaced from the inner city, and as the most militant anti-gentrification groups of the 1980s morph into housing service providers' (p.468). There have never been especially militant anti-gentrification groups in London (not like those in NYC – see Smith, 1996, on the Tompkins Square Park riots) and resistance to gentrification has not declined in London rather it has become intertwined with campaigns against the demise of council housing (see Watt, 2009). And again 'policy' is important – for new government policy has complicated anti-gentrification efforts in London and the UK. The New Labour government advocated that local communities should play a larger role in urban regeneration partnerships, the rationales were fourfold: 1. local communities have a better idea of their own localized problems and solutions to them; 2. participation empowers them against social exclusion; 3. their local knowledge is a valuable resource to enhance the expertise of urban regeneration partnerships; and 4. this serves democratic and accountability ends (Maginn, 2004:5; cited in Imrie, Lees and Raco, 2009). As Tony Blair said: 'unless the community is fully engaged in shaping and delivering regeneration, even the best plans on paper will fail to deliver in practice' (SEU, 2000:5). Dissent and resistance have been institutionalized into the urban regeneration (gentrification) process and in the same way that it is hard to argue against gentrification when it is sold to us through the morally persuasive discourses of social mixing, it is difficult to argue that the local community does not have a voice in the regeneration plans for their community. Under New Labour the state got hold of all the ribbons! Indeed the whole process of managing community relations became a business in the UK (and especially in London where local politics are more complicated), 'communication specialists' began to offer advice to local boroughs on community and stakeholder engagement (see Plate 1; also view the video clips, etc. on community engagement re. regeneration of the Aylesbury at: http://www.creationtrust.org/index.php?css_type=3). Part of the reason it has been so difficult to criticise British urban policy and resist gentrification in the UK has been because a. the British 'urban renaissance' is actually full of socially, economically and morally persuasive ideas, and b. because they have integrated protest and dissent over urban regeneration plans into the process itself. They have institutionalised public participation in the planning process.

Most of the residents say: 'No. Can't resist. We just have to make sure we work together and make sure we give us a better place for ourselves and our family' (interview C, 2011). But folk are resisting. The Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First is calling for an independent inquiry into the manipulation of democracy (the CONsultation process as they are calling it) by those with vested interests, they are calling for the suspension of activities of the Aylesbury NDC and Creation Trust, and, strategising off the new economic state of affairs are asserting that 'the whole estate demolition-privatisation strategy is completely unrealistic in the new and profound financial crisis'.

Equally importantly they are calling for the construction of a new image of the Aylesbury:

> 'Our lived experience of crime on the estate does not match the myth and this is borne out by statistics. We need to counter these pernicious negative stereotypes. By listing

> and emphasising the many positive features of our homes that we enjoy, and celebrating our diverse community, we strengthen our bargaining position. We are not going to be bullied into giving up good sound insulation, light, views and space because of exterior neglect and delays rehousing growing families due to current housing scarcity'.
>
> 'The best, most practical, environmentally friendly, cost effective, community empowering and health giving solutions to the problems of the Aylesbury will not involve wholesale demolition.
>
> We believe that the reasons for wanting total demolition of the Aylesbury were political, not structural. We question the wisdom of any council selling off its property assets – rather they should be enhancing them with investment and the best estate management. There should be whole-sale block-by-block re-evaluation of structural soundness and financial viability of refurbishment' (The Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First, http://aylesburytenantsfirst.org.uk/).

And there is clear resistance to the state-led gentrification of the Aylesbury from outside as well as inside. Anti-gentrification efforts around the plans for the Aylesbury comprise a mixture of tenants and DCH or 'Defend Council Housing' activists from outside of the Aylesbury. Their concerns are firmly about gentrification, displacement and security of tenure. As Watt (2009) states opposition to state-led gentrification in London is intertwined with one of the five threads of resistance that Hackworth (2007:190) delineates: that which 'aims to protect or preserve gains made under the Keynesian managerial state'. Given the importance of social housing as a buffer against gentrification in London, defending council housing is an anti-gentrification effort in its own right.

With a change of government, in June 2010, the Aylesbury regeneration programme lost £20 million of Homes and Community Agency (HCA) money. The future of the Aylesbury is on hold, despite a cross party agreement that it will be regenerated, until further funds are in place. But down the line there will no doubt be more privatization. Indeed, there remains lots of fear about the regeneration programme as this interview with a tenant (anti-gentrification) activist shows:

> 'We are worried that if we lose the council housing, we lose it for good...We are unsure about the future. Most probably any tenants with rent arrears will lose their rights. They intend to provide 700 fewer council homes than currently exist. The selection process is unclear. They are trying to persuade elderly people to move away from London. But people have been living here for a long time, and have social networks here. People know each other and support each other...We want council housing, and more council housing, with secure tenancy rights. We do not use the term "social housing" which means all sorts of things...' (quoted in *Workers Liberty*, 2010).

There is optimism, but again fear:

> 'The Aylesbury has been set back now as well because it lost the HDA funding that it'd been allocated. So there is a bit of optimism there and there is now a fight on to try and swing it round and force the council to keep the estate and to maintain it and refurbish it. But I'm worried it will be swung round the other way. And instead of regenerating or building with HDA funds, they'll just hand the land over to a private

> developer completely like they've done with the (adjacent) Heygate...' (interview D, 2011).

There are also fears that new groups claiming to represent local voices are being falsely set up:

> 'Now the chap who set this Elephant Hub up, his name is Steve Lancashire. He used to be a Lib-Dem councillor and councillor for regeneration at the time this whole scheme was cooked up back in the late 90s. He's not on the council anymore. But he's working on the payroll of the private developer...so I think it's very suspicious that he would want to get involved and establish a community group, when there's already one which has been long established' (interview D, 2011).

Conclusion

Tony Blair's flagship estate is now in limbo, as indeed it has been for most of the past 15 years. The stock transfer and the mixed communities initiative (MCI) is on hold, exemplifying what Smith (2011) calls the 'naked class politics of austerity'. A politics even more obvious in the housing benefit changes that, if passed, will render inner London to be almost completely gentrified (see Hamnett, 2010); and the tenurial insecurities being mooted whereby new council tenants will have no security of tenure and will have to reapply every 2 years, destroying their sense of place and permanence. In the meantime some interesting things are happening. London's current mayor – Boris Johnson – has slowly begun to degrade the mixed communities initiative: in June 2011 he dropped the previous mayor's (Ken Livingstone) quota of 35-50% of homes on large redeveloped sites in London having to be affordable/social housing, now it is up to the boroughs to decide on this issue. This 'is simply the latest brick taken from the wall of a London-wide policy designed to encourage mixed communities' (Bill, 2011)[4]. Developers are now being allowed to buy their way out of having poorer people living in their new developments, for example, Southwark Council has recently taken £9 million from the builders of 197 flats behind the Tate Modern rather than force them to sell 34 of the units to social housing providers[5], enabling them to build private homes for the rich alone. It seems that the social experiment of using planning laws to mix communities across London is being abandoned by stealth. As I suggest in a recent paper (Lees, forthcoming) at least mixed communities policy in countries of the global north guaranteed at least some social housing and protection for the poor (disputes over 'affordability', displacement and gentrification aside), it seems that in the very near future this may not be the case.

Gibson-Graham (2006) have been critical of 'strong theory' – of that critical urban scholarship mentioned earlier that provides reductive explanations of the top-down processes of urban restructuring that seem so all powerful, all pervasive, and impossible to challenge. Aligning myself with such critiques I would rather leave this paper with something optimistic to say, for we need a politics of hope, a politics that can emerge out of these 'new ruins'. As this paper has shown council house tenants have been very adept at rejecting the grammars of urban injustice that have been practiced upon them. Resistance has been at the level of the individual (those who complained to the newspapers about the 'sink estate' stories), at the level of individual blocks (through tenant representatives), for the Aylesbury as a whole (The Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First), to London-wide and indeed national campaigns

[4] On the London-wide policy of mixed communities under Mayor Ken Livingstone – see Davidson , 2008, 2010; Davidson and Lees, 2010.

[5] This is a familiar practice in other cities, eg San Francisco.

to defend council housing. Like Cloke et al. (2010), I am attracted to Katz's (2004) multifaceted vocabulary of opposition to the impacts of globalization through the differentiated ideas of resistance, reworking and resilience: 'Here, she incorporates respectively an oppositional consciousness that achieves emancipatory objectives (resistance), an impact on the organization of power relations if not their polarized distribution (reworking), and an enabling of survival in circumstances that do not allow changes to the causes that dictate survival (resilience)' (Cloke at al., 2010:12). Thinking about and explaining resistance in this way avoids the situation whereby the grammar of revanchism shuts down emancipatory possibilities (see Lees, 1998,2004). It enables us to think beyond the post-political, post-democratic city (Swyngewdouw et al.,2010) and to resist, subvert and transcend urban injustice.

There is capacity out there to formulate urban justice movements, alliances, and coalitions. The work that Just Space[6] have been doing with respect to the new London Plan demonstrates this, for they have launched robust challenges to the lack of socially rented housing in the new London Plan and to the displacement and gentrification occurring due to 'regeneration' (see Edwards, 2010). They are well aware of the importance of grammar and its injustices, as the debates over '*affordable* housing' and what that actually translates as show (eg. The London Tenants Federation's forthcoming document on the affordable housing con - http://www.londontenants.org/, which made the pages of a national broadsheet: see http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/davehillblog/2011/may/12/londons-affordable-housing-supply-failing-to-meet-need).

Like Just Space I would argue that we need to urge government to maintain a viable public housing stock, and although high rise housing has a negative reputation in London (see Baxter and Lees, 2009; Lees and Baxter, 2011) this large scale source of affordable housing needs to be protected because it is critical to preventing massive displacement (cr. Freeman, 2006; Newman and Wyly, 2006, Hyra, 2008). I would advocate, as do many on the Aylesbury Estate, the less socially destructive, step by step refurbishment of the Aylesbury, involving the tenants properly in this process. And some would argue that now is the time to push such an agenda – in a time of austerity – but this no doubt will be easier in provincial cities but less easy in London where despite the economic difficulties property prices continue to increase and rent gaps have survived. In pushing for the protection of council housing and the gradual refurbishment of the Aylesbury we need to have a clear sense of how discourse (grammar) can be used to negotiate conflicting perspectives and alignments (cr. Modan, 2007) but we also need to know about how people 'do' things (cr. Thrift, 2008), how they practice and perform injustices.

As Modan (2007:321) says:

> 'If we want to create communities that serve the interests of justice and equality, then we need to consider what's at stake in the ways we talk about places, and find discourses that can sustain the kind of society that we want to live in'.

We need to move towards a new grammar for the just city and the next task would be to work out theoretically what the bases of such demands for the 'right to the city' might be: 'There are strategic political reasons to do so today, joining the interests of the Excluded with those of the Included' (Marcuse et al., 2009:240).

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[6] Just Space is an alliance of community groups, voluntary sector organisations and special interest groups taking part in the EiP to press the GLA to improve the Plan, to make London a fairer and more environmentally sound city, see http://justspace2010.wordpress.com/. My thanks to Michael Edwards, Richard Lee, Sharon Hayward, and others, for sharing their experiences in JustSpace with me.

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