MOTHERING PRACTICES IN WYTHENSHAWE, SOUTH MANCHESTER:
CLASS, KINSHIP, PLACE AND BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities

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List of Contents

List of illustrations ........................................................................................................... 3
ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... 4
DECLARATION .................................................................................................................. 5
COPYRIGHT STATEMENT ................................................................................................. 5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..................................................................................................... 6
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................... 7
Mothering and relatedness .............................................................................................. 8
Social Space, Place and Belonging .................................................................................. 14
Mothering and Social Class ............................................................................................ 19
Anthropology in Britain: abroad or at home? ............................................................... 25
About Methods ................................................................................................................ 28
Ethical Issues ................................................................................................................ 32
Practical Details ............................................................................................................. 33
Data Recording Procedures ......................................................................................... 35

CHAPTER ONE: “LIVED SOCIAL SPACE ON THE ESTATE” ......................................... 38
Wythenshawe Boundaries .............................................................................................. 40
Social Space on the Council Estate ............................................................................... 46
A brief history of the Wythenshawe Estate ................................................................. 50
Living on the Estate ...................................................................................................... 55
Learning to be local ........................................................................................................ 57
A Journey around the Estate ......................................................................................... 59

CHAPTER TWO: “ON VOLUNTEERS” ........................................................................... 76
State-effects ................................................................................................................... 78
Volunteering at “Start-Up” ........................................................................................... 82
Start-Up Policies .......................................................................................................... 82
The Training Course .................................................................................................... 84
The Voluntary Sector and the Welfare State in England: the Coproduction of Motherhood ................................................................................................................. 90
“Sally’s unique personal development as a growing mum” ....................................... 94

CHAPTER THREE: “ON MOTHERHOOD” ..................................................................... 103
A Genealogy of Subjectification ................................................................................... 104
Being a mother as being a particular kind of person .................................................. 108
Meeting Annie: “She’s my Nanny” ............................................................................ 110
Meeting Sharon: “You gotta choose in life” ................................................................. 116
Meeting Pam: “Being a mum? It’s hard, it’s really hard” ........................................... 120
CHAPTER FOUR: “MOTHERING, DISCIPLINE & NATION” .......................................... 124
  Being soft; from “bad parenting” to a “soft-touch” nation ......................................... 128
  Discipline: “It takes a village to raise a child” ......................................................... 137
CHAPTER FIVE: “BELONGING AND TROUBLE” .......................................................... 157
  Dwelling on the Estate: Belonging and Trouble......................................................... 160
CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................. 175
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 189

List of illustrations

  Figure 1: Greater Manchester .......................................................................................... 41
  Figure 2: Wythenshawe in the context of Manchester city ............................................ 42
  Figure 3: Wythenshawe’s Heritage Trail ....................................................................... 43
  Figure 4: Tunnel between multi-storey car park and the supermarket ......................... 49
  Figure 5: Forum Leisure Centre .................................................................................... 49
  Figure 6: Wythenshawe’s streets based on Barry Parker’s design ................................ 63
  Figure 7: Street at Wythenshawe ................................................................................... 65
  Figure 8: Wythenshawe’s Main Roads ........................................................................ 67
  Figure 9: Wythenshawe’s Houses ............................................................................... 69
ABSTRACT

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This ethnography draws upon fieldwork experiences in South Manchester, England. The central theme is an exploration of the everyday relatedness of mothering practices, class, space and belonging. I examine mothering as practiced in both the politics of state intervention and through the mundane experiences of women living in a specific social space: the Wythenshawe Council Estate.

This research explores how support programs for raising children and a specific home-visiting volunteer project to support mothers promote the production and reproduction of a particular kind of moral citizen (individualised, autonomous, and disciplined selves). I argue that volunteering schemes come to play a key role as government technology. Women volunteers who live in the community in which they volunteer (indigenous experts) come to act as a model for other local women, who are usually defined by the authorities (professional experts), as lacking the right kind of knowledge. The volunteers are thus challenged to enhance and empower their neighbors and friends. However, this transmission does not occur in a linear fashion, but in quite subversive ways. While local women are actively involved in the use and appropriation of the resources provided by these programs, at the same time, they resist and transform them according to their own needs and desires.

I also argue that mothering functions as metaphor and metonym for the imagined nation-state. The experience of living on the Estate is not just a physical act, but a permanent negotiation of who you are as a person in the defined social space of the Estate. I learned what it means to belong to Wythenshawe through its spatiality, but I also learnt a particular mode of belonging through my own racial and class background. My experiences of being a Latin-American ethnographer living on the Estate, whose population is mostly white and living on low income, significantly shaped my fieldwork experiences.
DECLARATION

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INTRODUCTION

(…) Neither gender nor kinship is a thing in itself. Neither can simply be isolated from other markers of social difference or inequality, such as those of class or race. Nor can either be abstracted from the historical context in which such differences are made salient (Carsten 2004:82).

This ethnography draws upon eighteen months of residential fieldwork in South Manchester, England. The central theme is an exploration of kinship as understood and experienced in and through the everyday relatedness of mothering practices, class and belonging.¹ I examine mothering as practiced in both the state produced sphere of nation-making and through the mundane life experiences of women living in a specific social space. I will draw on observations of mothering in a particular context, understood as spatialised and categorised in class and racial terms, namely ‘The Council Estate’ in the Manchester district of Wythenshawe (henceforth the Estate). I look at the politics of mothering, the links between everyday practices (caring, nurturing, modelling and disciplining the children) and the production of a particular kind of moral citizens (individualized, autonomous, and disciplined selves) connected with ideas of nation.

My examination of place and space will focus on ‘local’ ideas of belonging; I examine the ways in which people make, imagine and create boundaries that keep people and things in and out depending on whether they belong or not (Massey and Jess 1995). My experience of being a home-visiting volunteer who supported local mothers, helped me to focus on the class and racialised dimensions to my field site, largely motivated by my residence as a non-white foreign ethnographer, on a council Estate in the inner district of Wythenshawe, a predominantly white working class urban area situated fifteen miles south from Manchester city centre. I learned during my fieldwork that one way of not belonging to the Estate was being seen as an immigrant that is making use of local resources.

¹ As Janet Carsten asserts kinship may come to be understood “in particular contexts through the things that people do and the everyday understandings that are involved in living together” (2004:37). I borrow Carsten’s idea that relatedness or kinship is simply about the way in which people create similarity and difference between themselves and others.
As a consequence of my positioning and the dimensions of the field site with which I was forced to engage, in this thesis I explore how place, space, belonging and social class are embedded in mothering practices. More specifically, I look at how parenting programs and volunteer schemes offering support for mothers and children are deployed on the Estate. I further analyse how these practices (mothering and volunteering) become mobilizing metaphors of nation-making and governing technologies.

In the following section I introduce some key theoretical insights that have enlightened and enriched this ethnography. One key topic is mothering and relatedness as a different way of thinking through kinship as a “metaphor we live by”, by the way “it structures our experience of nationhood” (Carsten 2004:162). I then turn to look at the literature on social class in Britain, with a special focus on inequality, disadvantage and the political marginalisation of a culturally caricaturised social group: the white working class. Broadly defined as “a council estate dwelling, single-parenting, low-achieving, Rottweiler-owning, cultural minority, whose poverty, it is hinted, might be the result of their own poor choices” (Botero 2009:7). I also show how the following analyses become embodied through the experience of living in a particular place and learning how to belong to, and on the Estate.

**Mothering and relatedness**

According to Barlow and Chapin (2010), anthropologists have long recognised mothering as crucial to the transmission of culture, the constitution of kinship, personhood and the reproduction of society. Anthropology and related disciplines have examined mothering from a wide variety of perspectives (cultural, psychological, sociological, legal). There have been a number of ethnographic

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2 "Such arguments contain dangerous echoes of those contemptuous views of the cultural and moral deficiencies of the poor which surface in epithets such as ‘chav’, ‘asbo’ and ‘pramface’” (Botero 2009:7).

3 I use the notion of mothering as an idiom that refers to a long term social relationship between women and children mediated by historical, political and cultural contexts, instead of going back to an analytical pre-given opposition between ‘the natural’ and ‘the social’ as traditionally mothering had been understood. Feminist perspectives have asserted that motherhood and mothering are not natural for women, but that they are culturally and socially constructed (Silva, 1996:1). Silva suggests that motherhood is a legal connection between mother and child, which is not necessarily derived from biology; rather it is a social construction. Whilst, mothering remains mostly connected to the caring activity and it is absolutely disconnected from biology (Silva, 1996:2). Mothering can be attached to motherhood or even shared between the mother and other people or even done on behalf of the mother.
studies drawing on psychological arguments and literature. Processes of socialisation, mother-child relations and child-rearing practices are common topics of interest among them. In this thesis, however, I am concerned with everyday relatedness as concerns mothering as practiced by particular women in a particular place and space: on the Estate. I borrow here Janet Carsten’s notion of relatedness “to convey a move away from a pre-given analytical opposition between the biological and the social”, in order to highlight an “openness to indigenous idioms of being related” (Carsten 2000:4). I am interested in how does the focus on relationality, contribute to new analytical models of thinking about different sorts of mothering practices? I also use Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “(social) space as a (social) product” to understand how people make place in practice (material boundaries) and as imagined communities. I want to look for answers for the questions of how does the social space of The Estate embody such social relationships? How could local idioms of relatedness – through friendship, work, and local residency – symbolize the metaphor of the nation – state (often deployed through discourses of the nation as imagined and ordered family, often racialized community of shared roots)?

I draw attention to the fact that mothering has been normally naturalized as universal feature of women and also as the image of the family, the natural shape of social organization. Mothering thus may appear as the image of the nation – state, the imagined national family. By mothering as practiced I refer to mothering as a practice of everyday life (de Certeau 1984) and, as such, mothering can be understood in terms of “ways of operating” by which people re-appropriate the space (de Certeau 1984): their locality. Mothering in this sense is locally defined which in turn is also socially, politically and culturally defined. Studies in psychological anthropology have seen mothering and child rearing as a universal cultural practice especially oriented to shaping children’s behaviour (see Quinn 2010). Nevertheless, my focus on mothering as practiced, and on social space, class and belonging shines new light on to mothering related studies in the UK. I will look for answers to the key question of whether or not mothering practices, understood as everyday relatedness, are locally socially, politically and culturally produced through disciplinary techniques taught by state agents/experts? Do these forms of mothering practices and everyday relatedness play an important role in shaping not only subjects and citizens but also notions of belonging? They promote, through modelling, the kind of person that women, mothers and children should be; ideals that promote model citizens or normative metaphors concerning how the ‘right’ kind of citizen one person
should behave. In so doing, such mothering practices and everyday relatedness contribute to create, produce and reproduce a sense of how the moral self relates to the nation state – a notion of citizenship as played through ideals of motherhood (see Jean-Klein 2000-2001 & Delaney 1995 quoted in Carsten 2004:155). In this research I show ethnographically that there is a dynamic relationship between mothering, discipline, personhood, belonging, class and the imagined notion of nation-state, which is mediated by state-agents & experts working with mothers within the local community. State agents & experts produce and reproduce disciplinary techniques and moral lessons about everyday life and cultivate values to produce mothers who are able to cultivate and promote particular kinds of children who are intended to become the future adult-citizens as appreciated in contemporary neoliberal society. By state agents and experts I am referring to Rose’s concept (1989) of “psy” knowledge and expertise (doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors). Which raise the question about how does the psy-knowledge that Rose refers to, become part of the daily lives of mothers in Wythenshawe? and to what extent do these notions shape the experience of motherhood?

Mothering practices as everyday relatedness “represents a matrix of images, meanings, sentiments and practices that are everywhere socially and culturally produced” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 341). Mothering can be seen as a social practice that does not depend exclusively on mothers’ performances, but may also be viewed as a socio-political phenomenon. Mothering is culturally, historically, socially and politically bounded in every society and time (Silva 1996). Experiences of being a mother vary according to race and class distinctions (Moore 1996), and within specific contexts. Consequently, examining mothering practices involves assessing matters ranging from kinship to class, passing through gender, reproduction, family, childhood and the nation-state. This means, as David Schneider (1984) and later on Carsten (2000, 2004)

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4 According to Strathern, the study of personhood, that is, what it means to be a social agent in different historical and cultural contexts played a central role in revitalizing kinship studies during the 80s. The study of the person, she suggests, offers a way of describing the connections between relationships and values (Carsten 2004: 84).

5 Rose uses the term “psy” knowledge to talk about psychology and its affiliates: the types of knowledge and expertise, largely invented since the mid-nineteenth century, such as social work, counselling, nursing, psychiatry, and so on). They embody a particular way in which humans beings have tried to understand themselves, to make themselves the subjects, the objects and targets of a truthful knowledge. They have played a constitutive role in shaping the ways in which we think of ourselves and act upon ourselves. The “psy” knowledge establishes different forms of authority and practical techniques that made possible for human beings to conceive themselves, speak about themselves, judge themselves and conduct themselves in new ways. Psy disciplines and psy expertise have had a key role in constructing governable subjects (Rose 1989).
demonstrate that the boundaries between the social and the biological in kinship relationships are in many cases blurred. Similarly, Strathern (1992) who has taken further Schneider’s idea and developed one of the most influential analyses on kinship in contemporary English society, argues that nature can no longer be taken for granted, particularly because of the new reproductive technologies (Carsten 2000). As Strathern (1992) points out, what was taken to be natural has now become a matter of choice: “The more nature is assisted by technology and the more the social recognition of parenthood is circumscribed by legislation, the more difficult it becomes to think of nature as independent of social intervention” (Strathern 1992: 30). Therefore, in order to understand notions of mothering dynamically, as Carsten (2004) remarks, we need to place them in the context and practices of contemporary kinship and this assertion rests on the assumption that gender, class, race and other social markers are inextricably linked.

Although mothering is considered to be crucial it has not featured prominently in anthropological studies of gender and kinship. A good example of this is given by Middleton (2000) who has linked the way mothering has been constructed by anthropologists as having an apparently direct and obvious relationship with the natural world. She argues that, in fact, maternity and the relationship between mother and child has been neglected (see also Barnes 1973). The politico-juridical and sometimes religious dimensions of kinship, as Carsten (2000) points out, were for a long time described as the source of cohesion in the societies that anthropologists studied and indeed, what was understood as still of interest for the discipline (see Radcliffe-Brown 1950). There was a lack of attention paid to intimate domestic arrangements and behaviour for these were assumed to be psychological matters rather than topics of anthropological interest. However, after Schneider’s critique of kinship, a revision of this view has been growing and giving more opportunities to think in terms of comparative cross-cultural studies of mothering within kinship.

After Schneider, studies of kinship during the late seventies and eighties were overwhelmed by a focus on gender from a feminist perspective, contributing to the marginalisation of kinship within anthropology (Carsten 2004). However, by

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6 I have not mentioned earliest theorists, such as Lewis Henry Morgan, Emile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, whose contributions have been influential in the development in kinship theory, but it is important to bear in mind their work when we are analyzing contemporary kinship.
the late eighties the influence of symbolic anthropology (specially Geertz 1973; 1975; 1983), developments in reproductive technologies, such as artificial insemination by donor, in-vitro fertilisation, and large-scale transformations in the institutions of marriage and the family both in the USA and Europe, with phenomena such as rising divorce rates, the growth of single-parent households and gay and lesbian movements rising in prominence, breathed new life into studies of kinship, raising at the same time new questions concerning and approaches into the study of motherhood, fatherhood and family relationships (see Carsten 2004; Stone 2004). Similarly, this movement gave birth to new emphases in areas covering themes such as human agency, understandings of historical context, the economy and social inequality. In turn, as a result, kinship studies became increasingly aware of the intersections between gender, ethnicity and class (Stone 2001). Accordingly, anthropologists, such as Jack Goody (1973; 1983; 1990), Faye Ginsburg (1991; 1995), Jane Collier (1981; 1987; 1988), Rayna Rapp (1995; 1999), Sylvia Yanagisako (1987; 1995), Sarah Franklin (1997; 1998; 2001) and particularly in English kinship, Marilyn Strathern (1981; 1982a; 1982b; 1987; 1992), Janet Carsten (1995; 1997; 2000; 2004), and Jeanette Edwards (1993; 1999; 2000), questioned the nature of kinship within anthropology. Amongst them, Ginsburg (1995) dealt most directly with practices of mothering as a subject of research interest, although all of these studies were informed by issues of kinship, gender and ethnicity. Generally speaking, the argument they make is that nature can no longer be taken for granted in late twentieth century English culture (Carsten 2000: 9). For example, Strathern (1992) considers as the consequences of assisted reproductive technologies in terms of kin relationships, asserting that they are both natural and constructed by technology. Nature is assisted by technology (Carsten 2000) in that sense. Similarly, as Strathern (1992: 87) argues, “kinship has a critical role in these shifts in knowledge practices precisely because, in the English view, kinship is defined as being the meeting place of nature and culture”. The relationship between the biological and the social appears then as destabilised. Consequently, as Carsten points out, kinship can be viewed as “relatedness”; as constituted of both the natural and the cultural at the same time. In other words, relatedness must be understood in terms of indigenous statements and practices. It describes the ethnographic particularities of being related in specific cultural contexts (Carsten 2004:4), thus marking an openness to indigenous idioms rather than to pre-given notions of ‘who’ constitutes ‘kin’. This may have an impact on how scientific knowledge is constructed from now onwards (see Haraway 1989; 1991; Strathern 1992; Franklin 1997). Scientific facts are no
longer truths waiting to be discovered in the natural world, but they are actively constructed by scientists whose practices, gendered identities and careers are historically and culturally situated (Carsten 2000). Thus, the impact of new reproductive technologies in terms of how knowledge is organized becomes a matter of culture as much as of nature. Kinship is “denaturalised”, and as Franklin (1997) argues, “reproduction becomes an achievement”. Moreover, Franklin points out, “since science can no longer be viewed as extra-cultural; kinship is no longer defined against ‘natural’, ‘biological’ facts; it is no longer ‘given”’ (1997: 210).

What emerges from this analysis is that mothering must be necessarily understood within kinship and gender perspectives, and that it disrupts and cuts through distinctions such as substance and code, biological and social, real and fictive, public and private, political and domestic (Carsten 2000) as well as being understood through aspects such as nurturance, affection, genealogical ties, shared pasts, living arrangements, warmth, the house, fostering, cooking, property, and recurring “bodily practices” in which “many rules of social life are encoded”, and occur in idioms of relatedness, as Carsten (2004: 31) asserted. Therefore, I borrow Carsten’s idea of looking at mothering practices as a form of relatedness, as a way of operating in the social context, a social practice that connects the politics of state apparatuses and the lived experiences of women raising children in specific places.7

In the following section I turn to examine the notion of social space and place as a mode of belonging. I examine ethnographically the question about how do place and space become embodied and bounded within imagined communities? I explore the links between social space, place and belonging as a starting point through which to engage with wider questions such as how does everyday relatedness connect with the politics of mothering through state mechanisms of governance?

7 I am aware that there are experiences of men raising children on their own. However, I did not look into men’s experience of raising children mostly because I did not encounter such relevant information during my fieldwork. Which is also telling us something about women: they are the main carers in charge of childrearing.
I began to consider the complex relation of space and place within the socio-cultural world as a tentative framework for class, racial and gendered practices after reading through my field notes and observations. Although place and space were not parts of my initial research focus, their importance emerged from my experience living on the Estate. Throughout my fieldwork I spent a great deal of time walking around the Estate with one of my main ‘co-conversationalists’ (Edwards 2000; Tyler 2003), discovering pathways and shortcuts, little woods and alleys. I learned not only particular geographies of the Estate but also the distinctions and values attached to certain places. I also learned about how people valued places, objects, relations and assets such as jobs and houses in particular kinds of ways. Subsequently one question which arose through my fieldwork experience concerned how space and place(s) embodied social relationships (Lefebvre 2002). I attempt to answer this question by borrowing Massey’s idea of space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey 2005). I want to take further the notion that space is socially constructed (Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 1993); not to refute it but to unpack the notion of space as lived and experienced. Doreen Massey draws attention to the implications of understanding lived space as a product of interrelations, as a sphere in which different trajectories coexist, a sphere which contains the possibility of multiplicity and heterogeneity, and also an understanding of space as always under construction, always seeking definition, negotiation, as never finished and never closed.

In this sense, I borrow Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “(social) space as a (social) product” in order to incorporate both ideas of space and place not as interchangeable concepts but as complementary ones. Lefebvre articulates three concepts: spatial practices (daily routines), representations of space (conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, engineers), and representational spaces (spaces lived through images and symbols, space as inhabited and used) (Lefebvre 1991: 38-39). These notions of space and place have been particularly and extensively discussed by cultural geographers. However, since the early 1990s they have become of increasing interest for

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8 “Co-conversationalist” is a term used by Edwards (2000) and Tyler (2003) referring to people with whom they worked during their fieldwork, as a more friendly term than informant.
anthropologists, although how space and place are defined is very much contested terrain in anthropology. Much of the time, but by no means always, space and place have been understood as interchangeable concepts. The question that interests me then is what kind of distinctions can space and place hold? In what ways are space and place different or similar? What are we talking about when we use the concepts of space and place? What does the phrase “social space” imply?

Conducting a literature review analysing the themes of space and place in contemporary Anglo-American anthropology may appear to be a messianic task, given the fact that debates about space and place have assumed an important position in philosophical discussions stretching back over a long period of time, and have come to the fore in Anglo-American social sciences more recently. It is not the purpose of this chapter to cover the full spectrum of the theoretical debate available. Rather I attempt to give an account of the subject on a more general level that enables us to highlight how an analysis of social space and place plays a role within a framework which allows us to broaden understandings of belonging, class and relatedness within contemporary Manchester. The literature review, whilst more general, is thus read through my field experiences.

Some key ideas that can help us to understand in the broadest sense the debate on space and place may be summarised as follows: First, the entwined relationship between space and place is mediated by time, or history. The notion of space has been little considered, or devalued, for generations and needs to be taken seriously once again by scholars, as Agnew & Duncan (1989) and Rodman (1992) point out, when they cite Foucault:

Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the other hand was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic ... The use of spatial terms seems to have the air of anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant that one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one “denied history”... They didn’t understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes – historical ones, needless to say- of power (1980: 70)
Hence space is not just the physical-natural landscape and it should not be considered as an ahistorical, a-temporal category but always as notion defined by time and history, built up by those who dwell in it and their multiple stories, which thus produce it. Similarly, places are more than points on the surface of maps (Massey 2005). Space and place are integrated through time and history; as such they become “dwelling landscape” in Ingold’s words (1993).

Second, the philosophical distinction between space and place links the transcendental with the empirical world; theory with practice. Descartes is seen as a key figure who brought to an end the Aristotelian distinction held between space and time when he asserted that they were categories which enable the ordering of things captured through the senses. Later, Kant revised the notion of space and his notion remains as a tool of knowledge clearly separated (along with time) from the empirical sphere. Space was understood as belonging to the realm of consciousness and hence as being a transcendental and essentially ungraspable structure (Lefebvre 1991). The modern field of epistemology inherited this notion of space as a ‘mental thing’. It was Foucault who bridged the gap between the theoretical realm and the practical one (Lefebvre 1991), linking the mental and the social through his interest in the way that people historically deal with material things and the knowledge that derives from this process (see Harvey 1989).

Third, place and space are tied up in social structure and contemporary notions of culture itself. Within the social sciences different approaches which try to define place and space geographically have emphasised one notion or the other: for economists and economic geographers location or space has often been conceived of as the spatial distribution of social and economic activities; some sociologists have used the notion of locale as a setting for everyday routines, whilst some anthropologists and cultural geographers have shown an interest in the sense of place or identification with a place by living in it (Agnew and Duncan 1989). However, the overarching theme in the social sciences at present appears to be a notion of place as historically mediated and defined by social interactions in specific localities (Agnew and Duncan 1989). Place is no longer “just” tied to community (as a physical setting). Place has changed. Place is inextricably connected with space. As Massey (1984: 117) has argued, “spatially-differentiated patterns of production are one of the bases of geographical variation in social structure and class relations”. Space and place
have moved further away from traditional relations of presence, so-called “local ties” (Agnew and Duncan 1989), into a wider struggle for the definition of culture itself (Ley 1989).

Fourth, space and place can be understood as a social product, or as the product of interrelations. Space and place are constituted through interactions (Massey 2005). As Lefebvre (2002) puts it, space is never “innocent”; it always provides signs; vestiges that physically, mentally or socially grant us particular ways of knowing things. This is how Lefebvre furnished the concept of space as a social product. This “Lefebvrian matrix” (Harvey 1993), offers us a “way to think through how places are constructed and experienced as material artefacts; how they are represented in discourse; and how they are used in turn as representations, as ‘symbolic places’, in contemporary culture” (Lefebvre 1991, quoted in Harvey 1993: 17).

This debate as manifest in anthropology has taken a parallel, although less animated form. Anthropologists have paid attention to place and space as constitutive elements of cultural dynamics and social meaning (Appadurai 1988a; 1988b; Rodman 1992; Ingold 1993; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Early anthropological debates tended to associate the notion of place with geographical settings, whereas more lately discussion has turned to debates about ethnographic voice, multivocality and multilocality (Appadurai 1988a; Appadurai 1988b; Rodman 1992). People are creating their own places rather than being “incarcerated” (Appadurai 1988b) in ethnographic places defined by ethnographers. Knowledge of places also implies a knowledge of people: those who dwell in them. “Rather than being "incarcerated" in ethnographic places anthropologists define, the people we study are constructing their own places. These places are not simply settings for social action, nor are they mere reflections of society (...) By joining multilocality and multivocality, we can look “through” these places, explore their links with others, consider why they are constructed as they are, see how places represent people, and begin to understand how people embody places” (Rodman 1992: 652). It has also been argued that place and memory are interconnected in an important sense (Stewart 1996; Degnen 2005). Degnen (2005) joins a growing group of scholars who seek to demonstrate how place, social relationships and, as she especially remarks, the “mundane ways of remembering the past”, are highly significant if one wishes to understand social memory. Similarly, Stewart (1996) describes
the West Virginian old coal-mining camps, describing people’s narratives as a way of remembering, placing both people and places into a rich mode of storytelling. Stewart shows how the intensities of a textured and remembered landscape of dense social imaginary may be understood in terms of cultural poetics.

As a result, I argue that space and place can be seen in everyday experiences as embodied in what I call (borrowing Lefebvre’s notion) “social space”. Social space in the council Estate is experienced and lived through feelings of belonging. Belonging can be understood as a “socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory (...) people act as a marker of their home” (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005:12). Notions of being at ‘home’ are linked with belonging to the place of residence, not as fixed, bounded territories but as more dynamic and relational markers of identification. Globalisation and migration have meant that communities and localities are no longer seen as self-contained and bounded places of significant belonging and identity. Migrants and mobile workers are seen as more distant from “local” people or ‘genuine’ working class locals. Within British social research, it has been argued that locally embedded populations continued to be the heart of community, that it is commonplace to make a division between locals and non-locals, with the locals retaining a moral possession over place (see Savage, Bagnall et all. 2005:30). Of particularly interest is the work of anthropologists such as Strathern (1981; 1990), Cohen (1982, 1986), Edwards (2000) and Evans (2006). Strathern’s account of Elmdon offers us an exhaustive description of how long-term residents claim moral ownership over place: the ‘real’ Elmdon people are those who have lived most of their lives there. Edwards’ work shows how Bacup residents refer to kinship as having a connection with the past. Indigenous idioms of relatedness, such as ‘Born and Bred’ (Edwards 2000), connect kinship to a particular geographical place and the past, as well as connecting persons and relationships. “Insiders and outsiders do not exist as fixed categories, but rather Strathern and Edwards show how kinship can be used to enact such boundaries” (Savage & Bagnall et all. 2005:31). Belonging should thus be seen as socially constructed and negotiated through face-to-face community, inhabited space and historically situated place. Belonging acts as a marker of home but also of social-economic position, moral value and collective imaginary.
In the same vein, ideas of belonging, difference and otherness are sometimes put to work as a distinctive social position. Difference is sometimes presented in terms of ethnic identity, cultural or religious variances rather than in terms of the class inequality many people experience. I argue that disadvantage, understood as marking certain social spaces and places, is primarily a class distinction reflecting inequalities in access to resources and status. As we shall see, class reveals itself as a salient phenomenon when we turn to consider mothering practices and governing technologies.

Mothering and Social Class

There is widespread agreement that the notion of class has been one of the most contested categories in the social sciences, mainly because it is used indistinctly for everyday distinctions as well as theoretical ones; in other words we encounter many definitions of class in lay and academic discourses. Most of the academic class analysis in the UK was initially focused on statistical and methodological sophistication rather than theoretical sophistication (Devine 2005). Although there is an increasing trend to relate the academic work into broader theoretical debates, especially an interest in the relations between culture and stratification (see Devine 1992; Crompton 1998; Devine 1998; Charlesworth 2000; Savage 2000; Savage, Bennet et al. 2009) This trend has evolved from emphasis on stratification to emphasis on cultural interest (Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998; Bennet, Emmison et al. 1999; Lawler 2000). In terms of stratification, social class has referred to social and economic inequality. Whereas in terms of cultural meanings of class "issues of subjectivity, awareness of perceptions about, feelings about and so on, were discussed within the contexts of debate of class-consciousness and class-imaginary” (Devine, Savage et al. 2005:6). Depending on the social theory used to analyse the concept, it is possible to produce different emphases: social class as structure, as identity, as consciousness, as exploitation, as stratification, differences in everyday tastes, hierarchical differences of skill, pay, employment security and status, etc. There are many sociological concepts ranging from primary emphasis on economic mechanism of distribution and control such as classical Marxist definitions (see Thompson 1963), to others that include a wide range of cultural differentiation, such as Bourdieu (Sayer 2005). In this thesis however, I claim a more nuanced

\[\text{Marx sought to define class as embedded in productive relations rather than social status. For Marx, classes are defined and structured by the relations concerning (i) work and labour, and (ii)}\]
position, I take into account both theoretical positions: I acknowledge the economic inequality as a salient feature of class distinction while at the same time I consider those mechanisms more sensitive for people’s identities, in order to understand more the interactions between people´s structural positions and their subjectivities. “Class is about how, and why, some people have more – more opportunities, more resources, more prestige or social esteem – whilst others have less” (Botero 2009:10). Finch (1993) proposes that class is a moral distinction which consists of features such as living conditions, drinking behaviour, language (types of words used) and children’s behaviour, as well as an economic distinction between people. Skeggs (1997) also acknowledges that class has been understood as a moral distinction which at the same time has allowed the use of the term to act as a device for making and measuring distinctions between different social groups.

Class as sociological category has often been understood as a quantifiable category which has mainly been used to conceptually locate working class people in Britain. Class means different things to different people in different contexts, and its everyday use is contested. However, one aspect of class remains certain: economic inequality and social disadvantage. In Britain, the impact of the closure of manufacturing industries and the neoliberal deregulation of the labour market and welfare state (Botero 2009) have had an enormous effect on the composition and life chances of the working class as a group. These changes have deepened experiences of disadvantage, particularly in young men and women. The labour market and education remain the main indicators of class inequality. Although class can be measure and delimited, the working class as a category remains a highly internally differentiated social category; it is an increasingly marginalised and uneven minority (Botero 2009). This ability to measure inequality and disadvantage has situated women, as wives and mothers, at the centre of all observable behaviour. Working-class women, as primary care giver, have had, as Skeggs (1997) points out, by far the largest responsibility for the care, protection, education and welfare of the household and of children throughout the last two centuries in Britain and as such have become responsible for representations of the moral character of the nation.
However, as Skeggs (1997) maintains, the notion of class has been largely neglected in feminist theory and feminist analyses. However, as some critics (Haider 1999; Steedman 1999) have pointed out, she has not offered a clear definition of what class means. She proposes something more than a Marxist emphasis centred on the family and the value of domestic labour, offering a historical perspective which includes a reflection of how dominant discourses have promoted images of caring and motherhood within the family. That is, an analysis that starts from women’s everyday experiences, rather than from social theory. Skeggs uses the concept of experience “as a way of understanding how women occupy the category of ‘women’, a category which is classed and raced and produced through power relations and through struggle across different sites in space and time” (Skeggs 1997:27). In others words, she refers to the experiences of women as a specific form of knowledge. “Experience is important as a practice of making sense, both symbolically and narratively” (Brah 1992 quoted in Skeggs 1997). Thus, experience refers to external events as well as meanings. The experience of disadvantage for women has meant a permanent negotiation with stigmatised and sexualised roles. Even though material living conditions have improved dramatically compared with those of their grandparents (higher life expectancies, better housing conditions and more comfortable lifestyles, etc), the lower your position in the economic ladder, the more risks you have of falling ill, facing unemployment and not succeeding in education, risks which are particularly prominent for working class women and young people.

Evans’ (2006a) work on white working-class children who fail at school, proposes an interesting perspective through which to understand the meaning of class in contemporary Britain. Based on Lave & Wenger’s (1991) theory of “legitimate peripheral participation”, Evans articulates an explanation of why white working-class children are more likely to fail at school compared with other children, arguing that what counts as legitimate participation at school, is experienced as ‘illegitimate’ by working-class children. In other words, the participation required from school is not meaningful for working-class children nor for their families. Moreover, Evans points out that one of the most significant factors linked to children’s success at school is the educational level of the mother or primary care-giver of the child. It is suggested that middle-class children are less likely to fail because their mothers usually take for granted that the loving relationship with a child is mainly based on the formal learning associated with particular skills, such as literacy, numeracy, crafts, curiosity and sports (Evans 2006a). In
this sense, it is often stated that learning is a social relationship based around an interaction which works to produce shared meanings between legitimate others. Accordingly, values and meanings promoted at school are produced and legitimised by the middle-class rather than the working-class, which might mean that working-class children need to assimilate middle-class values to be successful at school. This kind of legitimacy, constructed in the image of middle-class standards, may not be equally important in order to become a ‘respectable’ person in the eyes of many working-class people, which might imply that school success may lose its traditionally ascribed power of social mobility.

Social class, from this perspective, is an outcome of a relationship between economic position and ways of being in the world. Class, in Evans’ words, takes the form of “subtle markers of speech, clothing, ways of walking, wearing jewellery, hairstyle, physical bearing, posture and demeanour” (Evans 2006a). Being working class, Evans concludes, is akin to ‘being common’, in opposition to all those who are ‘upper’ or ‘posh’. Social class is associated with more than occupations, income, education and language. It is also, Evans (2006a) states, “about the more intimate and bodily question of how sensuality comes to be structured as desire”.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that in Britain there has been a historical emphasis on ‘common welfare’ within dominant discourses, derived from state policies, in which women are conceived as key actors and as responsible for care and caring within the family. In this sense, Skeggs (1997) points out that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women have been represented as “those” responsible for civilising the nation (“the” keepers of family and well-being). Therefore, women are often considered at fault if and when things go wrong. Skeggs (1997) also argues that this emphasis on women’s responsibility is a feature of colonial expansion, in the sense that women are taught to enact those values emerging from the ‘mother’ country. In Skeggs’ words, “women appear to be a matrix that makes possible the social stability which depends on women’s moral purity”. It is suggested that this is a discourse built to maintain the social order; “virtuous women protect the nation, while non-virtuous women are subversive” (Skeggs 1997:42). Thus, it has been suggested that more recent beliefs in hygiene, sexuality and morality have been constructed under this rationale. Hence, the regulation of moral behaviour has been a key characteristic of class identity, nation and empire in Britain (Skeggs
1997:42). Education is therefore conceived as a means of control, mainly with regard to working-class women and families. As David (1980) phrased it, "mothers act as an invisible pedagogue".

Consequently, motherhood within the discourse of the family comes to represent a way of dealing with moral behaviour. The state has provided help through educational reform, welfare provision, Christian charity and evangelism among others, as a means of regulating parenting (especially mothering), and as a form of influencing families to perform specific functions. With this orientation in mind, the first School of Mothers in Britain was founded in 1906 (Skeggs 1997), offering services, such as child feeding, advice and saving schemes. Additionally, an increasing number of services and institutions were created with the idea of offering support with the tasks of child care, cooking and making baby clothes. A very good example was the promotion of Housewifery, which placed young working-class girls, aged fourteen to seventeen in middle-class homes in the local neighbourhood for a period of compulsory unpaid domestic service as apprentices in housewifery (Skeggs 1997).

Moreover, as Skeggs (1997) remarks, the education of working-class women was understood at this time within the framework of 'domestic ideals' based on the values and organisation of Victorian and middle-class moral concepts. This ideal of domestic responsibility and respectability has persisted throughout the generations. The domestic ideal of cleanliness and moral purity, articulated by a figure of superiority, was deemed to be held by women. This meant that the notion of being a good/respectable woman and/or mother was organised around certain practices, behaviour, language and appearance within the domestic sphere, spreading the home and family values of the middle-classes as worthy and desirable for the whole of society.

Similarly, Edwards’ (2000) ethnographic account of Bacup (a small town in North-West England), in her ethnography "Born and Bred", drew our attention to distinctive forms of kinship in the way that people recognize themselves as relating to place and time. She also provided a class analysis not in the form of simple concrete opposition, but as an historical analysis concerning the evolution of industrial society and how it has impacted on social organisation in Bacup. The focus in "Born and Bred" seems to be on people and landscapes, past and
present, and their histories and geographies rather than class itself. Edwards suggests that in the late eighties in Bacup, finer class distinctions were constructed through the idioms of insider and outsider, or “Born and Bred Bacupian” versus “Newcomer”. Her argument is that local categories of class are much more finely tuned than broader sociological ones. Edwards maintains that class, as a social category comprises discrete permanent hierarchies between persons who are able to move up and down between them. “Instead of contradictory, ideas of class were implicit rather than explicit” (Edwards 2000:24). Thus, it can be argued that the notion of class in Edwards’ work may be understood through experiences of “identity” and “belonging” to both people and places. To be “born and bred” in others words, would imply a sense of pride, originality and uniqueness for residents of Bacup. As Edwards (2000) points out, to be born in a certain place does not automatically confer the status of belonging to that place. One also needs to have been brought up in a specific manner. Thus, belonging can be claimed through upbringing as much as birth. To be “born and bred” is to be constituted by social relationships, affective ties and connectedness with people. It is a sense of community. In Edwards’s words to be “born and bred” embodies “two significant aspects of English kinship: place of birth and being brought up, both of which mould a particular kind of character”. Therefore, being “born and bred” in Bacup under poor working conditions, overcrowded houses and a harsh climate – all features of being a “real Bacup” person – are perceived to have moulded tough, stoical and hard-working characters (Edwards 2000:84).

The notion of class thus developed in relation to other groups based on economic inequalities and is more evident through moral value, the risk of falling in and out of poor living conditions, lifestyle tastes and symbolic material assets such as housing, interior-design, dress sense, and is also more noticeable through access to schools and parenting styles. In this ethnography I examine how class has become embedded in places and spaces on the Wythenshawe Estate and also how class has become manifest – although not explicitly in the eyes of the women I met - through mothering practices and schemes of state intervention for women and children. My motivation for such an analysis is based on my experience of being a Latin-American ethnographer working as a home–visiting volunteer and living on a council Estate whose population largely defines themselves as English. My distinct perspectives thus stimulates questions of

10 The notion of “English character” has been represented in popular literature and lay terms. One can see it in classic novels like “Wuthering Heights” and “Pride and Prejudice” for example.
what it means to do anthropology in Britain, especially for someone coming from
the so-called “Third World”, and especially as anthropological studies of the UK
are predominately at present undertaken by people who grew up and were
educated in the UK. Next, I attempt to convey such thoughts in order to
contextualise my experience of fieldwork living in Manchester.

Anthropology in Britain: abroad or at home?

Anthropology has been generally been considered to be the study of non-
European societies, but in fact it has a long and significant history of research on
societies within Europe. In this thesis I assume Goddard’s (1994) position
identifying Europe as an object of anthropological inquiry, in so doing also
addressing some of the problems associated with this area of study. There is no
single approach to doing anthropology “in” Europe (Goddard, Llobera et al.
1994) but one of the main features which distinguish it has been the World
Wars. The post-World War Two scenario has implied changes not only in political
geography but also in how the social sciences conduct research and define
priorities in its agenda. The aim to reconstruct Europe after the catastrophe of
the War meant new challenges for the state and government. In particular, for
social anthropologists it offered opportunities, as they appeared to be ideal
candidates for promoting understandings and interpretations of cultural barriers
as a means for implementing strategies for further modernisation and economic
growth (Goddard, Llobera et al. 1994).

From an anthropological point of view one of the main features of European
societies has been their complex class structure (Pitt-Rivers 1966) and also their
multi-ethnic character and composition (Goddard, Llobera et al. 1994). These
characteristics have helped constitute and define anthropological areas of
expertise, understood as “focused on small scale and relatively bounded social
units: the community; interested in the social structure of such communities and
specifically in value systems which ultimately define them; and the effects of
urbanisation and modernisation processes which have caused the erosion of such
value systems” (Peristiany 1974). Anthropologists who have worked in Europe
have devoted themselves to understanding how this complex structure of classes
and their multi-ethnic composition, under the influence of the pressures of
modernisation and post-industrialisation, have come to create such a diversity of
cultures within this geographical area. Indeed, they have mainly – but not
exclusively - chosen to do so by studying small units or communities distinguished by language, skin colour, religion, gender and social class.

Traditionally the anthropological emphasis on Europe entailed fieldwork in rural communities. However, Europe, as a complex society with cultural, economic and political diversity, soon demanded a broader perspective. The notions of identity and belonging appear to have been major concerns of anthropology of Europe, as well as certain methodological inquiries associated with the idea of whether or not methods and concepts deployed in the study of “other” cultures can be applied to “our own” society. Regarding this point, Arensberg (1963) and Goddard et al. (1994) point out that anthropological studies of Europe demand a broader perspective than those that single-society based studies used to require, and they also need to incorporate greater elements of history and sociology in order to be better comprehended. Although European cultures share some structural and geographical characteristics with non-European cultures, one of the main features of Europe is its urban character, including the dominance of post-industrialised economies and concordant forms of social organisation.

Specifically in the case of Britain, the anthropological interest in national identity and belonging (see Cohen 1982a; 1982b; 1986; 1987; 2000) has been linked with the concept and experience of Empire (see Cooper 1997; Stoler 2002). Whatever the experience of being British means, it will likely be associated with the history of the Empire, the World Wars and industrialisation, and especially with the impact they have had on the constitution of belonging and identity (see Cohen 2002; Rapport 2002). The study of the growth and collapse of the British Empire and of associated nation-states, of urbanisation and industrialisation can be seen, as MacDonald (1993) argues, as part of the necessary link between contemporary meanings and the historical significance of social processes. In other words, belonging can be experienced through the lives of people as historical, political, economic and interactional contexts. Thus, ethnographers may study identities which also focus on moral and cultural aspects.

The idea of doing anthrop学 “at home” was established during the middle of the twentieth century and it entailed a phase of increasing interest in Western societies. Jackson (1987: 8-9) suggests that some of the factors associated with the pull towards ‘home’ are: decreased funding to do fieldwork; increased
student numbers; objections on the part of many new states regarding research into what they call “tribalism” and suspicions of neo-colonial intellectual imperialism; the discovery of large areas of ignorance about one’s own society; interest by historians in using anthropological insights to interpret past records; questions concerning the ease of access to one’s own society; and a reduction in the time and money needed, and available, to ‘enter’ the field. However, what anthropology ‘at home’ really means is still contested terrain. Following Strathern’s (1987: 16) essay “How one knows when one is at home?”, I ask the question of whether I, as a Latin-American scholar doing ethnography in Britain, may consider myself as doing anthropology at home? Does home refer to an equivalence between the state in which the anthropologist grew up and/or was educated and the state in which she does her fieldwork?

I argue that although I am doing fieldwork in Europe, as a Latin-American ethnographer, I am not doing ethnography at home. An awareness of being at home or abroad is evident from the beginning of the discipline and most of the time doing anthropology at home has been seen, by many, as more difficult than doing it elsewhere (Dumont 1986). Similarly, Malinowski ([1939: xix] quoted in Peirano 1998) remarked that if self-knowledge is the most difficult to gain, then “an anthropology of one’s own people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a fieldworker”. The notion of ‘home’ refers also, for certain authors such as Jackson (1987) and Messerschmidt (1981), to Europe and the United States respectively, because anthropology emerged at the beginning of the colonial era, as a distinctive discipline “carried out by Europeans, for an European audience of non-European societies dominated by European power” (Asad 1973: 15). In this sense, being at home means being in Europe or the USA and doing anthropology at home means, therefore, western anthropologists doing fieldwork in their own countries. However, in the post-colonial era, the idea of home became defined as an increasingly narrow territory (Okely 1987) and, in some ways, transient (Strathern 1987). Even though the boundaries between “foreign”, “overseas”, “exotic”, and “primitive” are disappearing as the world becomes more globalised on some levels, on another level people have become more aware of differences, especially in orders and levels of the production of knowledge. In this sense “home” and “abroad” continue to be distinctive sites. When observers and the observed meet, no matter where (abroad or at home), new forms of representation arise and so anthropologists need to register and develop an awareness of their own practices, thus using the same concepts they share with their co-
conversationalists as incorporated in the data to be explained. In so doing, anthropologists become more reflexive in their consciousness concerning their beliefs, backgrounds and stand points.

About Methods

In this section I show how I went about this ethnographic research project. As mentioned above, the focus of this ethnography was the exploration of mothering practices in Wythenshawe, looking particularly at embodied experiences of class, race and belonging, and at how mothers are assisted by local charities, by government support programmes and by their own networks of kin, friends and neighbours. The research also has sought to contribute to a contemporary understanding of mothering practices within the framework of new forms of kinship and everyday relatedness, social space and belonging. Through the mundane encounters of ethnographic fieldwork I set out to learn about domestic processes, such as caring, child-rearing, household composition, mother-child relations and everyday life in houses through the intimate relations of those who live together and alongside each other on the Wythenshawe Estate.

Let me start with the most obvious question the reader might ask: ‘Why did you do fieldwork in Manchester?’ This was the first question many people asked me when I told them what I was doing. The answer is not straightforward. Before coming to Manchester I had been working in Chile, for fifteen years, as a project manager in the third sector and as an advisor on different government services. More recently I had also taken up a position as Lecturer in a public university. I had experience and expertise in social analysis using statistics and qualitative research methods, and had gained a detailed understanding of how the State, in Chile, addresses some contemporary social problems, such as violence, gangs, marginality, youth and families (especially women and children) in poverty. My idea was to extend my understanding by undertaking a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology and my original proposal was to work on Chilean female youth gangs. However, I subsequently decided to try and follow this path by doing ethnography in Manchester, with little idea, as it turned out, as to what this might actually involve. I soon realised that I did not have the kinds of prior connections that I would have needed to work ethnographically with female gangs in Manchester. I also had to consider the relations that were central to my life at that time. I had arrived in England with my family (my son and my
partner) and I needed to shape a research project that would allow us to continue living together; second, I still had to learn more English and furthermore become conversant with local accents and expressions; thirdly I had to accept that in England I had to work out my ethnic and class positionality in ways that would be quite different from those with which I was familiar in Chile. In Wythenshawe I, along with many others, was a non-white foreigner (immigrant). I also became aware of my privileged middle-class assumptions as I had to learn to live with poverty, and to live without the financial and cultural supports that had, in practice, meant that I had no real experience of what such a life might entail.

As soon as I started to understand what goes on in Manchester and what it really takes to do participant observation, I realised I needed to have the grounds for building relationships of trust between myself and the people I wanted to learn from. Soon I realised I had to change my initial project. But this insight brought me another challenge, deciding what I could realistically do in Manchester, bearing in mind my familial context, my English, my own expertise and background. In order to learn more about local situation, to improve my English and to get the sense of what was going on in the city, I decided to volunteer as a way to engage in the everyday life of Manchester’s people. I also wanted to learn the most adequate grounds to build relationships with local people and subsequently be able to engage ethnographically in a more suitable project. Searching on the University website I discovered Start-Up, a local charity that works in south Manchester. In November 2007 (I had started my PhD just in September 2007) I enrolled in it. Start-Up brings practical support to families with children who are experiencing stress. I took a training course and began volunteering from January 2008, visiting one family once a week and familiarising myself with the local community. Start-Up network is a national charity which consists of more than 200 affiliated schemes which offer support, friendship and practical help to families with young children in local communities. This support is offered in their homes for a period of not less than one year. Each office is set up and run by people from the local area, and is responsible for raising all its own funds. This (usually) small staff team recruits and trains local volunteers and carefully matches them with families who need support. Each local Start-Up is managed by a board of volunteer trustees. The constitution of a local scheme is based on a nationally agreed model, adapted for local

\[11\] Real names and contact details have been modified to protect anonymity.
circumstances. Start-Up was under this model of “parent-to-parent” support service.

When I first started I did not plan to undertake my ethnographic research within the frame of my volunteering activities. However, my training course as a Start-Up volunteer made me aware of how particular knowledges were seen as important for ‘proper’ motherhood in the context of public policies and their implementation by organizations that offer support for families. The notion of proper motherhood seemed rather narrow and normative and it made me wonder how this worked on the ground, how space was made for different and competing notions or how people accommodated this particular version of motherhood in and through their relationships with state agencies. I realized that in order to understand how mothers cope (or not), with their circumstances and with state intervention, it is necessary to adopt a genuinely ethnographic approach. Initial questions started to emerge: Why do mothers have to attend courses to be a “proper” mother?, Why do they need a “role model” mostly based on middle-class volunteers’ behaviour?, Why are these schemes for supporting families started?, Why does the government not work with teenagers to the same extent?, Why has the government chosen to work with mothering practices? Specifically, I have looked at mothering practices from the perspectives of mothers in order to explore and to think about the relationship between these women and their support networks in all guises: kinship, friends, State and NGOs. I have intentionally looked to mothers and not fathers since I initially noticed that on the Estate it was mostly women in charge of caring and raising children. During my fieldwork I did not encounter many fathers in charge of caring for children on their own. I met a couple of fathers at the parenting classes but they had been forced to attend by social services or court orders. Given this fact I focused on mothers rather than fathers although I acknowledge there are numerous experiences of men looking after their children on their own not only on the Estate but more generally.

Working in Start-Up I quickly became aware of the tension existing between the government and schemes promoted by it, and social relations as lived in spaces such as Wythenshawe and in the everyday lives of women who are mothering their children. I decided to look at the interventions in women’s everyday life, from the point of view of these “assisted” mothers. I aimed to discover what the logic is behind this “assistance” to mothers. I also wanted to understand in what
ways mothers are assisted not only by organizations but also by their own networks of kin, neighbours and friends if any and what kinds of resistance these mothers have, if any to these modes of assistance. Consequently this research project has sought to broadly answer the following group of questions:

- What is mothering all about today in Wythenshawe? What it is like to become a mother in Wythenshawe? How do women learn to be proper mothers? What counts as socially appropriate mothering on the Estate?

- How are mothering practices intertwined with classed, raced and gendered experiences in everyday life?

- What can the study of mothering in Wythenshawe teach us about kinship relations more generally? What is the significance of mothering within the wider practices of kinship today?

- How are people making similarities and differences with me and with Others, in terms of gender, class and race, and what difference does it make that I am working in the UK, but not doing ethnography ‘at home’?

- What is the role of the NGOs and the State in assisting mothering practices in Wythenshawe? Which are the agencies working with mothers in Wythenshawe? What are they doing? Since when? What are the assumptions underlying these interventions?

In short, the main objective of this project is to understand contemporary interrelations between practices of everyday relatedness and state intervention. It looks at the politics of mothering practices, and the ways of producing and reproducing certain kinds of subjectivity or moral selves. I specifically explore how intersections between everyday practices and governmentality of the self, community and citizenship intersect on the Estate. As a result this ethnography shows practices of governmentality but also forms of resistance and subversion. It pictures the politics of mothering that is increasingly treated as a form of expertise that requires skills and ratifications based on “psy-knowledge” and expert practitioners. It also contextualises this phenomenon within the frame of social space and belonging as mobilizing metaphors of the social imaginary of women and mothers.
Ethical Issues

My initial position as a volunteer opened the gate to accessing many relationships I had in the field and provided a useful starting point. After my initial training as a volunteer I decided to continue in this area as an ethnographer, and discussed this possibility with Start-Up and with the only family who had been assigned to me at that point. I talked about the possibility of doing fieldwork first of all with the family I was working with and when they agreed I discussed the situation with Start-Up. They did not object to my plans to work as an ethnographer, but wanted me to meet one of the Start-Up’s supervisors regularly (once every two-three months) to report how things were going, and they also wanted me to hand in a final report once my research project was approved by the University. Most importantly, regarding the family, we agreed I would work only with the family mentioned, protecting their anonymity and confidentiality through the modification of names and personal details. In this thesis the family composition, address, location and other personal details have been changed. I did not write monthly reports about the family everyday practices to the charity and also I do not refer in this ethnography to very specific details about the mother-child relationship, husband-wife relationship or any other sensitive or intimate personal details of the lives of this family. Of course I also talked at length about my research with the family and explained to them what the research involved, and how I would collect information (observation, writing notes, talking to people and eventually recording interviews). I also explained to them about confidentiality and anonymity procedures. They were basically happy with the idea and even relished the prospect of being portrayed in an academic project. In time this family introduced me to many other people on the Estate.

As a relationship of trust grew between us, I began to be included in their intimate network of friends and kin as well as engaging their wider community connections. I also gained in confidence as I got to know the social space on the Estate better. I was able to connect to other places such as the Benchill Community Centre, the Forum Centre, another well-known national charity that works with children and families whose name I have omitted, and numerous community groups where I got involved: breastfeeding group, baby massages, food and cooking classes, fitness classes for women, parenting classes, meditation and so on and so forth. Although all these experiences brought me a
variety of experiences and confidence within the community, not all of them granted me access to a deeper level of trust needed to write about people. The activities of these groups were often conducted during brief period of time during day time and friendships were not easy to build. The public who attended these groups were mostly women who run from one place to another completing their domestic routines, doing shopping, cooking, picking up the children from school or after classes clubs, and so on. We normally engaged in short conversations after classes and few times we went for a cup of tea after the sessions. My own positionality as foreigner – outsider did not help with the bonding process with everyone I met. As a result, the core family and their network were fundamental to this project. However they were not my only close contacts. I formed a strong relationship with a local photographer with whom I walked the Estate on many different occasions, learning from his accounts about life on the Estate. Other key informants include women from the breastfeeding group and from the Benchill Community Centre.

Practical Details

In August 2008, I moved in with my family – my partner and my son - from Didsbury to a new flat located in Wythenshawe (Benchill area). Didsbury is a predominantly middle class residential area of Manchester, characterised by beautiful parks, detached cottages, modern and refurbished apartments as well as wide access to entertainment, services, public transport and outstanding schools. Wythenshawe, in contrast despite being located only two miles south of Didsbury, is a mostly white working class area classified as “deprived” by local authorities because of council state housing, unemployment, poor school reports, high rates of violence and teenager pregnancy.

Although the place I lived was rented from a private landlord, it was surrounded by council state housing. It was just ten minutes from the Start-Up local office. Living on the Estate meant a deeper involvement in everyday activities and I moved from being a volunteer to being a resident. I enrolled myself in the Forum Library and also in the Forum Leisure Centre as a way to get involved in community life. I attended swimming evenings and gym classes, as well as

12 The Wythenshawe Forum, built during the 90s, is a massive building located in the centre of the town and used to be vandalised and abandoned, until, in 2002, it was refurbished by the Local Council and now is a community centre which provides services and facilities to strengthen and
using the library facilities, such as computer clusters, books, DVDs, driving test training practice, and looking for new activities within the centre. One of my first activities was a review of the directory of institutions and organizations that bring services to families, with special attention to mothers and children, in order to have an oversight of what is going on in the community. I realised that one of the most noticeable charities was “Marie Wills” with several projects distributed all around the Wythenshawe area aimed to bring support to families and, especially, to women and children.13

As mentioned above, I attended groups meetings held at “Marie Wills” specifically the so called Toddlers-Group, which met on Thursday mornings, and, additionally, the mothers’ meeting group on Mondays. Additionally, I visited the family I worked with every Tuesday morning. I also attended regularly one of the main after school centres in town, where we joined women’s gym class on Mondays and Fridays early in the morning. I went to the once a month meeting of local historians at the Library on Tuesday night. I also joined different mothers’ groups in the area including the Benchill Community Centre’s welcoming group and Breastfeeding Training Group. In all these places I met key informants with whom I kept close relations during my fieldwork.

Living on the Estate was very challenging both for me and for my family. My son had to travel an hour on the bus every day to go to school and many times he had to face unprovoked harassment on his way back home. He continued to attend the same Didsbury Catholic high school where he was accepted when we arrived to the UK. We finally decided to buy a small, cheap car in order to drive him to school. Eventually he made some local friends with whom he travelled again on the bus. My partner also had also to manage the lack of the public transport at night when returning home from late shifts at work and many times he had to witness and fear unprovoked violence at different bus stops across the Estate. As a family we also had to live with very difficult neighbours in distressing circumstances (described in more detail in chapter five). It was hard for my son and my partner to make friends locally as they spent their days elsewhere, and this experience of isolation is clearly common to many foreigners who arrive without wider networks in this area. They did of course make friends with my own closest informants and their families. We tried to get involved in

support the local community as a whole. It brings an extensive library, adult learning centre, nursery, cafe, and a health centre with an NHS Walk-In Centre.

13 Real names have been modified.
community activities that were aimed at families too but their involvement was rather peripheral.

**Data Recording Procedures**

I recorded data in different ways. I wrote detailed field-notes recording my observations and my experiences as a participant in Wythenshawe life. I conducted sixteen unstructured and open-ended interviews, and also I took interview notes. I audiotaped those interviews when possible and then transcribed them. I was helped by my own key informants to transcribe the interviews I did with them, and in this way was able to check my understandings and elicit further comments. They appreciated the opportunity to edit the interviews afterwards, and to correct or modify their statements. I kept personal diaries during the research project. I used as sources, the local newspaper and institutional materials, such as training kits or leaflets published by local charities. I examined local historical archives, which contain photographs, biographies, local memoirs, public documents and so on. I tried where possible to document my experience building a digital photographic archive.

In addition to my life in Wythenshawe with my family and the families I came to know, I drew upon my experience as a volunteer. In this capacity I attended a four month preparation course, which consisted of a once-a-week participative session, where I and other volunteers were trained in how to offer support, friendship and practical help to families with young children, who also are experiencing difficulties or suffering stress, in the local community of Wythenshawe. During this time I kept a personal diary where I wrote my personal thoughts and described the events I participated in. I also attended also other training courses aimed to train a new volunteer cohort.

Regarding my notes I kept two books. One of them was used in the field during my interaction with people to write jottings, language and memory support and also some demographic information about the time, names, the place, date of the field settings where the participation takes place; the second one was for writing comprehensive notes at the end of every day, recording the chronology of events, portraits of the participants, reconstruction of dialogues, description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events or activities and so forth.
As briefly mentioned above there were difficulties that arose during the fieldwork that eventually led me to seek ASBO order against one of my neighbours. At that time I tried to get in contact with my co-residents in the compound, trying to see how others were responding, and trying to explain my dilemmas. I did discover that I was not the only target of the particular abuse I was subjected to, but I also found that nobody had any support to offer (described in more detail in chapter five).

To conclude, in this ethnography I invite the reader to travel with me to contemporary inner-city Manchester in order to question these labels of doing anthropology at home/abroad and to contest what it means to be working class, to be women and/or mothers, dwelling on a UK council Estate. I look into parenting and volunteer programs aimed at ‘helping’ the supposedly most disadvantaged. My experiences range from an analysis of the politics of citizenship (promoted by parenting classes) and technologies of government to the mundane practices of everyday nurturing, caring and loving children. I also deal with learning how to belong to and on the Estate and my own resistances and transformations in doing so, with a focus on the way relatedness became more salient through friendship and reciprocity (for example, I started my fieldwork by taking part in a wedding and finished my stay becoming the Godmother to my friend’s youngest boy there).

The first chapter maps the Estate through its inner social and spatial boundaries. It delineates symbolic distinctions of what dwelling on The Estate means. What kind of knowledge entails whether one belongs or not. The second chapter examines the ways in which volunteering practices can be viewed as neoliberal governing technologies which deploy moral strategies of care, child rearing and discipline.

Chapter three looks at mothers as targets of state intervention, how they deal with expertise and psy-knowledge. It shows the politics of mothering as everyday resistance and as a genealogy of subjectification. Chapter four analyses parenting classes, interpreting them simultaneously as policy for families, work through discipline and reflections of the imagined nation-state. As we shall see, ideas about mothering and of the creation of disciplined, autonomous and highly individualised citizens are entangled with particular ideas regarding the continuation of the nation-state. Finally, chapter five examines material and symbolic modes of dwelling on the Estate, focusing on how
everyday tactics and strategies are lived and experienced, creating a sense of what it is like and how various people experience living on the Estate in quite distinct ways.
CHAPTER ONE: “LIVED SOCIAL SPACE ON THE ESTATE”

This chapter draws on concepts of space and place as being physically, socially and temporally grounded, yet at the same time opened and boundless. Space and place in this work are seen as not only open ended but also as permanently negotiated through social interaction (Harvey 1993; Lefebvre 2002; Massey 2005) in order to analyse how social relations and everyday life are intimately attached and create attachments to places. I began by considering the complex relationships that space and place encompass within the socio-cultural world as a tentative framework for understanding classed, racialised and gendered practices, which emerged through the practice of reading through my field notes and observations. This focus was not planned as part of my initial research project. Throughout my fieldwork I spend a great deal of time walking around the Estate with one of my main informants (Tom, the photographer), discovering pathways and shortcuts, little woods and alleys. I learned not only geographies of the Estate but also distinctions attached to certain places and how people valued objects, relations and assets such as jobs and houses. Subsequently a key question raised concerned how space and place come to embody social relationships (Lefebvre 2002). I attempt to answer this question by engaging with Massey’s idea of space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey 2005). She draws attention to the implications of lived space as a product of interrelations, as a sphere in which different trajectories coexist, where there exists the possibility of multiplicity and heterogeneity, and also space as always under construction, as always seeking definition, negotiation; as never finished and never closed. At the same time I will also draw on some key ideas of space as socially constituted (Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 1993). Henri Lefebvre introduced his notion of “(social) space as a (social) product”, articulating three concepts: spatial practices (daily routines); representations of space (conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, engineers); and representational spaces (spaces lived through images and symbols, space as inhabited and used) (1991:38-39).

I am particularly interested in how space and places elicit distinctions, for example through having particular reputations, as well as how people who dwell in those spaces and places that elicit both stereotypes and prejudices also shape social identities. I want to explore differences between space and place, how they have been planned and lived; and in doing so, unfold fixed notions of social
deprivation and marginality. I finally turn my attention to examining ‘social space’ as a product of people’s social interaction in everyday life in Wythenshawe.

Distinctions between space and place in anthropology have been associated with preoccupations concerning time, bodily action, the cultural significance of locations, movement, duration, boundaries, as well as the relationship between bodily actors and terrestrial spaces (Munn 2003). Space, boundaries and time are intertwined dynamically and always changing, permanently being redefined through the actors who inhabit those places. As Bourdieu (2003) illustrated in his archetypal explanation of the Kabyle house, space is organised according to a set of homologous oppositions, between private and public life, day and night, male and female, culture and nature.

Spaces are thus rendered cultural and culture, at the same time, is rendered spatial; social practices are lived out in and through space (Lefebvre 1991 quoted in Pellow 2003). Places and their spatial aspects are thus inseparable from and connected to everyday social practices. They are intimately intertwined. “Like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society” (Weisman 1992:2 quoted in Pellow 2003:160). As Ryden (1993:37) explains “space is geography viewed from a distance, coolly pondered and figured out, calmly waiting to have meaning assigned to it” (quoted in Degnen 2005:735). Whereas place, resembling Ingold’s “dwelling perspective”, constitutes the “testimony and record of the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so have left something of themselves” (Ingold 1993). In other words, space and place may be understood as one when viewed from the perspective of trying to understand everyday practices and relationships. As Ryden (1993:38) concludes, “When space takes on three dimensions, when it acquires depth, it becomes place”. In this sense I use the notion of social space as mutually physical, socially and temporally constitutive.

Space and place subsequently are not simply two different realms; they become visibly entangled through notions of time (history), community, identity and power. Space and place can be a source of social and political order mediating
the everyday lives of people (Agnew and Duncan 1989). Moreover, space and place as mutually constitutive are also intimately linked with gender; men and women occupy and value spaces and places differently (Moore 1986; Massey 1994; Bourdieu 2003). This entangled notion of space and place will be understood in this piece of work as “social space” henceforth.

Having all these distinctions in mind I will now examine the notion of “social space” as constitutive and represented through people’s interaction. Concretely, I look at social space in the district of Wythenshawe, as a constitutive part of people's everyday practices and identities, as something never fixed and always negotiated. Moreover, I wish to explore the ways in which spatial practices are experienced and how representational spaces are differentiated in a local context such as Wythenshawe. In so doing I will explore a brief historical account of The Estate focusing on the outcomes of a social project initially designed to revolutionise people’s lives there. I look at what this Estate was meant to be, what it is and what it could be. I combine historical material with people’s memories and people’s distinctions regarding Wythenshawe as well as my own experiences and observations I gained whilst dwelling on this council Estate. The argument is developed through a brief account of Wythenshawe’s history. Following different layers of stories I attempt to highlight the ways in which social space not only draws on geography, streets and buildings but is also drawn through social, racial and economic distinctions made by its inhabitants. In this chapter I suggest that travelling by bus through the Estate may offer a glimpse of what is like to live on the Estate and what it means to learn to be “local”.

**Wythenshawe Boundaries**

Wythenshawe is located on the southern stretch of the River Mersey seven miles south from Manchester city centre in the North West of England. Its geography covers a vast area of Manchester (see figure one and two).
It is characterised by being both a very green area and also a densely populated one: it encompasses approximately eleven square miles of houses, parks and industrial terrain including the city’s international airport. The boundaries have changed over time; at present Wythenshawe is comprised of nine different areas: Northenden, Northen Moor, Baguely, Benchill, Sharston, Newall Green, Woodhouse Park, Peel Hall and Moss Nook (see figure three).
In the northern section of the district surrounded by the River Mersey and separated by the M56 motorway, lie Northenden and Northern Moor. As soon as you cross that imaginary line, on the same side of the M56, you will find the areas named Baguely, Benchill and Sharston which are situated in the middle of the district. The south western area closer to the airport contains the areas Newall Green and Woodhouse Park. Finally, in the south eastern region of the Estate you find Peel Hall and Moss Nook. There are physical landmarks that make each area very recognisable. For example, the airport in the southern boundary constitutes a physical barrier as well as the Motorways M60 and M56 (see figure three).
Figure 3: Wythenshawe’s Heritage Trail

Interestingly, boundaries are not just geographical markers. Boundaries can also be shaped by belonging, identity or everyday practices such as walking, talking, meeting up and shopping (Taylor and Rogaly 2009: 65). Importantly, Wythenshawe does not mean “Manchester” for local residents. When the people with whom I spoke in Wythenshawe refer to Manchester they would normally use the phrase “I’m going to town”, meaning going to the [big] city centre. Everyday life on the Estate was understood as different from life in “town” (referring to Manchester). Geographical location and physical features of the landscape constituted the most obvious visual distinctions. Wythenshawe is located forty-five minutes by bus from Manchester and going to town is in a sense, like going on a day trip. There are no terraced Victorian houses on the Estate as in many areas of Greater Manchester. Instead, the architectural landscape is distinguished by semi-detached red brick houses, wide avenues full of trees and there are only three or four tall tower blocks of council flats in Wythenshawe. The physical landscape is very open and less crowded than it is in Manchester. Less obvious differences and more subtle markers of difference emerge in and through social relations in Wythenshawe. My personal experience was that people in Wythenshawe, compared with people in Didsbury where I lived the previous year, tended to spend more time at home and to socialise more with neighbours whether in their house (talking through the gardens), on daily trips to the local shops or during activities at the various community centres. It struck me that people were more talkative than people in and around Didsbury. When I first moved to Wythenshawe I was pleasantly surprised by this friendliness. People talked to me wherever I went; at the bus stop, queuing in the supermarket, sitting on the bench in the Civic Centre or waiting in the doctor’s practice. I soon learned that people in Wythenshawe consider “Manchester” people to be not like “us” – as they say. On many occasions I heard people say “ya’know, they’re Manchester people …” implying difference. This difference was not simply a question of belonging to a place (an “us”/ “them” distinction); for it was also inflected with a subtle class distinction. One of my female acquaintances told me once, “you don’t need to get dressed to go shopping at the Civic … it’s not like going to the City Centre or so …”. In fact, a common scene in the Civic Centre used to be people (mostly young women) doing their daily shopping wearing pyjamas. Wearing pyjamas was seen by some middle class women as a marker of class. For example, one morning we had a cup of tea in my flat, one of my informants, who was clearly from a better off position, told us “well, I normally go shopping in Cheadle [a nearby upper middle class vicinity] … it is not like going to the Civic wearing your PJs (pyjamas) …”.

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This woman wanted to demonstrate that she did not belong in the Estate. The act of wearing pyjamas thus conveyed a status of being at “your place” (at home) whereas dressing up entailed going out of your place and also not “being looked down on” (e.g. going to town, referring to Manchester city centre, was clearly going out of “one’s place”). One of my closest informants used to get dressed up for going shopping in Next in the Arndale Centre in Manchester City Centre so that she felt she would not be looked down on.\(^1\) She did not want to look “less” proper, as she called it, than the rest of the people in the city, and so she would wear makeup and dress up “properly” for the occasion.\(^2\) According to my informant, the act of dressing properly normally means wearing high heels, a girly dress that matches your shoes, and carrying a big fashionable leather bag. These would be accompanied by makeup, long lashes and accessories such as bangles, pendants, earrings, hair-clips and so on. Dressing up entails fitting in the right standards of taste and value in front of, and for particular others who can “weigh you up”; that is to say, it has a particular audience in mind (in this case, city people that is supposed to be better off than people from The Estate). In this sense wearing pyjamas while shopping at the Civic centre in Wythenshawe allowed people to deploy a status of “being at their own place”, where nobody was going to look down at them because everyone is the same; they belong to the same place. Only outsiders could actually notice and remark upon such distinctiveness.

In this way, boundaries were drawn not only on maps but also through symbolic distinctions such as sense of belonging, certain kinds of aesthetics, class distinctions and so on, all of which can be linked to specific social spaces. In the next section, I examine the kinds of values attached and promoted through everyday activities on The Estate.

\(^1\) Next is a very popular middle-range retail store in the UK. It is not one of the cheapest (e.g. Primark) nor one of the most expensive (e.g. John Lewis).

\(^2\) The Arndale is one of the main indoor markets located in the city centre. Refurbished a few years after the city centre bombing, it has become one of the most popular commercial places in Manchester.
Social Space on the Council Estate

Wythenshawe is one of Manchester's largest districts, it is an important housing Estate created as a new "Garden City". The "Garden City" movement is a method of urban planning that was initiated in 1898 by Sir Ebenezer Howard in the United Kingdom, inspired by Utopian intellectuals mostly from France (see Ward 1992). It was also a movement of social reform. Garden cities were intended to be planned, self-contained communities surrounded by "greenbelts" (parks), containing proportionate areas of residences, industry and agriculture. Howard believed that overcrowded cities were one the main issues that promoted social problems. Howard’s garden city concept combined the town and country in order to provide the working class an alternative to working on farms or crowded, unhealthy cities (Ward 1992). In 1904, Raymond Unwin, a noted architect and town planner, along with his partner Barry Parker, won the competition run by the First Garden City, Limited to plan Letchworth, an area 34 miles outside London. Unwin and Parker planned the town in the centre of the Letchworth estate with Howard’s large agricultural greenbelt surrounding the town, and they shared Howard’s notion that the working class deserved better and more affordable housing (Ward 1992).

Wythenshawe as Garden City started from 1926 when a vast population started to be relocated away from the slums and the horror of the living conditions of workers in Industrial Manchester. The havoc associated with the resettlement and with moving such a large number of people (almost one hundred thousand people), all from different communities, was enormous and had a great deal of serious consequences. Former residents of Wythenshawe came from the slum clearances or were veteran soldiers from the First and Second World War, Policemen, the elderly and/or industrial workers. However, the Estate, like many others around Britain (see Ravetz 2001; Hanley 2007), was built initially without pubs, shops, amenities or services, and additionally, it was located far away from the main places of work in the centre of the city. As a result, by the late 20th century Wythenshawe was suffering from many social problems including

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16 These conditions were extensively charted by Engels in his contribution to the Communist Manifesto.
unemployment, vandalism, robbery and “unsatisfactory households” (Taylor and Rogaly 2007). 

The effect of moving more than one hundred thousand people to one of the largest Council Estates in Britain was devastating, but the transformation in the social relations that constructed this space was even greater (Massey 2001). Reports of hooligans delaying building processes, raids on materials in the construction sites, squatters’ houses and children stripping private gardens were common complaints made to the Police since the mid-1930s. Vandalism, burglary and stolen cars were the most frequent crimes reported since then, according to police accounts during the 1970s and 1980s. Various resident associations were set up to address these problems, and progress was very slow, according to many of my acquaintances who have various family memories dating from that time. Joan who is born and bred in Wythenshawe explained to me,

[Benchill] was mixed, families and elderly people living together ... everybody lived in harmony. There were few problems, you know, in the sixties ... they [the government] created a ghetto here, they put a lot of poor people, people who weren't working, they sort of created this Benchill ghetto ... they put lot of people without work, during the recession in the seventies, when there were very little jobs - they put a lot of the same families together – in late seventies and early eighties, and they have clashed together since then. They had to put a lot of resources into regenerating the area, opening up the area, bringing people, buying properties, mixing it up a bit. If you put a lot of the same people together in the same place, they clash; they don't bounce off one another. It's not a natural sort of movement. 

Over the years, the social experiment that was Wythenshawe has gradually changed and settled, becoming a better place to live, as many of my informants

17 “Unsatisfactory households” is a term which refers to “problem families”, as the authorities defined them, rather than to the material conditions of the houses. It was used to refer to domestic violence, drug abuse, school failure and so on.


19 I use pseudonyms throughout. Joan is a “born and bred” Wythenshawe resident who has devoted her life to working with local children. She runs a successful local charity that provides after school services for children in the area.
told me. Wythenshawe gradually acquired all the amenities and facilities that the early planners forgot, including schools, shops, pubs, community centres, churches, supermarkets and some job opportunities such as at Manchester Airport. Nowadays it has the Wythenshawe Forum, a major venue for dramatic, theatrical and musical events. It also has its own hospital: the Wythenshawe Hospital which grew out of the earlier Baguley Hospital after the war in 1948. As many of my informants acknowledge, Wythenshawe has changed a great deal over the last ten years. Tom (the photographer) recounted,

There has been loads of regeneration out here. Benchill Community Centre, more than a million pounds invested. The same with the Woodhouse Park Lifestyle Centre - lots of money has been put in ... It’s been social regeneration really.20

One aspect of this broad transformation occurred when many tenants on The Estate decided to exercise their “right to buy” promoted by the government of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). Many houses previously owned by the Council are now privately owned although most of the houses are still under the administration of the local housing association, such as Willow Park in Benchill.21 Responsibility for the housing stock continues to be transferred from the local council to housing associations in other areas of Wythenshawe as well. As I mentioned before, a vast investment was promised in the form of a Regeneration Project which meant that the district’s centre was renovated between 1999 and 2002, with new stores being built and new architectural changes being made. The main street in the Civic Centre now features gates that are locked at night so as to prevent the vandalism that had been seen in previous years. The tunnel (figure three) going between the multi-storey car park and the large supermarket building now exhibits a mosaic displaying various aspects of the town. The Forum Centre (figure four), which houses a library, leisure centre and other amenities, has also been renovated in a more youth-centric, modern style. In 2007 further redevelopment continued when

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20 Tom passed away while I was writing up this thesis. He was a retired, middle aged, amateur photographer and long term resident on the Estate, and was one of the most frequent co-conversationalist I had. He used to be a very active member of the Wythenshawe Photographic Society, an online Facebook group dedicated to visually documenting local everyday life on the Estate.

21 In the UK these organizations are non-profit bodies that provide low cost housing.
ASDA opened a new superstore with multi-storey car parking on the site of the old Cooperative store.\(^{22}\)

Figure 4: Tom’s photo. Entitled “Mosaics at Swan Walk, Civic Centre”

Figure 5: Tom’s photo. Entitled, “Forum”

Figure 4: Tunnel between multi-storey car park and the supermarket

Figure 5: Forum Leisure Centre

This shift has meant a new physical and social focus to the area (Massey 2001). The same houses now display signs of their private ownership. It offers a new opportunity to express personal pride and also to break-up of the old vision of “the working class” neighbourhood (Massey 2001). The same Garden City Estate is still there, but its meaning has slightly shifted. The negotiation of the space is defined on day by day basis. As one of my closest informants, Tom, explained to me, building new houses and facilities, better transport and major investment in primary schools are seen by established residents as a twofold consequence of the regeneration process; a way of enabling and at the same time a way of disabling. Tom pointed out that there is an “elision” (as he called it) in this process; as he explained, it is supposed to bring better conditions for

\(^{22}\) Available online at [http://www.wythit.com/wythit/Local_Activities/Local_History](http://www.wythit.com/wythit/Local_Activities/Local_History) [accessed on 7-Aug-2010]
Wythenshawe residents but instead it has become a focus of attraction for outsiders who come not only from Manchester but also from all over the world (he referred to foreigners) and who compete not only for jobs but also for houses, school places and health services/vacancies. Tom argued that many of the airport’s jobs are filled by foreigners, or rather by Manchester city “outsiders”, who commute to come to work and consequently, there are no jobs for Wythenshawe’s “established people” (as Tom calls long term residents like himself). Life on The Estate, in this sense, can be read as a being permanently negotiated, in contrast to being understood as a fixed space of dwelling about which one can learn. When viewed in this way, the ways in which people make sense of their life on the Estate reveal themselves as more significant and situated in a much broader context of multiple social relations. As Massey (2001: 459) describes, “places are spaces of social relations”.

A brief history of the Wythenshawe Estate

Wythenshawe and its fields have inherited roots going back to feudalism. According to the Northenden Civic Society, there is archaeological evidence of Roman coins discovered in 1972 and dated from the fourth century. There are also some similarly dated coins found near to the River Mersey between Cheadle and Didsbury. Wythenshawe is different from other areas in Manchester because it has been a woodland area since Roman times. The history of Wythenshawe, Deakin remarks, “is the story of the three ancient townships of Northenden, Baguley and Northen Etchells” (Deakin 1989: 1). According to Deakin (1989) the first record of Northenden and Baguley comes from the Domesday Book of 1086. This book was written on the orders of William the Conqueror after the redistribution of land from the English to the Normans following their invasion in 1066 (Deakin 1989). Wythenshawe means a “willow-shaw”, shaw being a word still in use for a wood; the area name Sharston means a shaw-stone, whilst Baguely refers to a “badger-lea” (Deakin 1989: 2). It used to be the home of the Tatton family from the fourteenth century till the twentieth century when they sold their land and those three towns mentioned became “civil parishes” that were joined together as the suburban Garden City.

23 In 1926 the city council acquired the whole of the Tatton Estate comprising 10,396,374 square metres for £205,520. Available on line at: http://www.wythenshawehistory.btk.com/p_The_Tattons.ikml [accessed on 2-11-09]
when they became part of Manchester around 1929. Wythenshawe is well known as the one of the largest council estate in Europe, despite the fact that, at present, most of the properties are in the hands of private landowners and private housing associations. The idea of Wythenshawe as a community and as a Garden City was first discussed in 1926 in the framework of a project which involved over a thousand people. The project was born out of the following two related issues: (1) increasing pressure from the city of Manchester to provide more living space due to the swelling population, exacerbated by the First World War; and (2) professional city reformers and planners who had a dream of “better living conditions for working people” (Deakin 1989: 20).

Housing legislation in Britain began with the Artisans’ Dwellings Act of 1875, followed by the Royal Commission into the living conditions of Britain’s poorest people in 1885. It was the former Artisans’ Dwelling Act which suggested programmes of slum clearance which intended to replace the back-to-back terraces where families of twelve or more were crammed into single rooms (Hanley 2007:53). The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 strengthened earlier acts and encouraged local councils to undertake housing improvement schemes. The end of the First World War also meant the beginning of large-scale state funding for council housing, launched under the slogan “homes fit for heroes”. The 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act (more commonly known as the Addison Act) established a measurement of how many houses were required to clear the most insanitary slums, concluding that they would need over five hundred thousand council houses. The Addison Act also concluded that the houses which would be truly fit for heroes were those with private gardens which could only be built outside the city borders due to restrictive laws already enforced. As a result, new regulations were imposed stressing the importance of “an open layout with no more than twelve houses per acre [4.046,85 square metres], seventy feet between rows of facing houses ... most houses should have three bedrooms, a large living room...with a sunny aspect, a small parlour, a reasonable-sized scullery, a bathroom and a water closet approached under cover” (Deakin 1989: 24). Local authorities were required to provide schemes on how they would achieve this in working-class areas and new powers were given to condemn properties and clear slums within their boundaries. The government offered a subsidy for houses built by local councils for rent. The 1930’s Housing

Act introduced a five-year programme for the clearance of slums in towns with designated Improvement Areas.

The idea of Wythenshawe as a Garden City was a long and broadly discussed project. Barry Parker was one of the most well-known pioneer planners to be associated with Wythenshawe. He was a revolutionary architect, probably influenced – although there is no written evidence - by the intellectual trend at the time, with utopians such as Edward Belamy and Ebenezer Howard (Ravetz 2001) who gave birth to the idea of a “Garden City” as a new way of organising housing for an increasing population in big cities. Their main proposal was to build a Garden City creating a network or ring belt of suburban areas located a short distance from the central town. In such green areas, workers and their families could live in better conditions. There was a predominant idea that society could be transformed for the better by improving the living conditions of its people (Hanley 2007: 51).

Wythenshawe’s project as a Garden City was inspired by those national trends in British social policies. What is really remarkable is the notion of social transformation implied in such a project. To expand on this, I borrow Hanley’s idea that social class can be drawn into the physical landscape. I would argue that social class, values, reputation and social relationships can also be shaped by space and place and vice versa. In this vein, Wythenshawe was conceived as being a nearby (from the city) working class realm into which people were supposed to move, thus almost automatically eliminating all the problems associated with the slums. This Council Estate was associated with slum problems and the working classes even before the Estate was built in its entirety. The strong link with slum-clearance, the poor, the working classes and with deviant behaviour has remained to the present day (Taylor and Rogaly 2009). As Hanley (2007) asserted, the word “council” became pejorative and had negative connotations regarding people’s clothing, accents, hairstyles and demeanour. The idea of living on a Council Estate has, ever since then, been a very strong social distinction attached to every resident.

Underpinning the Garden City project is a “naturalistic” (Ingold 1993) conception of space and place as a flat surface on a map, a “neutral external backdrop to human activities”, as Ingold asserts. The project of building a municipal Estate
came to represent a right assigned to working-class people as deserving of healthier and better living conditions. The new architecture of the small cottages, three bedrooms and vast gardens was meant to build a new world of relationships and improved quality of life for all its working-class inhabitants. However, the Garden City as I mentioned, was initially built without pubs, amenities or services such as schools, shops, churches or community areas. Moreover there was little employment available near the Estate. It was conceived as a natural landscape able to give birth to a community itself, but no history, social, racial or economic relationships were taken into account. Wythenshawe Estate however, once identified as one of the poorest in the country, has been the focus of millions of pounds of public investment over approximately the past ten years. Many of my acquaintances estimated that remarkable improvements had been made over the last decade. I learned through my fieldwork that much of the money invested had been given for the Regeneration Project run by Manchester City Council which aims to improve the living conditions of the whole community.  

Nevertheless what really seems to be happening is that social spaces are being permanently negotiated. They are neither innocent nor empty vessels, as Rodman asserts (1992). Social spaces resemble Rodman’s notion of place as “politicised, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions” (1992: 641). Considering this I would argue that Wythenshawe’s social spaces have become, not only what people who live on The Estate do, make, think, behave and inhabit (i.e. spatial practices); they are at the same time what outsider people, such a middle- upper-class neighbours (from Didsbury, Cheadle and Northenden for instance), authorities, workers, the mass media and “the public”, imagine and think about Wythenshawe Estate and its inhabitants (i.e. representations of space). What I am attempting to highlight here is that spatial representations of social class, reputation, social relationships and their correlative values and distinctions are culturally defined, politically loaded and historically particular. The last ten years on the Estate have meant a new physical and social focus to the area (Massey 2001). The same houses have signs of their private ownership – porches, fancy bricks and front doors. As I pointed out above these changes offer a new opportunity to express personal  

pride and also to break-up of the old vision of the “working class” neighbourhood (Massey 2001). As Massey (2001) points out, regarding Wythenshawe, the physical Estate is still there, but its meaning has slightly shifted. The original Garden City imagined, planned and built for the working classes continues to show how class composition has changed, how transformations in the economic productive system have meant changes in the composition, materiality and meaning of class. Negotiation continues over the space. An emphasis on spatiality brings our attention to the simultaneous coexistence of others with their trajectories and stories to tell (Massey 2005:11).

According to Massey, who grew up in Wythenshawe, often but by no means always, there is active aggression, not necessarily against persons, but visible in the shattered bus shelter, the massacred sapling, the piles of garbage left outside the bins and so forth. Prams, scooters, shopping trolleys and bicycles compete for space on the street. The people for whom this Estate was built are no longer the same as before and “they turn out to be multiple and differentiated” (Massey 2001: 469). Wythenshawe is not only a haven for the working class; it is a product of multiple relations always under construction. It is difference and multiplicity but not opposed, as such, to class. The space and place in Wythenshawe is where the social is constructed.

Drawing on Ingold’s (1993) “dwelling perspective”, I would say that social space on the Wythenshawe Estate is intimately linked with its history as a Council Estate and as a social engineering project aimed to bring better life conditions to the poor, to those from the slum clearance and to working class people from Manchester more generally. The lasting testimonies of the Wythenshawe people’s lives have left memories that speak of their particular struggles over the years, becoming part of what is “a landscape of invisible layers” (Ryden, quoted in Degnen, 2005). What has been told about Wythenshawe and what Wythenshawe really is, seems to be knitted in series of multiples stories, meanings and relationships that people have forged with the place. As Degnen points out, “people do not ‘layer’ meaning onto the otherwise unchanging physical forms of the environment. Rather, they construct relationships with place” (2005: 739). In other words, dwelling on the Estate implies certain kind of

26 Doreen Massey grew up in Wythenshawe, Manchester, and her parents continued to live on The Estate until a few years ago.
knowledge and the ability to read and see those “invisible layers” of meaning. For instance, during my fieldwork I lived in a brand new compound built above the site where the Sharston Baths used to be, where thousands of memories and new relationships were shaped. That place is part of the memory of many former residents and almost three generations of families. The same applies to knowledge about where to go on The Estate, who lives in which place, how to get a better deal in certain shops, what to do on the Estate, what places one should avoid and which ones are preferred. People create expertise regarding the meanings of dwelling a place, “through living in it, the landscape becomes part of us, just as we are part of it” (Ingold 1993: 154). The experience of lived space is the “business of dwelling”, as Ingold remarks.

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world... that each place draws its unique significance (Ingold 1993: 155)

Living on the Estate

Between June 2008 and September 2008, I was writing up my PhD research proposal and dealing with the process of my family moving to and settling down in the Benchill area of Wythenshawe. We had moved from another, rather different, area of Manchester (East Didsbury). Although I had officially begun my fieldwork after successfully passing my pre-fieldwork examination in October 2008, I had already been writing notes since January 2008 when I became a home-visiting volunteer at Start-Up. Commencing fieldwork in Wythenshawe was made easier for me because of my previous role there as a volunteer and subsequent domicile in the area which gradually allowed me to acquire some hard-to-obtain tacit knowledge about its geography, people and circumstances.

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27 Didsbury is a predominantly middle class residential area in south Manchester characterised by its semidetached houses, little cottages and new buildings aimed at young professionals and families. It is a very well connected area with access to a rail station, several buses and many services and shops.

28 Start-Up is a modified name for the local organization in Wythenshawe which works providing help for underprivileged women with children under five years-old, through a group of volunteers who visit those families in their homes.
Being able to live on the Estate however, offered me a world of difference. The change arose through the difference between observed (when my home was elsewhere) and literally, lived-participatory experiences (since moving to Wythenshawe).

I spent most of my fieldwork period building different networks in the local community in an attempt to keep my ethnographic experience rolling, but I soon became aware that I was also dealing with my own family life ethnographically. In this respect, my experience of doing ethnography in Britain differs from most non-western ethnographies where the anthropologist often dwells within a local family house. I was established with my partner and my thirteen year old son on my own. Therefore I had to deal with every single issue of daily life based on my own abilities to survive and to learn by doing, probably to the same extent that local people do. However, one important difference was that as local people, they may have some other historical or experiential knowledge to draw on to which I did not have access. Issues of access to, and quality of, health care, as well as mundane arrangements such as garbage disposal and the use of parking spaces were both sometimes causes of dispute. Weekly parties, drunken fights and domestic violence amongst my neighbours were also a matter of daily routine that I had to deal with.

Very soon I realised that “social spaces” are far more complex than geographies and maps or even mere narratives of one place. In fact, I became aware that social space required an expertise that I did not have. Such expertise was knowledge on how to read invisible layers of symbolic meaning not available to newcomers at first sight. I needed to know for instance that “hoodies” asking for “a light” on the corner are not delinquents as the television often portrays them.29 Instead, they are just bored grown up kids hanging out in their neighbourhood. I also needed to know that the person who slept for several months in the common hallway inside my building (of whom we were all scared) was a sixteen year old boy sleeping rough, as I later discovered when the police came over and found him sleeping inside the rubbish shelter covered in old mattresses, later taking him to the police station.

29 Normally they were local youngsters wearing oversized, dark sweatshirts with hoods worn over their heads, in such a way that made it impossible to see their faces.
I would certainly never have been able to become one of Wythenshawe’s “established people” (as Tom termed himself) during my limited amount of time spent living there at least, but I became a good learner of what this entails. Different memories, in different relationships and in different spaces joined together over time, changing, moulding and shaping what it was like to live in a place like Wythenshawe. Being a volunteer at one of the local organizations and also a resident helped me to become slowly aware of the socio-spatial-economic conditions in which people live on the Estate and most importantly of the kind of knowledge required to be local.

**Learning to be local**

I met Tom (the photographer) through the virtual network of Facebook, when I was looking for Wythenshawe’s networking groups. Tom was an amateur photographer and an active member of the Facebook group called the “Wythenshawe Photography Society”. I joined the group and we started a virtual conversation which led to a first encounter at the Civic Centre. Tom later introduced me to Wythenshawe’s social spatial geography. Sadly he passed away unexpectedly after I left my field site. Tom was a retired man in his sixties who used to live on his own. He had neither children nor a partner. Tom came to live in Wythenshawe in 1991. He was originally from Salford where he used to own a Victorian terraced house “in very bad shape” as he described it. Tom told me when he eventually got the money to renovate the house in Salford he instead decided to sell it and move to another area. As he described it:

> When I was looking for houses around Greater Manchester and north Cheshire ... The house prices as a general rule in 1991 to 1992, when they were, certainly on the right at the west peak ... they were completely unaffordable, relative to what's being offered ... And then, I found the Wythenshawe section ... And the prices were amazingly cheap... (Tom’s interview)

Since then, he lived in Wythenshawe. Tom was severely deaf and he needed a hearing aid to make his way in life. He proudly told me that he went to Salford
Grammar School and that he successfully completed his secondary education in 1963. Later in life, in 2005, Tom achieved a Master’s degree in Business Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. Nevertheless, according to him, he was unable to get a well-paid position due to his handicap and also due to his “difficult character”, as he acknowledged. Tom argued that his deafness has been a serious extra disadvantage in his life, preventing him from finding better paid employment or from staying longer in the job market. His disability has forced him to stay in poverty, he explained.

Tom defined himself as “definitely not a neo-conservative” person. He was a very clever man who declared that he had survived discrimination (due to his deafness) and social deprivation (due to chronic low income). He was not a “typical Wythenshawe-case” he used to affirm. Tom told me he normally used to spend most of his time reading or searching the internet at home. According to Tom’s stories he seemed to be a lonely man, with few friends. State benefit had been only source of income since long ago, he confessed. Seventy four pounds weekly used to pay for his food, transport and gas – a luxury in winter which was only for cooking. Tom told me one day “I do not turn the heating on, even on the coolest winter days ... It is a luxury pleasure”. Tom normally used to walk everywhere, as did I every time we met. He used to enjoy walking around the Estate and taking photos that he later uploaded to the virtual networks of Flickr or Facebook. He was a very involved member of Wythenshawe online photograph websites. This also meant that he normally stayed on the Estate; he only occasionally went to Manchester, Salford or Aughton Green to visit his sister, as he let me know in one of the many conversations we had.

We normally used to meet up for a walk around the Estate or for “dinner” and coffee at my flat. 30 According to what he told me, Tom lived in poverty. He graciously admitted once “when I come to yours for dinner I get my veggies ration for the week”. When I inquired about this he explained that eating vegetables is more expensive than eating processed food, and therefore he could not afford to buy vegetables. Tom died while I was writing this ethnography. He also died in poverty. During Christmas 2009 he passed away after a brief but acute illness. He died alone at home during his sleep, as his sister let a mutual

30 Dinner refers to lunch in the working class idiom of the North West of England.
friend know. This friend published the news on the Wythenshawe Photography Society website. That is how I learned about his death, through the web, in the same way that we had met. According to the web users, Tom was found at his home several days after he died. Numerous messages of condolences were posted. I was in shock and I still am. The last time I met him was in November 2009 when I finished my fieldwork. Tom was a very reserved man and he died as such, but mainly he was a proper “local Wythenshawe established person” as he liked to call himself.

Tom taught me that as a local person you should be able to travel around the Estate “knowing its bits and pieces”. In the next section, I attempt to bring The Estate to the reader by way of a journey through the main features of the landscape that a visitor can apprehend on a first visit to Wythenshawe.

A Journey around the Estate

Normally Tom and I used to meet at the Forum Café. The Forum Centre (see figure four) is part of the Regeneration Project which commenced in 1999. The Forum is a massive community building that comprises a library, leisure centre, café, gym, swimming pool, a health centre, chemist, learning centre and other amenities. It is part of the modern side to Wythenshawe located in the commercial heart of the district, next to Wythenshawe Market, the bus station and the major supermarket and shops. The Forum Café is an indoor facility located within the Forum building. It is a glazed space in the corner of the inside open space. There are tables and silver chairs all-encompassed by big plant pots, endowing the space with an artificial modern green feel. Inside the Café you will find more formica tables and silver chairs as well as a big self-service counter where you can get anything from sandwiches to salad. The counter opens into a buffet where you can order the kind of food displayed. The food offered is listed in a panel on the wall. Full English breakfasts, jacket potatoes, beans, cheese, chips, bacon and salad are served.

Tom quickly explains that the people who come to the Forum Café are “not established Wythenshawe people”. The price of a cup of tea is far more expensive than in the Market Café. The food portions are smaller and the menu less diverse than what is on offer down the road in the Market Café. The Market,
though, has not got the silver chairs or air conditioning that the Forum Café has. As Tom taught me, local people would not buy coffee or tea in the Forum Café; they would rather go to the Market Café or the Birtles Café in the Civic Centre. Distinctions are made based on personal budgets and taste for food. Being in the Market implies eating more for less money and eating the kind of home-made dishes that normally people would have at home. Tom told me that local people prefer the Market Café notwithstanding the lack of heating and despite the joined up tables and chairs that make it difficult for anyone to sit down without hassle. Being local in this sense thus means having gained knowledge of how to make a living with little money. Being local implies having knowledge of the place, of the Estate itself, where to go and where not to. An essential part of being a proper resident is knowledge about the landscape, of knowing the layout of the Estate and consequently to know where to go and how to get there, knowing when is the best time, knowing who lives where and so on. In this sense I borrow O’Byrne’s (1997) idea that “people learn to be local” (quoted in Taylor and Rogaly 2009).

Previous ethnographies in Britain have suggested that the way in which people identify themselves is in terms of being local or from elsewhere; such distinctions are made between those who belong and those who do not belong (Edwards, 2000:83). Frankenberg’s (1957) account distinguishes between “Pentre people” and “outsiders”: the outsiders were mainly English-speaking and most Pentre know some Welsh even if they did not use it; regarding religion, most Pentre people were non-conformist whereas outsiders were mostly associated with the Church or with nothing; and the most significant difference was an economic one, Pentre people were mainly wage-earners or small tradesman and outsiders were salaried, landlords or engaged in business on a larger scale. Rapport (1993) in Yorkshire distinguishes “locals” and “off comers”; Cohen (1987) in the Shetland Islands, distinguishes between “wir folk” and “da folk sooth”; and Strathern (1981) in an Essex village, between “villagers” and “newcomers”.

In Edwards’ own work, she suggests that in Bacup such distinctions are made between Bacup “born and bred” and “incomers”. What I am arguing then is that being local in Wythenshawe implies having knowledge of the place and the relationships embedded within it. Being local implies knowledge about what pathway to follow, where to have coffee and the best jacket potatoes, knowledge
about people’s and places’ reputations; in other words, knowledge of the simultaneous maps that can be drawn on the Estate. As Wythenshawe’s idioms suggest, distinctions are made between “established Wythenshawe people”, meaning mostly white English long term residents and “non-established Wythenshawe people”, meaning most of the time but not always non-English and newcomers to the Estate. It is not a racially exclusive criterion, for a white English person who just arrived at the Estate would also be considered “non-established”, meaning that the status of being “established” is determined first and foremost in terms of time of residence on the Estate and secondly by ethnic origin.

In order to gain a broader understanding of Wythenshawe’s idioms and everyday life on the Estate I now turn to describe the Estate’s main features. I propose to make an imaginary journey using the same route that local residents would normally make when travelling by bus. Imagine coming from the city of Manchester to Wythenshawe. You can basically travel along one of two possible routes. The fastest way is along Princess Road which runs through Moss Side, Withington and West Didsbury. As soon as you reach the River Mersey, picture in your mind a very green, densely wooded area. Princess Road runs between Wythenshawe Park, set in 109 hectares of open gardens and woodland, and the extensive housing surrounding it. The green landscape is only broken when you enter the Estate from Princess Road. Now you see series of semidetached houses situated in innumerable clusters of cul-de-sacs on circular roads and hexagonal streets (see figure five).

The bus goes around the Estate dizzying the visitor’s mind and her/his geographical coordination. After a while, you do not recognise the south from the north. East and west are no longer in the same places they used to be. Houses circulate in and through the window of the bus. Red brick is the main building material that leaves an impression, whilst many chimneys contrast against the sky and white double glazing, coloured doors and glazed porches paint the Estate’s landscape. Spinning around the West side of the District, through Newall Green and Woodhouse Park, we see not only Wythenshawe Hospital, but also continuous clusters of neighbourhoods bricked up in multiple colours. Rows of breeze-block, terraced houses smatter the streets struggling with pedestrians, cars, scooters and buses that contend for a space on the road. Red brick-built semidetached and terraced houses draw together a maze of
dwellings similar to each other and hence more confusing for new visitors. One or two old local pubs and small shops have been abandoned and vandalised. Graffiti has been painted over their walls, their windows are broken and debris is spread all around each of these buildings which were once full of life. Occasionally a shattered bus stop reminds you that social spaces are always negotiated through social relations. There are permanent reminders on the Estate that so-called anti-social behaviour must be reported to the council. Multiple banners in public areas and pamphlets show information delivered from the city council, informing people that they can call them to report an incident or to ask for help. Tom explained to me that these acts of violence (the shattered bus stop, vandalised buildings, even the bullying or terrorising of people on the streets) show the great extent to which the authorities have neglected Wythenshawe over time. On Tom’s understanding, being neglected by authorities [the state] best describes the existence of poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion.
Wythenshawe Estate was built with the idea of eliminating the terrible conditions which industrial Manchester had generated for those who lived on the margins of the modern city. However, in so doing a new pole of marginalisation was created outside the city. This Estate, as is the case with many other council estates in Britain, was designed and built during the first half of the twentieth century. Like others, it is also associated with a major urban area but both spatially and socially peripheral (Hanley 2007). At the time it was believed that society and its
people’s behaviour could be permanently transformed through the use of and design of space and natural landscape (see figure five). Whilst at the time its design was revolutionary, it has become obvious today that the physical space on the Estate is complicated, full of blockages and curled streets that makes not only vehicle but also pedestrian circulation difficult. There have been attempts to improve the isolation that this design originally generated. One example is the regeneration of the Civic Centre including its refurbished Market and the Forum centre and also the proximity with the city Airport.
Figure 7: Street at Wythenshawe

Wythenshawe Strategic Regeneration Framework. 2004. Manchester City Council
More of the Journey: Sharston, the Market Cafe and Manchester Airport

A second route coming from the city centre to Wythenshawe crosses the whole town via Oxford Road through Withington, continuing down Palatine Road. Near the end of Palatine Road, after crossing the River Mersey (which looks smaller than you would imagine) you arrive in Northenden (see Figure seven). Imagine three blocks of side to side Victorian terraced houses, which have been mainly converted into shops, banks, a post office, hairdresser and newsagents. There is also a Barnardos’ Charity Shop, a Chinese take away, Thai Restaurant, a Chippie, and one or two relatively modern bars.\(^{31}\) Palatine Road then merges into Wythenshawe Park and Sale Road, leaving behind a massive Mormon Church and the Britannia Airport Hotel, which reminds you that you are very close to the main airfield in the city. Northenden, a complex web of semidetached brick-built houses each with a large back garden, hides behind the shopping area.\(^{32}\) The whole area looks considerably better-off than the surrounds in neighbouring Benchill. I learned about “better kept” houses walking around The Estate with Tom (the photographer). In Northenden, the houses are bigger and better kept, which normally means that the gardens are well set and tidy, have flowers and nice grassland. Most of the houses show a perfectly painted front and bricks look red and bright, PVC double glazing has replaced old wood windows. Conservatories are displayed in almost every house and most of the houses have one or two cars parked in their front doors. There are no shattered bus-stops, graffiti or debris neither abandoned houses or pubs.

The bus goes all the way through Northenden, which does not take more than five minutes, and then it turns East and South again, going into Sharston (see figure two or/and six). Sharston is an industrial area that has been expanded within the originally Benchill area of the Estate, with the original aim, according to Tom, of lifting Benchill up in statistics charts which used to designate the district as one of the poorest Estates in England. Aesthetically, the Sharston industrial area is one of the most arid areas in Wythenshawe. Imagine large grey

\(^{31}\) Chippie is a slang word for fish and chip shop.

\(^{32}\) Northenden has its own specific history. It used to be part of Cheshire included in the township of Northern Etchells which later became a separate parish. It was incorporated into Manchester as part of the extension of Manchester City Council that allowed the Local Government, using the 1929 Act, to rearrange and redevelop its own boundaries. Northenden is now part of Wythenshawe district, but Northenden people tend to identify themselves as different from Wythenshawe people.
breeze-block warehouses, some of them reconverted into offices. No signs or public notices are displayed but commercial script reads in big letters “offices for rent”. I lived in a renovated area of Sharston which is surrounded by Benchill area. The industrial area was one of the first places that Tom took me for a walk.

![Diagram of Wythenshawe’s Main Roads](image)

*Figure 8: Wythenshawe’s Main Roads*

Wythenshawe Strategic Regeneration Framework. 2004. Manchester City Council

This industrial estate, I learned from Tom, consists of various sectors named using the Greek alphabet: Alpha, Beta, Gamma. The landscape through Sharston Road passing through to Wythenshawe looks grey indeed; the weight of the industrial era has left its mark. You can see, on both sides of the road, outsized buildings, grassless gardens and even a zirconium pinnacle of 128 meters built in a spot named Alpha Point that has been abandoned, yet stands out clearly. It evokes the image of a discarded modernity; an image of post-industrialisation. There is no green landscape in the Sharston industrial area, just old structures erected all together higgledy-piggledy stretching across an enormous terrain that
merges now into the southern section of the M56 motorway creating a roundabout and some pedestrian tunnels and pathways that connect the area with new housing projects. Tom explained that this area used to be a flourishing district full of activity and employment for local people. Now it is empty, unattended and in some places vandalised. Many airport-related businesses have been set up in the area: parking spaces, storage and industrial machinery. It is a neglected social space, as Tom liked to say.

Continuing the journey from Sharston’s roundabout, the residential area flourishes again. New housing projects welcome every traveller. There are new private compounds built over the last two years. Greens, reds, yellows and browns are born again in the landscape. Colours and images of community life come back into the traveller’s view. Tree-lined streets and gardens create green scenery that flows through the bus window as you move forward towards and into the inner Estate. Houses are densely arranged using the original ideas of Barry Parker: there are cul-de-sac streets, along with hub shapes and rows with circular ends (see figure five). Chimneys on tiled roofs come in to sight again contrasting with the sky. Picture travelling further south, Sharston Road becomes Brownley Road. This avenue crosses the whole Estate towards the district’s centre including the bus station and the Market.

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33 Barry Parker was the one of the master planners of Wythenshawe as Garden City.
One day in November 2008, on a typical winter’s day in the North West of England – cold and wet - I met Tom for a little walk around. There was a light dusting of snow in many of the gardens and most of the tiled roofs were covered in a thin, white layer of ice. The sky was partially cloudy, though there was sunlight coming through. Clouds were moving fast, the wind was freezing cold and it felt as if a storm were brewing. People on the streets wore coats, scarves, hats and gloves. Their faces, especially noses, appeared reddish - unusual because as I had observed, local people normally wear lighter clothes, short sleeves or simply a jumper, even in winter. Tom always used to wear a wool jumper and a winter cotton jacket (clearly non waterproof, because it used to look wet when it
was rainy). All those signs made me realise that it was really cold and that it wasn’t just my unsettled feelings about the weather.

We agreed to meet up at the bus station, located next to the Wythenshawe market. Tom and I simply followed what local people were doing. Most of them walked through a small tunnel that connects the bus station with the local market. Inside the tunnel I met an elderly white man wearing just a sweater, not a jacket, broken shoes and an old woollen beanie. He had tattooed letters on the top of each of his fingers that really stood out, and when read together spelt out the word “angel”. He was playing a flute while asking for some money, pointing to a small hand written piece of cardboard which lay in front of him. Tom explained to me that this was his “job” and that he regularly comes to the same spot to earn some money. Tom also remarked that he was probably not British because if he were, he would not be begging.

We walked further along the short tunnel. To the right side there is a glass gate that gives you access to the small local market. The market is located in a square building with a high roof. It has two glazed manual gates at every access point. The place smells of the fresh bakery and the butcher shop. It reminded me of the market called “La Vega” that I used to go to as a child in Santiago de Chile. This place was built at the beginning of the 20th century when all kinds of fresh agricultural products were sold. According to Tom, Wythenshawe Market sells the cheapest food; being especially good value for vegetables, seeds, meat and fish. I observe that they also sell special devices and mobility aids for the elderly and disabled such as scooters, wheelchairs, toilet adaptations, and so forth. Tom mentions that it is the favourite and most popular place to buy groceries and is also known for its Café, as earlier mentioned. In this café, which is always busy, the menu is written on small pieces of coloured cardboard stuck behind the glass display counter where people order and pay for their food. On this occasion, Tom and I had to wait for someone to leave before we could get a place at one of the fixed formica tables with four attached chairs. Tom does not visit busy public places like the Market Café too often because, as he explains, his hearing device does not work properly in noisy environments. The device captures background noises at the same volume as the closest sound he is trying

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34 A small close-fitting hat worn on the back of the head
to listen to, he explains, transforming everything into a very disturbing concert of loud echoes.

Most of the people sat in the Market Café that day carried small trolleys containing their daily shopping or simply carried plastic bags filled with goods. Some elderly people come on their scooters and parked them just outside the Café, in the main aisle of the Market. I learned from Tom that people who carry plastic bags - “baggies” he calls them – may be considered the poorest in the area. Tom taught me that they carry plastic bags around with them because they most probably have no car. When you carry your bags or push your trolley, you are effectively making the statement that you have no vehicle, Tom explained. It therefore marks a social distinction between those at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the rest. The Forum Café, on the other hand, is strategically located next to the parking area. People can just park their car and have a coffee inside the Forum Café. There is no need for bags or trolleys. What I learned thus was that there are social values, statuses and aesthetical distinctions attached to places or assets. Places such as the Market Café, the Forum Café, are normally occupied by those considered at the bottom of the social order within The Estate. Having a car gives people certain status and social prestige, which means that the car owner is no longer seen as underprivileged or poor by other members of the neighbourhood, they normally display their status by using other social spaces (i.e. Forum Café).

On the other hand, within walking distance of the Civic Centre where the Forum Leisure Centre is, you can find one of the most important landmarks in Wythenshawe: Manchester Airport. The airport demarcates the boundary with Cheshire around the southern edge of the Estate (see figure four). It was officially founded in 1928. Barton, near Eccles, was chosen as the site of Manchester's new aerodrome. At the same time, Manchester City Council was keen to establish a municipal airport, and so a temporary airfield was built in Wythenshawe. In 1929 Wythenshawe Airport opened for business. In 1974 it became a well-equipped international airport, presently one of the busiest airports in the UK. Since then it has become one of the poles of attraction of the district in terms of employment and financial investment. Many newcomers have come to live in Wythenshawe because they work at the airport. According to Tom many of these new housing developments have been built to house such new workers rather than people established in Wythenshawe. He argued that
most of the new privately administrated flats start at prices from around £500 per month whereas a council owned semidetached house with three bedrooms costs around £300 per month. This difference, according to Tom, pushes local people out of such a housing market. I learned from many of my acquaintances that there is a waiting list of approximately three years for a council house on the Estate. This time can be reduced if the applicant is in a priority situation due to disability, number of children or homelessness. In fact, this happened to Annie, one of my most important collaborators. She has three children under five years old and had been living in a two bedroom small ground floor council flat for the last four years. She had applied for larger accommodation after her second child was born in 2008. Annie finally got a three bedroom semidetached house – although a house in bad shape- after waiting nearly two years on the waiting list of the Willow Park Housing Association.

The Airport is one of the most dynamic places in the area remaining open twenty four hours every day of the week. It has become an icon embedded in Wythenshawe’s landscape. It has a wide diversity of physical features - airplanes flying almost above roofs, buses, cabs and vans constantly going in and out, running through the Estate and connecting people through the M56, themed pubs and hotels, flashing banners advertising cheap flights abroad, travellers pushing and piling their luggage on the bus, airport workers wearing uniforms, and so on. All these spectacles and more, position the airport as a social place rather than as a “non-place” for the people of Wythenshawe, as Mark Augé would call it (Merriman 2004). Different people inhabit, travel and work at the airport, many stories are told simultaneously about the airport and through it. One such story concerns workers. According to Tom, most of the jobs offered at the Airport are for cheap labour, which means long hours at unsociable times (shifts go from 5am till 3pm or 7pm till 3am), paid at minimum or relatively low wages. Tom, and other informants as well, explained to me that people who are generally willing to accept such jobs are foreigners or low qualified local people. Tom ironically used to remark that “Wythenshawe’s jobs are not for Wythenshawe people”. Tom and other acquaintances on the Estate blame the increasing Airport expansion on the fact that many immigrants, and especially Polish people according to Tom, have come to live on the Estate.

This attitude of blaming immigrants for a perceived decay of the area was a common feature of discourse amongst some of the residents I met. As Botero
(2009) asserts, by presenting inequality and marginalization in ethnic terms, people risk giving a cultural reading of poverty instead of having a bigger picture of how systematic economic inequality generates disadvantage. Discourses about foreigners or even about the ‘white working class’, instead of speaking about class inequality, offer a cultural explanation of disadvantage and help perpetuate the idea of poverty as a result of individual effort or attitude rather than of paying attention to the structural causes of poverty, lack of employment and marginalisation. Blaming immigrants and talking about the “white working class” somehow racialises notions of inequality and has the effect of attaching negative values and reputations to certain people who live on the Estate. It creates a social type featured in the mass media, designated through labels such as “chav”, “asbo” or “pramface”: a council estate dwelling, cultural minority, perhaps a single parent, like a “shameless” TV character or the earlier mentioned “hoodie”. 35

Inequality thus becomes not just an issue linked to the undeserving poor (those at the bottom of social hierarchies and, it is argued, who only have themselves to blame for being in such a position) who live on the outskirts of the city; inequality also comes to be associated with the increasing flux of immigrants moving onto the Estate. Older established people (mostly white) tended to explain the deterioration of living conditions, unemployment, lack of housing and other community problems in terms of the increasing migration movements in and out of the district. There is fierce competition for very scarce resources such as housing, school meals, school vacancies, health services, employment and so on. As such, newcomers appear to be surplus and unlawful users. This moral claim about whether or not newcomers have the right to claim access to state benefits tends to obscure the experience of disadvantage (and its structural causes), generating hostility, fear and insecurity from those at the bottom competing for such resources.

When local people represent immigrants in this particular manner, they create an imagined Other. It also creates a moral attitude where local established

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35 Shameless is a very popular British comedy-drama TV series set in Manchester on the fictional Chatsworth Council Estate. The TV show pictures the life of a group of working class people in an ironic fashion, depicting them as chaotic drug abusers, benefit dependents, and so on. It is the story of a young group of siblings abandoned by their parents surviving by their gut instincts and with humour in a neighbourhood where a belligerent father, bisexual mother, internet porn-star, drug dealers and thieves struggle to cope in ingenious and sometimes hilarious ways.
people believe they maintain different standards of living their lives (Scott 2005). As I observed throughout my fieldwork, such discourses create feelings of resentment and a sense of being let down by the government and authorities; feelings of being stolen from and financially abused – feelings which affect relationships with neighbours and of course community spirit. It creates a separateness, which emphasises differences. There is a sense of being neglected, as Tom explained many times to me, based on the belief that immigrants are “taking over”. In Tom’s eyes Manchester Airport itself has contributed in bringing this image of immigrants taking over the local community to the fore, in the sense that jobs and local housing are increasingly being filled by non-local people. Blaming immigrants seems to be a mechanism that, in focusing on a cultural Other, helps people like Tom and other older established inhabitants on the Estate to deal with their own struggles and experience of disadvantage; it helps them to mediate narratives of poverty and social exclusion through concrete subjects rather than through abstract ideas.

To summarise, the council Estate is a social space composed of multiple relationships and stories to tell, always under construction, and encompassing a very complex scenario defined by class inequality and social disadvantage. Social space appears to be marked by class connotations such as the Market Café being a proper place for established people, versus the Forum Café for people who owns cars, better kept houses versus deteriorated council houses, shattered bus-stops, reputation attached to neighbourhood like Benchill or Northenden. The Estate creates material and social differences between a very diverse social group: the poor. Class appears as spatially and materially embedded: focused in localities with the highest concentration of deprivation, unemployment, poor amenities, and fewer opportunities, there are visible markers of exclusion and marginalization. However, as people move in and out of them, excluded neighbourhoods are no longer “sink” Estates in the sense of fixed, deprived areas. 36 “The nature of the disadvantage consists in higher relative risks or the poverty of experiencing spells of unemployment or poverty ... rather than a fixed attachment to either an excluded location” (Botero 2009:14). Dwelling on the

36 A sink estate is a British Council Estate depicted as a place with high levels of economic and social deprivation, although they are not always high crime areas. Many “sink estates” were created by the clearance of old “slum” properties at the beginning of the twentieth century. The origin and meaning of the term sink estate is unknown, although it is believed it may refer to being at the depths of social hierarchy. The phrase came into usage in the 1970s, and was probably a term coined by journalists.
Estate entails knowing the place and having the ability to see and read *invisible* layers of social meaning. It is belonging in the form of local knowledge of the social space which determines who is an established person on the Estate and who is not.

In the following chapter I examine the way I learned about women’s life on The Estate which was mostly – although not exclusively - through becoming a home-visiting volunteer. Being a volunteer at the local community I became aware of the tensions between everyday women’s activities and the state interventions deployed to supposedly support them. I address questions such as in what ways do volunteers’ practices allow us to connect the specificities of local community life with the politics of state intervention? How do power mechanisms work on the mundane level of life on the Estate? Are volunteer schemes nuanced expressions of state intervention within the intimate space of the family? What are the state- effects of the voluntary work? How is the state imagined and encountered in the mundane lives and day-to-day experiences of women?
CHAPTER TWO: “ON VOLUNTEERS”

During the nineties in the UK, reforms in welfare provision promoted by the advanced liberal democracy at that time, made it possible for “voluntary home visits” to become a key element in encouraging the blossoming of “independent” and “self-developed” communities and individuals. In this chapter I examine the home visiting volunteers as expression of state intervention drawing on my experience at the Start-Up office in Wythenshawe.

For a long time families and women have been topics of great concern for politicians, policies and the modern state in the UK. Since the late eighteenth century in England, as a result of early domestic ideologies promoted by the emerging industrial bourgeoisie, a new bundle of ideas concerning women and codes concerning their behaviour were emphasised. Women came to be defined mostly in domestic terms, primarily as wives and mothers (Hall 1979). Women and the household were thus increasingly seen as moral domains. The bourgeois ideal of domestic life was promoted through propaganda and government schemes aimed mostly at the poor, who were regarded as lacking in morality (See Cieraad 1999; Segalen 1986; Stoler 1995, 2002). These changes led to the notion of mothering, a key element in domestic life, becoming one of the central targets for state intervention in social policy and the modernisation of the nation during the twentieth century. In England in particular, much of the earliest welfare provision was proclaimed and deployed by philanthropic organisations and depended on women volunteers (Summers 1979). “Visiting the poor was a practice initially intended to transfer values from the visitor’s home to the working class environment” (Summers 1979:57).

An ethnography of voluntary work thus raises a number of important questions. For example, in what ways do volunteers’ practices allow us to connect the specificities of local community life with the politics of state intervention? How do power mechanisms work on the mundane level of life on the Estate? Are volunteer schemes nuanced expressions of state intervention within the intimate space of the family? How is the state imagined and encountered in the mundane lives and day-to-day experiences of women? All these nuances and subtleties seem to be very difficult to draw in practice and so in this chapter I will attempt to describe and analyse ethnographically how volunteering practices may invoke
the state through politics of care, specifically deploying moral strategies that shape and govern what it means to be a woman and a mother in contemporary England. The state does not materialise in self-evident forms on the Estate where I conducted fieldwork and lived; its shadowy and all-encompassing presence in women’s everyday life will be the focus of my interest in this chapter. I wish to argue that home-visiting volunteering practices which deal with women on the Estate can invoke the elusive state, both its presence and absence. Paradoxically, although voluntary work is organised within institutional frameworks, it is normally subordinated to major policy directives linked to national legislation. At the same time however, volunteers are individuals with different backgrounds and life circumstances who establish face-to-face relationships with people in their own homes and communities. Most of the time, volunteers do not embody the state for the women they assist. Volunteers invoke authority through the institutions they represent, but they are not perceived as bringing the state into peoples’ homes; at least the state in its self-evident form. What I am suggesting here is that the state, in the form of home-visiting volunteers, becomes unmarked and remains as shadow, out of view and not available for analysis (Harvey 2005).

In this chapter, I want to argue that volunteering is a form of governing technology which is performed through different nuanced techniques of self-development. Volunteering is not perverse in the sense that it does not coerce itself; it uses technologies of subjectivity and citizenship to establish a relationship between a women’s self and a tutelary power (a volunteer, a social worker, community scheme, parenting classes, etc.) (Cruikshank 1993). “Governance in this case is something we do to ourselves, not something done to us by those in power” (Rose 1989:213). On the contrary, I found that the women I met during my fieldwork experience were often very keen to take part in training schemes, or to follow paths of self-improvement; their “own development”, as some of them called it. This is not surprising given that I conducted fieldwork in a context that describes itself as a democratic and liberal society, where values such as freedom, independence and autonomous consciousness are understood to depend upon the abilities of individuals.

The first section of this chapter deals with the theoretical background, covering the study of the state within anthropology and the notion of “state-effects” before moving to consider the idea of governmentality and technologies of self-
regulation. The following section presents an ethnographic account of my own experience of becoming a volunteer with Start-Up and the training course in which I participated. The third section situates the analysis in a broader historical context, giving an overview of the emergence of the voluntary sector and the development of the welfare state in England and how this produced a certain model of women and mothers. Finally, in the last section I discuss ethnographic material based on the story of one senior volunteer I met during my fieldwork, employing this material to show how technologies of self-development play out on the mundane level of everyday life.

State-effects

It has been argued (Nagengast 1994; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005) that anthropology has come relatively late to the academic debate on the modern state due to having traditionally focused on stateless societies and/or the non-modern state. This is partly because of the apparent elusive existence of the state, something that does not have an objective and material existence. Radcliffe-Brown argued against the study of a fiction that existed only as an ideological construction: “The state in this sense does not exist in the phenomenal world: it is a fiction of the philosophers. What does exist is an organization, i.e. a collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations ... There is no such thing as the power of the state” (Radcliffe-Brown [1940]1955:xxiii). This “death by conceptualization”, as Trouillot (2001) termed it, has not encouraged anthropologists to critically engage with the study of the state. A second reason of a late interest on the modern state by anthropologists is due to the state as conceived by political scientists appears as an ideological construct beyond the reach of anthropological methods. Krohn-Hansen (2005) argues that Radcliffe-Brown’s treatment of the state as an abstract entity was correct but disagrees with his call for abandoning its study. For anthropologists the state is difficult to grasp except through political practice. This point has been further discussed by Abrams (1988), who points out that the state stands behind the mask of political practice. He maintains that the state is veiled by institutions such as the police, the army, prisons, and so forth, which in reality are an assemblage of uncoordinated practices and claims that act as a whole, as if they were “the” state. According to Krohn-Hansen, “Abrams shifts the focus away from the state as an object, to a far more diffuse field of power relations” (2005:5). Although in
this thesis I am more interested in how people experience the state (i.e. state effects) than in the discussion of what the state is, Abrams focuses on the effects created as well as on those people who create the effects, stressing that the state functions to legitimate domination. This approach is linked with the concept of "governmentality" developed by Foucault (1991). Foucault's term links forms of power and processes of subjectification, such as governing, "gouverner", and modes of thought - "mentalité" (Lemke 2000). Lemke points out that "government" also refers to self-control, guidance for the family and children, management of the household and directing the soul. Foucault used the notion of government to investigate the relations between technologies of the self and technologies of domination. For Foucault, domination refers to ways in which people act upon themselves and how techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion. As he stated, "Governing people ... is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself" (Foucault 1993:203-4).

I wish to turn my attention to governmentality concretely as "technologies of government" and specifically on "indirect mechanisms that link the conduct of individuals and organisations to political objectives through "action at distance"" (Miller and Rose 1990:1). Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as "the conduct of conduct" and thus as a term which ranges from "governing the self" to "governing others" (Lemke 2000:2). Governmentality is a key concept in Foucault's work. "It plays a decisive role in his analytics of power in several regards: it offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centers either on consensus or on violence; it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state; finally, it helps to differentiate between power and domination" (Lemke 2000:3). According to Lemke (2000) governmentality is introduced by Foucault to study the "autonomous" individual's capacity for self-control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. The notion of government is used to investigate the relations between technologies of the self and technologies of domination. As Foucault suggests:

"I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of
domination but also techniques of the self. Let’s say: he has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think government” (Foucault 1993:203-4).

Following Miller & Rose (1990), I suggest that volunteering practices can be considered “indirect” mechanisms of governing that work upon the supervision of “expert” knowledge promoting self-regulation and independence among women and their households, creating paradoxically, an “indigenous” knowledge based on parenting skills. Home visiting volunteers therefore become identified as indigenous experts who exert their authority indirectly, mirroring the ruling values of an advanced liberal democracy. The notion of “indirect” mechanisms that allow social and personal alignment with socio-political objectives is taken from Latour’s idea of “action at distance” (Latour 1978), and it relies upon expertise: “social authority ascribed to particular agents and forms of judgement on the basis of their claim to possess specialised truths and rare powers” (Miller and Rose 1990). Although this perspective can be well-traced within the field of policy, I do not intend to confine the present analysis to the study of administrative agencies, their interests, funding and administrative procedures - although some of these aspects will be illustrated in the following section, an ethnographic account of my fieldwork while I was a volunteer. Additionally, I also attempt to unveil some of the aspects of the state’s presences and absences in the life of the women who live on the Estate, exploring the shadows of its complex intervention.

37 I have named indigenous knowledge or indigenous expertise to local and situated knowledge acquired through lived experience. Local volunteers that help women to parenting their children are experts by lived experience. Together they can exert social and cultural values many times in dispute (i.e. discipline, hygiene, recreation, learning techniques, habits of study, etc.).

38 Miller and Rose (1990) argue that “such action at a distance mechanisms have come to rely in crucial respects upon ‘expertise’... And we contend that the self-regulating capacities of subjects, shaped and normalized in large part through the powers of expertise, have become key resources for modern forms of government”
The question therefore is how the state, through voluntary practices, has become implicated in the texture of social everyday life (Gupta 1995). I wish to go further than Miller & Rose’s argument by saying that the state cannot only be seen as government (exclusively) and so I will borrow Trouillot’s (2001) idea that the state is “a set of practices and processes and their effects” that recreate relations of political power. I will argue that voluntary practices are processes of power that operate at an everyday level, as indirect state mechanisms. I want to look at what are the state effects of volunteering institutions. As Mitchell points out “disciplinary power ... works not from the outside but from within, not at the level of an entire society but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them” (1991:93). The state should not be analysed through as an external structure, but as “the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist” (Mitchell 1991:94). The nation state is the principal structural effect of the modern social world which contains many of the institutions such as armies, schools and bureaucracies. One very clear example of state effects given by Mitchell is the existence of frontiers. He points out that “by establishing a geographical and physical barrier the state defines a series of social practices such as wire fencing, passports and immigration law” (1991:94). Another example is the law, the detail of legal process expressed in particular social practices produce the effect that the “law” exists as a sort of abstract framework above social practice. The state comes to be the sum of these structural effects. “The state should be addressed as an effect of detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance” (Mitchell 1991:95). In other words, the state effect is the way in which the state appears as singular and coherent and over and above spaces of everyday life.

Volunteering thus becomes a visible form of “indigenous” knowledge that promotes the self-regulation of the capabilities of women, and in doing so, acts as a concealed expression of the state. As Harvey (2005) has pointed out, the production of state-effects, or the process through which a state agent occupies a hierarchical position of control (through which people are acted upon in specific ways), could be ethnographically approached only via particular lives and places. From this perspective, the state has no institutional fixity and as such a focus is warranted on the multiple sites in and through which state processes and practices are recognisable as effects (Trouillot 2001).
Volunteering at “Start-Up”

When I was deciding whether or not to undertake my fieldwork in Manchester, I began to consider involvement in voluntary community organisations in order to get a glimpse of the local milieu. Bearing in mind my background of having worked with socially disadvantaged families in Chile over several years, and my own position as a mother of a thirteen year-old boy, I discovered a local charity that offers support to local families through home-visiting volunteers—this was how I got to know Start-Up. I sent an application form while I was attending the first year of my doctorate prior to commencing fieldwork. They replied with an interview request that was arranged at my own home. During that initial meeting conducted in my flat I met Lisa, a social worker in her late twenties, who talked to me about what Start-Up does, how they do it and what they expect from volunteers. Lisa also questioned me about my own family situation (including kinship relations and financial status) and the reasons I wanted to embark on such an endeavour. I had to recall details of my divorce, explaining the reason for my separation; my current marital situation, my relationship with my partner, the nature of my son’s relationship with my partner and with his own father, and how arrangements have been met in terms of child rearing, and much more. At times I did not feel worthy of being a volunteer, and that my divorce was a sign of family failure. I felt I was being measured in terms of how “good” a family we were and how “good” a woman I am in order to be accepted as a volunteer and that I had to prove that I was a “fit” enough person for the job. Lisa explained that, given all the ethical issues involved in visiting vulnerable families with small children in their own home, they have to know in great detail who is applying to become a volunteer. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling uneasy about being so closely examined. However, it was not only my emotional background that was being considered. Lisa commented upon “how nice and posh” my electric gated compound appeared. My flat and my address, which gave a clear indication of my social status, were also taken into account.

Start-Up Policies

According to their own definition, Start-Up is a network of community based schemes within the United Kingdom, who deliver one-to-one support through home-visits by volunteers to families who are struggling to cope. “Each local
Start-Up is an independently registered charity that supports local families in exactly the way that is needed in its local community. Each local Start-Up is set up and run by people from the local area, and is responsible for raising all its own funds. The (usually) small local team of staff recruits and trains local volunteers and carefully matches them with local families who need support. Each local Start-Up association is managed by a board of volunteer trustees. The constitution of a local scheme is based on a nationally agreed model, adapted to local circumstances. This structure is commonplace in the voluntary sector where independent schemes adhere to a national framework for core functions, standards, policies and good practice, but stands alone financially and in terms of local accountability”.  

All local Start-Up schemes are supported by Start-Up UK. Start-Up UK is an independently registered charity that provides support to local schemes offering training for volunteers and trustees, information and guidance on governance, legal issues, fundraising and so on. Start-Up defines its mission as “offering support, friendship and practical help to parents with young children in local communities throughout the UK”. Their basic approach is to recruit and train volunteers who are parents themselves, who then visit families with children under five years old, offering what they call “informal, friendly and confidential support”. This task is concretely defined and framed within Start-Up methods and procedures. As a volunteer, my main goal was:

“to help to increase the confidence and independence of families by: visiting families in their own homes to offer support, friendship and practical assistance; reassuring parents that their childcare problems are not unusual or unique; encouraging parents’ strengths and emotional well-being for the ultimate benefit of their children; trying to get the fun back into family life; developing a relationship with the family; encouraging families to widen their network of relationships and to use services available within the community”.

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39 Start-Up Preparation Course. Volunteer’s Resource File. 2005. Unpublished material. This is a very common arrangement nowadays within the framework of a post-welfare state in a post-industrial capitalist society: private sector allied with state policies, in charge of delivering social and community services.

Every volunteer is also expected to complete a ten weeks preparation course; to make themselves available for at least three hours per week to visit a family and to attend regular supervision meetings with a Start-Up organiser (normally a professional hired for such matters) every four to six weeks. A minimum commitment of one year is also required. Volunteers are also encouraged to keep a diary of their contact with the family, giving special attention to details regarding living conditions, the kinds of relationships observed within the household focusing especially on childrearing practices, health and hygiene conditions and anything else that happens to catch the volunteer’s attention. This should be written down, or even reported by phone to the local Start-Up organiser if there are concerns regarding child-protection. Details of every visit have to be handed to the organiser at monthly supervision meetings. One of the first lessons I had to learn as a volunteer was that families that were referred to this scheme were usually (though not always) sent by health visitors, doctors, social workers, school teachers, housing associations, refugee agencies, midwives, support-workers, children’s centres, job-centres and sometimes by women who had it about it through word-of-mouth. I was also told on my training course that the sort of activities that volunteers normally complete include “helping people with child care, helping to boost confidence, establishing contact between people and local community services and so on”. However, the core of the training was given over an experiential ten week course, which I will now detail.

The Training Course

After the initial rite of passage – namely the visit and interview in my house - I was accepted and invited to attend a compulsory ten week training course. The

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41 We were fully instructed on Child Protection legislation in the UK, and additionally in how to identify different levels of risk within any family context.

42 This kind of surveillance relationship raised one of the main ethical issues during my period of fieldwork. Being a volunteer for Start-Up and an ethnographer at the same time seems to run along two completely different pathways. I made a number of small choices to help negotiate my position in the role as volunteer. I did not take more than one family, unlike most of the volunteers who normally work with two or more families at a time. I kept my commitment with only one family with whom I had an open discussion about my parallel role as a researcher, which they were happy to accept. My relationship with Start-Up though remained somewhat blurred mainly due to the written monthly reports. I actually did not meet my supervisor every month; I did so every three months instead. Additionally, I did not give a detailed account of what happened during my visits but instead I gave a general statement about the kind of activities we had undertaken together. This meant taking a clear side with the family, a position that I considered gave greater protection to the family I was working with.
Start-Up office is located next to St. Lucas’ Church in Wythenshawe. Lisa clarified, emphatically, that they are not a religious organisation. The organisation operates in a building attached to the back of the Church and it comprises three small offices, toilets and a large meeting room divided by a mobile panel gate which connects to an even larger hall used normally by Church-goers as a ballroom and for other Church-related activities. It was here that I attended the weekly training sessions, every Friday from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon. There were six volunteer candidates including myself: Clare, Rosie, Afua, Sylvia and Annie. During the first session, a big file with material to work through was given to each volunteer. This was a resource file titled “Preparation Course to become a Start-Up Volunteer”. There was space here to write your own thoughts and also for group work conclusions which could be registered.43 In the first session we introduced ourselves giving some personal biographical details, and then we were quickly organised into pairs following instructions from the Start-Up organisers. The course teachers were Lisa, the social worker who visited me at my flat, and Hannah, a psychologist in her thirties. I was paired with Afua, a twenty year-old of African descent woman. She was attending the course alongside her mother Rosie. They are not local to Wythenshawe, but live in Moss Side.44 Afua is a single mother with a nine month-old baby boy. She confessed that day: “I want to be a volunteer to gain some experience … to know about other people’s lives…I want to learn, but mostly I want to be useful to someone”. Afua admitted though that her friends think that volunteering “is boring”. She justified herself saying “I don’t go out … I’m not like my friends”, implying that she has different responsibilities since she became a mother.

After the introductions, each of us shared our conversations with the main group, and so I had to introduce Afua to the group and vice versa. The Start-Up rules were introduced at that first meeting. I learned that one of the most important rules is to report to the organisation, both in writing and verbally about not only my own performance but more importantly “the assisted family’s performance”. Lisa, the social worker, gave us a presentation, highlighting the

43 If the file is completed appropriately, a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 can be obtained. NVQs are work based awards in England. They are based on National Occupational Standards that describe the “competencies” expected in any given job role. Typically, candidates will work towards an NVQ that reflects their role in a paid or voluntary position.

44 Moss Side is a traditional neighbourhood in Manchester which is mostly mixed with a large Afro – Caribbean population. It is very unlike, in terms of ethnic composition, Wythenshawe, a mostly White area of the city.
expectations that Start-Up has of volunteers. The following aspects were stressed: to complete the preparation course, to be able to dedicate three hours per week to visit an assigned family, to attend regular supervision every four to six weeks, and to make at least a one year commitment. In this way, it appears that through the volunteers’ guided actions in the field, the institutional framework expands and multiplies its own actions ten-fold. In practical terms this means that on a weekly basis they covering ten times as many “interventions”, exponentially expanding the number of community connections and “self-improvement” possibilities for women involved in the scheme. Accordingly, Start-Up stresses that what makes them so effective in working with families is the fact that it is a very flexible scheme. There is a strong emphasis on the fact that they do not offer exclusively professional guidance. On the contrary, volunteers are normally local parents, mainly women, who actually visit the families as friends – not as professionals – helping to generate a more “relaxed mood“. As they put it, it is a scheme where “parents support parents”.45 There is also an emphasis on the fact that the family or the volunteer can say “no” whenever they wish. If that is the case the volunteer will be assigned another family and vice versa. Either of the parties can withdraw from the exchange at any time and hence there is a common understanding that it is a scheme that emphasises friendly, as well as practical help. This is an interesting selling point for the service, as I discovered during my eighteen months of fieldwork that although anyone can withdraw at any time, what usually happens when problems arise is that the intervention plan is redefined and families and volunteers can be rearranged with what they call “a better match”. In fact the intervention does not end but is modified. Neither the assisted family nor the volunteer is discharged from the scheme and the “intervention plan” continues with different actors.

In the training file it is explained that volunteers will “most likely enjoy their work but at some times it will be also challenging”. The manual highlights the importance of the supervision meeting held between the volunteer and her supervisor (the Start-Up worker). Many “real” cases are described in terms of brief vignettes as follows:

45 That is one of the reason volunteers may be called “indigenous experts”.

86
- You knock on the door of the family’s house for your usual Wednesday visit. You hear the raised voices of the parents inside. The mother opens the door – she has a red mark on her face. She tells you to go away and shuts the door.

- You are visiting a family with four children. The three year-old comes in and demands chocolate. Her mother refuses – and a full scale tantrum erupts. The father pulls down her knickers and smacks his hand on her bare bottom.

- You have been visiting a family for six months. The house is always in total chaos and far from clean. So far, you have managed not to let it bother you too much. But the family has just acquired a new kitten which is not house-trained, leaving its offerings all over the floor – on which the baby is crawling.46

In this way Start-Up attempts to illustrate the kind of situations the volunteer will probably face, and more importantly the kind of reaction that is expected from a volunteer in those cases. “What would you do?” is the given question. As volunteers, we were always encouraged to report to the main office and to our supervisors. During the training course we took part in several role-playing exercises where we learned that we should not personally make any decisions regarding the kind of support needed without consulting the Start-Up office first. There is a strong emphasis on trying to neither look nor behave as identifiable professionals. Rules such as “only give advice when it is asked for”, “always try to empower parents to find out for themselves”, “never push any advice on others”, “respect other people’s beliefs” are examples of the golden rules that volunteers are encouraged to learn and follow. Volunteers here are meant to perform the correct response.

There are tensions experienced in the volunteer’s everyday routines, as expressed through the strict requirement to keep writing reports and records for supervision meetings. These reports can be considered as a practice of “inscribing” the family’s behaviour - and especially the mother’s performance - thus determining strategies for promoting “self-improvement”. This can be illustrated through a variety of techniques and ways of approaching the assisted family. A good example of this is the so-called “Volunteer Survival Kit” which

consists of a set of guidelines concerning how one can develop a better relationship with the family assigned. Some of its key points read as follows:

- Don’t feel as if you have to solve all the family’s problems. You are not to take over and work everything out for the family. The problems are theirs, not yours, and your role is to help them to find solutions which will suit them. Sometimes your role is just to listen while they work things out themselves, and share their failures as well as their successes.

- Beware of doing things to and for a family – aim to form a relationship in which you are working with them.

- Being a successful volunteer is not about being a do-gooder or a saint or a super-person- you do not carry the sole responsibility for improving the family’s circumstances or the behaviour of some members of the family.\(^{47}\)

Additionally in the file-book, in a coloured frame with italicised letters, it is highlighted that volunteers must always report their actions, concerns and thoughts to the main office: “Make sure that you share your feelings and any concerns in your regular supervision session with your Organiser who can support you in deciding what to do”. This tension between ruling, inscribing and letting them be, evidences the desired “ambivalence” of the volunteer’s role. A volunteer, though not a professional or a hired worker, comes to occupy a position as an “indigenous” expert, and as such – whether (s)he is aware of it or not- occupies a hierarchical position in relation to the families with whom (s)he is working. It is a concealed, elusive and indirect (Mitchell 1991) way of playing out political power. Being a volunteer can thus be a “political technology” through which the state conceals its own operations of governance. As Dreyfus and Rabinow have pointed out, “political technologies advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse and recasting it in the neutral language of science” (1982:196). In other words, political technologies such as volunteering act as creating expertise and expert knowledge. It is a combination of external “subjection” and internal “subjectification” (Rabinow 1984).

As I have already mentioned, it is an indirect mechanism that acts upon “expert knowledge” in the form of “parental knowledge” to establish a normative grid that helps mothers to act upon and to change themselves. Stress on change is paramount throughout the training course. I learned that as volunteers “we can help people to change”, using learned techniques such as, “empathy”, “unconditional positive regard” (listening to others in a supportive manner and being positive despite what they say to you), “using reflection” (rather than giving opinion, just repeating what they said), “creating dissonance” (anxiety over uncomfortable differences between two statements that don’t agree), and so forth. Change is one of the key aims of a volunteer’s work. There is a strong and lasting encouragement to promote practices of self-reflection on the part of the women with whom we are supposed to work: “Giving them insights to say and think things for themselves” is a very important axiom in the volunteer’s agenda.48

Following Miller and Rose (1990) it can be argued that such “techniques of the self” operate through powers of expertise which help to normalise the capacities of the subjects by means of “self-regulation”. These “indirect” resources have become key elements of both modern forms of government and welfare provision in contemporary liberal democratic societies. “Liberalism renders its political subjects “governable” by requiring that they become self-activating and free agents” (Burchell 1991:119, quoted in Shore and Wright 1997:9). The family in this way becomes an instrument of government (Foucault 1991) and volunteer schemes a scene in which “state-effects” are acted out. The state thus, through liberal policies embedded in the voluntary sector and quasi-governmental organisations (like charities) characteristic of the so-called post-welfare state, promotes values such as “freedom”, “individual choice”, “self-development” and “independence”. In this sense, the notion of “self-governance” assumes an importance in very specific ways. “Capitalist state formation fragmented identities based on class and replaced them with the fiction of equal individuals who were all equal rights-bearing members of the nation” (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005:7). What is interesting here is, as Hyatt (1997:219) has already argued, that there is a trend in contemporary social policy to produce environments intended to foster self-government not only “of” the poor by the authority of experts, but also a self-government “by” the poor. In other

48 Emphasis is put on particular “things”, not just any odd things. Things related to how to raise children properly which imply discipline, independence, making choices, and so on.
words, this promotes a new understanding of poverty by privileging knowledge held by local people (i.e. neighbours who volunteer), where poverty and disadvantage can be experienced as an opportunity to experience “self-improvement” and empowerment.

This idea of engineering a particular environment in such a way as to “produce” a certain kind of person seems to come from notions of modernity and the rise in importance of the category of “the social” in England (Hyatt 1997). The history of voluntary work and the welfare state in England offers a good illustration of how the idea of what it means to be a woman and a mother has been co-produced and regulated initially through models of the welfare state and then the emergence of a new post-welfare strategy.

The Voluntary Sector and the Welfare State in England: the Coproduction of Motherhood

Anna Davin examines the emergence of state interest in motherhood historically. The emphasis on motherhood as a valued skill to be achieved can be traced back to the nineteenth century, starting with Darwinian notions of species and their struggle for survival as a fundamental element of life. This notion was reinforced by Thomas Malthus’ ideas that excessive population growth should be prevented (Davin 1978). Sometime later, this view gave birth to what has come to be known as the Eugenic movement, which claims that an “unfit” population (such as poor families) constituted a threat to the nation. Since then, infant mortality and mothering practices have been viewed as a matter of national power. Children were considered a national asset and therefore had to be well nurtured and kept under a close eye by the state. Different laws were designed and implemented to improve children’s living conditions and childbirth. “Midwives were required to have training (1902) ... local authorities were empowered to provide meals for needy children (1906), and they were obliged to provide medical inspections (though not treatment) in schools (1907). The state had to be notified of new births within six weeks so that health visitors could be sent round (1907), while the Children’s Act of 1908 made detailed provision across the spectrum of child welfare” (Davin 1978:11). Schemes for supplying milk in working class districts and prizes for healthy babies were common. Voluntary societies promoting health and domestic hygiene emerged: “the Institute of Hygiene (1903), the Infants’ Health Society (1904), the National League for
Physical Education and Improvement (1905), the Food Education Society (1908), the National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare (1905), the Eugenics Education Society (1908), and the Women’s League of Service for Motherhood (1910)” (Davin 1978:12). Such voluntary societies were composed of women without jobs as well as professionals such as doctors, social workers, teachers, nurses, health visitors, and so forth, and on many occasions their activities frequently overlapped with those of local authorities. For this reason they were frequently consulted on the implementation or assessment of social policies (Davin 1978).

Motherhood can be thus considered more as a constructed notion rather than as something given, where women had the principal role as responsible not just for their children but also as “nurturers of citizens of the nation”. Women, whether as the focus of intervention or as volunteers, embodied the spirit of the state and the focus on an ideology of racial health and purity expressed through a myriad of policies. The relationship between women in their domestic role and the state became not just a matter of policy but a moral duty, giving legitimised authority to the state-apparatus to intervene if considered necessary (Poor Law 1899). This emphasis on women, domesticity and individualism set the basis for an ideology of motherhood broadly popular in the UK since the twentieth century, where being a “good mother” was understood as a skill to be learned, something that could be instructed. It constituted a kind of “mothercraft” (Davin 1978), organised and delivered through voluntary societies (professionals included) and local government. Definitions of what constitutes “good” and “bad” motherhood practices have thus been shaped by class, gender and racial components. As Davin has argued, “the authority of state over individual, of professional over amateur, of science over tradition, of male over female, of ruling class over working class, were all involved in the redefining of motherhood during this period” (1978:13).

In this way, social deprivation and poverty have served the conservative elite, as a rationale for promoting a change in the attitudes and the moral mind-set of poor mothers (Gillies 2005). During the late twentieth century in England (specifically during the 1980s), a shift away from state assistance to moral regulation was promoted by the “New Right” who sought theoretical support in concepts such as the “undeserving poor”, “underclass”, and “culture of dependency”. As Gillies (2005) points out, this view focused particularly on
single mothers who were considered a danger and a source of crime and social pollution. Conservatives consequently created policies to support family life and reinforce traditional values. This resulted in highly paradoxical legislation, which attempted to regulate moral behaviour but in doing so undermined the libertarian and non-interventionist ethos of the right wing initiative. In order to counterbalance this paradox, the Child Support Act in 1991 was established as a measure designed to provide incentives against single parent families, through making absent fathers financially accountable for their children.

Later in 1997 with New Labour’s victory in Parliament, amidst rhetoric of a new national plan of “modernisation”, the government was to launch a renewed project for changing social behaviour. Drawing on communitarian discourses (e.g. Etzioni 1994) New Labour promoted a new policy agenda for families aimed at strengthening parenting within a moral framework based on marriage and paid work. The New Labour government saw both marriage and paid work as moral duties for citizens, using law to “inculcate appropriate values and ‘rebuild social order and stability’” (Blair 1996, quoted in Barlow, Duncan et al. 2002:110). This discourse was crystallised in two Green Papers: “Supporting Families” and “A New Contract for Welfare” which set the framework for the New Labour government until 2001. This set of policies has been described as “a pragmatic mix (a ‘muesli’) of moralism, care and control, universalism and selectivism” (Featherstone and Trinder 2001:534). It expressed a clear preference for traditional forms of family (with married parents), where universal services were framed in the form of “advice”. The idea of “Supporting Families” ignored child abuse and domestic violence, dealing with these issues through justice and criminal law. Tackling poverty with an emphasis on paid work and inclusion was promoted using schemes such as the New Deal for Lone Parents, Working Families Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit. Of course mothers’ work in bringing up children at home was not considered to be an economic contribution. A new focus on personal responsibility, the important role of community and the family itself was central to Tony Blair’s “Third Way” philosophy (Beck 1997; Giddens 1998). Liberty and personal obligation as well as social cohesion are considered key elements of the new mentality designed to deal with families and communities. It has been argued (Barlow, Duncan et al. 2002) that underlying these assumptions about family behaviour, there lies a model of a “rational economic man”, an individual able to make cost-benefit decisions which maximise benefits. In this logic it is assumed that by providing better information and educating people, they can then act upon this knowledge,
thereby promoting the desired social effects. However, it has been proved that people take decisions on parenting, partnering, work – and probably other things as well – based on quite different grounds (Barlow, Duncan et al. 2002). The idea that parents must be supported has been sustained through several initiatives, most prominently in the 2003 Green paper “Every Child Matters”, which reveals a very class-specific concern with the “socially excluded”. As Gillies (2005) pointed out, a closer look at New Labour family policy highlights the contradiction of a new interventionism characterized by overt attempts to control and regulate parents’ behaviour alongside purported values such as the importance of an individualistic ethos in an advanced liberal democratic society which emphasises ethical self-governance and encourages conformity. Although New Labour distanced itself from conservative policies, developing a critique of individualism through a communitarian discourse, an “economic rationality” of personal benefits prevailed. Tony Blair’s Third Way viewpoint attempted to combine liberty with personal obligation. “This translated into a seemingly paradoxical desire to reinforce the traditional family while simultaneously encouraging negotiation and choice” (Deacon and Mann, quoted in Gillies 2005:74). According to Rose (2000), this “third way” philosophy evokes the language of community in order to bring together the state, the market and individual liberty. The individual is seen as ethical in nature, guided by community values. Families exemplify the community through the practice of parenthood and therefore good parents are seen as mirrors for their children’s values to protect and reproduce the common good (Driver and Martell 2002, quoted in Gillies 2005). This political emphasis according to Rose (2000) situates the state as facilitator and enabler, rather than as guardian of the population.

Following Hyatt (1997), it can be argued that implicit within such post-welfare policies lies an assumption that knowledge and “expertise” can be regarded as a transferable commodity, which once delivered to groups such as mothers with children, will automatically make them competent in “changing” their own environments. This tendency of transforming subjects from being dependent on experts’ knowledge to being autonomous beings has been aligned to a broader movement known as “self-esteem empowerment” (Hyatt 1997:224-8). The paid welfare professionals have progressively been replaced by “unpaid” local experts; parents themselves (Hyatt 1997:229). The institutionalisation of this

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49 The contemporary self-esteem movement has been spearheaded by feminist Gloria Steinem and California legislator John Vasconcellos, based on the controversial Steinem’s best-seller “Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem” (1992) (see Cruikshank 1993)
philosophy of “self-help” through schemes such as “home-visiting-volunteers” made possible a new strategy of government, linking people’s subjectivity to their subjection, and community participation (activism) to their discipline (Cruikshank 1993). The public sector has thus been reorganised with the promise of transforming “welfare dependents” into citizens with “rights and responsibilities”. It marked an ideological shift concerning how poverty and deprivation were understood and conceptualised. When viewed as active citizens, people are situated in a world of productive and entrepreneurial activity (Hyatt 1997); therefore poverty and disadvantage do not require a great deal of public investment. The state becomes diluted into the immense amount of voluntary work that this effort requires. In other words, voluntary practices become marked with and by state-effects. Voluntary work, in its form as marked with and by state effects can thus be seen as an effect of post-welfare rule in advanced liberal democratic societies. I will now illustrate this ethnographically through the story of one of the volunteers I met during my residential fieldwork on the Estate in Wythenshawe.

“Sally’s unique personal development as a growing mum”

I met Sally at Start-Up; she is a senior volunteer who has six children of her own. Sally is cheerful, friendly and easy going. We used to meet up at Start-Up for the events and get-togethers that the charity regularly organises. One day we went to the Forum Café for a longer conversation where she related to me some details of her life-story.

Sally is a clever woman, she displays a great deal of pride in being aware of her own position within her community; and describes herself as a “mixed raced” person. Sally recalls her life, stressing that she was born in a mixed race family and how this fact helped her to grow up in more tolerant surroundings. Sally told me:

I was a child in 1967, I was born and obviously ... being of mixed, Mum’s white, Dad’s Jamaican, years ago it was just intolerable, because I remember me Mum saying that ... when she told me Nana that she was pregnant, she said is it black? So obviously my Mum, me, structurally, I think our culture’s definitely gone a bit more diverse to the way it was
because of having different children, in different cultures and it’s got more tolerant with more understanding.

Sally was brought up in Rusholme, one of the traditional mixed Asian and Afro-Caribbean neighbourhoods of Manchester, which probably makes her more aware and proud of her own background. She strives to be confident in what she stands for, showing respect for others but also acknowledging the fact that when there is trouble and “ignorance” she will face it: “I was born and bred in Rusholme, and we lived in the Moss Side area, and Wythenshawe was like a no-go area for black people”. When we talked about racism, she dismissed its importance as something to do with people’s ignorance and she locates it as no different to other as forms of discrimination, like being disabled. She emphasises

You don’t take any notice, I just make sure my family is feeling comfortable ... I don’t draw attention, I don’t, I don’t know whether is, like I say, I’ve got Rachel [her daughter], I’m so used to her being Down Syndrome, mixed race, Dad white, what on earth’s going on? And I mean we’ve had that in certain situations where you walk in, so now I just don’t take any notice, I don’t see anybody and I think they’re that ignorant and if they’ve got something to say then they’ll come and say it, but they don’t.

Like many of the women with whom Sally has worked, she was a teenage mother; she had her first child when she was sixteen. As I learned during my volunteer training course, many of the volunteers have not finished their secondary education; and some have limited numeracy and literary skills (I noticed some volunteers having difficulties with writing reports and reading materials provided during the training sessions). Other volunteers had had professional careers and had now retired. Thus, in some cases, volunteering means taking one’s education a step further. In actual fact, the training course itself can provide a NVQ qualification if the file is completed and filled appropriately (according to Start-Up standards). Sally, like many others, did not finish school. In her words, “I just couldn’t learn and I realise now that I’ve got dyslexia and dyscalculia”. Sally is now going to college where she studies English and Maths. She confesses that she never wanted to be visited or assisted by any “expert”. Moreover, she did not believe in such “home-visiting” approaches for
many years; this was a strong conviction she inherited from her mum, who would never let any professional into her home. Sally never allowed professionals in until she had Rachel, her disabled daughter. She told me,

I was a very young Mum. I was sixteen when I had my first ... to be quite honest ... I don’t feel I had enough information about being a Mum at all. And so, between Damien who’s twenty seven now and my other children, there is definitely a difference since then. Years ago, you were told “just don’t let anybody in”, like health visitors or anybody like that, because they are just being nosey ... not just because you’re a young Mum ... they’re going to take your children away, and that was from my Mum’s background. It was just like, you didn’t let anybody in official. You just got on with it.

Sally was aware of the policing character of professional and expert intervention (“they can take your children away”, “they are just being nosey”) and also of the stigma attached to being a single mum. She grew up in a single parent household and as she told me, she learned to be a mother from that experience. Interestingly, Sally confesses to me that she has grown up as a mother, and that she has been more open to having help from experts. She attributes this change to her own ability for self-improving and learning, starting from her own background (what she learned from her own mum), now opening up to services and resources available in the community. Sally’s transformation as a mother is illustrative of the shift in policies for supporting parents. She continues:

You made your bed and you got on with it. So I must admit I didn’t gain much services or access to anything, even though it was out there and probably available. I thought I was quite guarded to make sure of that. I didn’t let anybody official in, I just didn’t. Made sure that I kept everybody safe, with being a young mum, not having much knowledge ... but, as the years have progressed, and I have actually experienced my own personal development, and had a few more children, I realised that ... I think I took a lot of my parenting skills from my mum’s parenting skills which were her parenting skills, and obviously I didn’t feel they were the right sort of parenting skills but ... ‘coz she was quite strict, and you know, I think because she was, I was actually brought up in a single
parent background, I think a lot of onus ... from the professionals were that single parents were trash ... that they never amount to much, I think that because she was, that stigma was attached to single parents, she made every effort to make sure the house was clean, her kids were clean and well-mannered in that, she was quite strict and judgmental, so there was like no playing with the children, we made our own devices and stuff like that. So obviously that was where my parenting skills come from.

A breaking point for Sally has been her daughter Rachel. As she acknowledges, Rachel’s situation has signalled a turn in how Sally deals with services in her community. Since Rachel was born, due to the need of much professional support, Sally has encountered a myriad of new knowledge coming from different experts: taking part in several professional clinics, parenting classes on different stages of child development, community leadership, volunteer training, and so forth. Soon Sally realised that her involvement in such “empowerment” schemes could render more benefits for her in terms of breaking her own impoverishment; she learned how to get it right in order to prevent her kids from being taken away; she learned how to deal with state officials and their effects; she prepared herself to go through an intensive self-education process, attending classes and training to learn new parenting skills. As she describes

Having Rachel I had to start learning how to play with her ... stimulating her to help her development and obviously the organisations were coming in then, and then, it actually made me realise that these organisations could not take your children off you, just like that, you had to be doing something wrong for them to want to come in and take your children, so with that I suppose my barriers slightly went down ... and I started approaching different organisations and doing my own personal development, like I say, with play, and I went on to have some more children ... and my parenting skills from my first two to the next four are definitely different ... I went on a parenting course and that taught me a hell of a lot, and that taught me definitely about play, and even though I count myself as being, I wouldn’t say a wonderful mum, but a growing mum, with the other children ... it helped my own personal development ... so I go out to parents now, who have disabled children and actually teach them these parenting skills, with the basics of learning how to play really.
Being a volunteer is an activity not without its paradoxes, exerting indirect state-authority through indirect professional supervision but at the same time exercising local and situated knowledge acquired through life experience –what I call “indigenous” expertise. Guidance and discipline for the poor and/or needy population is now delivered by citizens for citizens. The assisted woman is now linked “into the social order as a democratic citizen with rights and responsibilities” (Miller and Rose 1990). A tacit assumption characteristic of these post-welfare policies is that “expertise” can be regarded as an automatically transferable commodity, which can be granted to all women who will decisively change their own living conditions via personal empowerment (Hyatt 1997). Volunteers thus appear to be “indigenous” experts in the art of self-help within this domestic ideology. I very soon learned that it is a duty for every volunteer to ensure that everybody has access to services they need. In this way, women in the community could be assured to progress adequately with their “self-development”, especially through cultivating parenting skills. The volunteer’s role is to inculcate a sense of autonomy, encouraging women to take decisions and to thus be more confident. Sally puts this very nicely:

As a parent I think as well, you don’t get told often enough that you, that the job you’re doing is alright, so I like to instil in parents you know there might be something that you’re not quite sure about or getting to grips with but … the other things that you are doing is fine, you are doing a really good job but maybe if you tweak this way or tweak it that way, then we will work together and try and get it sorted, you know, coz I think definitely the onus is definitely on play, in my circumstances anyway … as for bringing kids up, and actually doing the volunteering with Start-Up has made me more aware of services that are available out there, but we also think as parents I need to know it’s the next generation and the younger generation than what I am, I find that there’s still that regimental routine that won’t let professionals in, that think they only want to be nosey, they’ll only come and take your children off you, which is a shame really, coz they are just not getting the services that are out there for them.

As a volunteer Sally has remade herself, or “engineered” her life. She has taken from professionals what she needs to achieve her own autonomy and agency.
She wants to be as good as everybody else; she does not want to be treated as a second class citizen -as she said. Sally stresses that the importance of growing in confidence, and standing on her own two feet, are significant parts of what she refers to as her “own development”. She acknowledges a hierarchical position regarding the relationship with professionals though. Sally told me she sometimes feels that there is a patronising attitude from some professionals (referring mostly to medical specialists). Sally resists it though. The paradox is that her own weapon of resistance, her “self-development”, seems to reflect her own subjection.

I don’t know whether it is back from years ago or I just haven’t got a clue, I just know whether it is just instilled coz I believe that things are learnt behaviour, and I suppose if you have got a society that always just believes that, if you let the professionals in they are going to do this, they are going to do that, they are going to take your children away, then they are scared and also sometimes when you are working with professionals they give you that kind of feeling ... I don’t know whether it is just people’s insecurities, like that because they are professionals they’ve got it right, and as parents I think, I feel parents are treated as second class citizens and with professionals, I think they, they tend to think that parents are second class citizens. I feel my own personal judgement is that straight away if a parent goes into a situation that they are feeling uncomfortable with and they don’t feel as equal as the professional, then that starts a friction as [soon as] they walk in through the door, and it’s just the airs and presence, I don’t know.

The promise of change in people’s minds underlined in this strategy of empowering individuals (citizens) fosters the problem of obscuring power relations and the politics of poverty. This shift from “social improvement” to a therapeutic model of “self-improvement” (Rose 1992; Cruikshank 1993) which emphasises self-determination, individualisation, moral community, moral responsibility, implies what Rose (2000:14) has named the “double move of autonomisation and responsibilisation”. Looking for reasonable, rational, moral

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50 A second class citizen classifies as such when (s)he does not behave as an ideal democratic citizen with rights and responsibilities: autonomous, decision making, self-developed and hardworking (meaning not state benefit dependant).
citizens who seek the best for their children will also help to maintain social cohesion and public order (Gillies, 2005).

However, what I found during my fieldwork was that the relationship between professional experts (workers) and indigenous experts (local volunteers) is not quite so straightforward. Citizens and experts are not the same, they do not value the same things and inequality cannot be masked beneath the liberal rhetoric. Sally explained this problem with “authority” through her relationship with medical experts who tended to remind her that she is “just a parent”, someone different from "us":

I mean obviously I’ve got a disabled daughter ... I went to see a professional heart specialist, and ... it was like I’d ask him questions and it was just like he would just sort of fob me off but give me in his terms, in his professional terms, or as if to ... sort of, I got the feeling. It was like “who are you to ask me, you’re just a parent”, ‘coz obviously she had a congenital condition, a heart condition and I needed to know the ins and outs of the information he was giving me and because I questioned him and because he was ... I felt he was a high up professional I felt like how dare you even ask me, you’re just a parent; but I mean eventually we ... we sort of reached an understanding where he knew I was going to ask questions, and would challenge him, but yeah, so I suppose through having that experience with him it has left me very guarded as well, and even though I work with professionals, I still feel quite intimidated by them. Selective ones.

Similarly, these political technologies tend to obscure class, gender and race relations. Issues like poverty, social deprivation, exclusion, domestic violence, racism, and so forth are masked with the veil of moral responsibility, liberty of choice and self-development. It has been argued (Gillies 2005) that, in terms of social capital, this model of success seems to be more closely linked with white middle classes, rather than with working class and/or ethnic minority parents. Middle class parents are seen as socially competent, creating and fostering social networks whereas working class parents are seen as lacking connections, confidence and self-esteem. Sally describes how professional experts represent people like her:
I just feel that there’s no communications skills there, well not so much. They don’t do it in layman’s terms, they do it in the big environment and their terminology, so the parent gets lost in the translation of it. And you do find even with that when you’re speaking to medical professions or other professions, you think because that’s their field, you’ve got no right to question it as well, they’re always right.

This focus on a lack of self-esteem does not fully provide reasons why or how people come to understand themselves as lacking in self-esteem. It obscures and neglects the underlying causes of exclusion, poverty and deprivation, promoting moral punishment if minimum standards are not reached. As Sally said,

It was like they were just treating Rachel as a single child, but there were other siblings attached to it and one might need to go to football here, or something over there, but you had to make sure you went to them appointments, because if you wasn’t, you’d be penalised.

Social problems are treated as individual issues, poverty is criminalised. There is a fine line between the subjectivity of the citizen and their subjection (Cruikshank 1993). The evidence shows us an increasing demand for more professionalised practice of childrearing with a parallel request for support, advice and guidance for parents. Implicit in this movement is the notion that working class parents or “socially excluded” families are targeted as main subjects of this kind of state intervention. Social policies for families –including volunteers and professionals’ schemes- emphasize a perceived disconnection from middle and upper classes’ values and aspirations which many times promote tacit classed and moral judgements despite a rhetoric of self-development and empowerment.

In synthesis, this chapter has shown how the state is made manifest in the mundane and quotidian practices of volunteering, parenting and “helping out”. I have argued that volunteering is a governing technology promoting values such as self-regulation, decision making, self-help, independence, and decision
making, as key elements to the right kind of citizen. The state conceals itself and its modes of operation through volunteering but in the process it is also diluted. In this case, it relies on ideas of self-development and self-improvement but people go further in exploiting governing technologies for their own purposes. It is not only about discipline and the discipline of oneself. In the following chapter I will examine how women negotiate “psy knowledge” coming from experts and professionals into their everyday experiences of caring and nurturing children and in doing so I will look more closely at their negotiations and resistances.
CHAPTER THREE: “ON MOTHERHOOD”

When I first began this ethnography I was interested in examining what it means to be a mother in present-day England. I wanted to investigate discourses of motherhood through the everyday practices of women and organisations who work with them. I quickly realised that motherhood is not only a popular and common-used term within the domain of social care taken to refer to common practices of raising children, but that it also refers to a state of being a mother which describes all acts related to mothering therein; especially the politics of care and mothering a child, as well as class, race and gender distinctions (see Silva 1996). Moreover, motherhood has increasingly come to be seen in the UK as a mechanism for tackling crime, poverty and exclusion, where state intervention deliberately targets more disadvantaged families. Mothers are thus identified as reproducing this cycle of exclusion and are therefore viewed as needing state intervention to improve their childrearing skills (Gillies 2009). As I have already related in the previous chapters, prior to my fieldwork I became a home-visiting volunteer at Start-Up where I started to learn how the meanings of mothering are negotiated and also produced through mundane activities. What it means to be a mother, as Lawler (2000) asserts, can be linked with processes of self and subjectivity but I wish to turn my attention to mothering as a social practice; mothering as socially negotiated and produced.

This chapter shows how meanings which circulate around mothering are socially negotiated, reproduced and sometimes resisted. I explore some ways in which mothering practices resist and overlap with discourses and practices derived from established and legitimised “psy-knowledge”, highlighting what may be considered as “indigenous” knowledge. The chapter is organised around two substantial sections. In the first one, I draw on Nikolas Rose’s “genealogy of subjectification” in order to examine mothering practices as a genealogy of personhood in contemporary England. In so doing I analyse what kind of person a mother becomes through engaging in everyday practices of motherhood in Wythenshawe. In the second one, I examine three women’s biographies – Annie, Sharon & Pam - specifically looking at resistances and everyday activities such

51 Elizabeth Silva (1996) pursues a historical perspective on mothering and motherhood. She differentiates between mothering and motherhood: the former as an activity than can be done by anyone, the later as an institution that is essentially female. Motherhood is not “natural” but instead, socially created and recreated. It is affected by ideologies, labour markets, law, resources and technology.
as caring for children and other family members, as well as domestic work, nurture, teaching and discipline.

A Genealogy of Subjectification

In this section I attempt to examine the ways in which knowledge about mothering is used by mothers themselves and how this knowledge is produced and reproduced. Building upon Lawler’s (2000) conceptualisation of the social self, I use the notion that discourses - that is, not only what people talk about but also what people do and what they are constrained to do - create and produce categories of the human subject that can be understood not solely through meanings but mainly through practices. Lawler (2000) argues that the matrix of “psy-knowledge” which is produced through disciplines such as medicine, psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, etc., informs the work of professionals such as social workers, health visitors and counsellors who very often present ideas not as theories open to contestation but as “truths” about human nature (see Rose 1998). Subsequently, this chapter attempts to focus on how mothers negotiate “psy-knowledge” through their own everyday practices and how understandings concerning what it means to be a mother condense into an inextricable form of social and personal identity, in short, a specific kind of person. In other words, the kind of person a mother becomes is negotiated and reproduced through mundane everyday experiences and expert “psy-knowledge”. With this in mind, in the following text I examine women’s descriptions of what “being a mother” means for them and what kind of mother they think they are. I also look at different ways of caring for their children and the relationships women have with those who raised them. I wish to demonstrate ethnographically in what ways mothering practices can sometimes resist and overlap discourses and practices derived from established and

52 A critical view of psy-knowledge is well presented by Nikolas Rose in his book “Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood” (1998). He argues that “the growth of the intellectual and practical technologies of psychology in Europe and North America over the period since the late nineteenth century is intrinsically linked with transformations in the exercise of political power in contemporary liberal democracies” (1998:11). In more specific terms, “to rule citizens democratically means ruling them through their freedoms, their choices, their solidarities rather than despite these. It means turning subjects, their motivations and interrelations, from potential sites of resistance to rule into allies of rule” (1998:19-20). More specifically still, psychology, psychiatry and related disciplines do the trick by ensuring that those choices which appear “to emanate from our individual desires to fulfill ourselves in our everyday live” (1998:17) are in practice the “educated and informed choices” (1998:20) of those exercising their – necessarily learnt – “autonomy” (1998:17) to live democratically; to live as “good” enterprising selves, active citizens, family members, members of the community.
legitimised “psy-knowledge”, highlighting what appears to be an obscured and ignored kind of expertise (the expertise of being a mum). In doing so, I propose to draw on Nikolas Rose’s (1989; 1996a; 1996b; 1998) “genealogy of subjectification”, concerned with the “attention that humans have directed towards themselves and others in different places, spaces and times” (1996b: 129). Rose’s work focuses on the individual as subject. He is concerned with the different ways in which the modern self has formed, psychological developments and the establishing of the discipline of psychology being one of the most relevant sources in this modern matrix of “psy-knowledge”. Rose (1996) points out that autonomy and identity are constructed locally and are based on specific kinds of knowledge; they do not simply consist of a relationship between the citizen and the state. These kinds of knowledge are produced and reproduced by experts working from within local communities. After the Second World War, deliberate mechanisms and techniques for morale boosting, propaganda and group work were established as new forms of intervention in interpersonal relationships. Group work became a form of expertise. Skills and management were also transferred to the workplace, reflecting the belief that individuals should have citizen’s rights at work. Rose (1989) contends that childhood is the most intensely governed aspect of an individual’s life. According to Rose, the establishment of rights for children occurred with the introduction of the ideas of the child as citizen. In so doing, children became an object of government intervention through expertise. In this way, by governing children and subsequently their mothers, the family became a site of governance with the aim of achieving excellence. As a result, the role of mother was understood to be essential for the well-being of the citizen. Governance, through experts and expert knowledge thus gained access to the domestic sphere, promoting the construction of certain subjectivities. The family become both responsible and autonomous but there was always an open door for state intervention when things went wrong (deviant behaviour).

Rose’s genealogy of subjectification provides tools which offer us an analysis of the ways in which particular categories of person emerged in the framework of the practice of psy-disciplines. Rose proposed four axes of investigation along which a genealogy of subjectification could be performed. First, he argued that such an approach ought to be concerned with problematisations, i.e. how aspects of human being (singular), such as sexuality, have been rendered problematic. If we consider mothering through the model of “problematisation”, rather than looking at mothering as the natural outcome of giving birth or the
social outcome of particular kinship relationships, you can question “where, how and by whom aspects of ... [mothering are] rendered as problematic, according to what system of judgement and in relation to what concerns?” (1996:25). Second, he argued that a genealogical approach to subjectivity ought to be concerned with the particular technologies that have been invented or put into place to regulate the behaviour of human beings. If we examine the notion of “technologies” in terms of “what means have been invented to govern the human being, to shape or fashion conduct in desired directions” (Rose 1989:26), we could argue that mothering practices and their associated skills have been modelled and shaped in order to produce certain kinds of subjects. Third, Rose states that this approach can also concern itself with authorities. Concurrently if we want to investigate the notion of “authorities”, Rose asks precisely “who claims the capacity to speak truthfully about humans, their nature and their problems?” (Rose 1989:27). In this case, who speaks about mothering, motherhood and women’s problems? The last axis of investigation suggested by Rose refers to strategies. It is concerned with how the “procedures for regulating the capacities of persons linked into wider moral, social or political objectives concerning the undesirable features of populations, work force, family, society” (Rose, 1989:28). In this case, we may thus pose the question of in which ways the politics of motherhood are deployed within the frame of the UK Social Policy?

Concretely, in my work I wish to borrow Rose’s genealogy of subjectification in order to examine how motherhood has become a kind of social self to be learned and monitored. The problematisation of motherhood implies looking at a historical perspective in order to give attention to the kinds of mothering practices produced in different places, spaces and times. Motherhood in Britain as a domain of state intervention emerged from ideas of improving child health and infant life at the beginning of the twentieth century. This argument, supported by Darwinist approaches of the struggle of the fittest individual as an indispensable part of the endurance of the species, was adopted later by an intellectual trend known as Eugenics, which actually promoted a selective growth of the population to prevent both the decline of the race and also the decline of the British Empire. The British population at that time was not increasing fast enough to populate the vast territories of the Empire and many feared that the British Empire would lose land newly colonised by their own native inhabitants or rival European conquerors (Davin 1978). According to Davin (1978) a focus on birth rate became a matter of national relevance: “population was imperial power”. In this context, the Children’s Act of 1908 emerged in Britain. This piece
of legislation included a detailed description of the spectrum of child welfare expected in the country. Middle class conventions of the time took for granted that the proper context for children to grow up in was the family, and the person responsible for bringing the children up was the mother. Therefore, if the nation needed more children and future citizens, then the mother must improve her performance as such (Davin 1978: 12). Accordingly, the state in Britain started to problematize motherhood as something to be dealt with, something that needed to be scrutinised, corrected and adjusted according with national standards. Through problematising motherhood the state targeted women themselves, especially those considered to be in poverty or under environmental stress (lone mothers, the ill, the homeless, slum dwellers). In other words, women who were considered unfit to raise a child properly. The state also targeted professionals who were most likely to be called upon to assist those unfit mothers, and more importantly, the general public.

Following the genealogy of subjectification, motherhood came to be seen as a result of a set of technologies and became not only a national duty, but also a moral obligation. School meals, maternity income support, family allowances, etc., were conceived as a safety net provided by the state. If motherhood was done badly, the state could intervene (Davin 1978:13). By emphasising the idea of motherhood as an expression of the nation’s dignity, it became a twofold concept. Motherhood came to be seen as a duty of and destiny for women (to be the “mothers of the race”) but at the same time, if they failed, reasons were assigned was individualistically, with reference to women’s individual faults and neglect. To be good mothers, women needed instruction in the skills of bringing up the children of the nation. Most of the devices employed in this endeavour have since then aimed to provide information and education about the “right” child-rearing practices, establishing support groups in local communities, facilitating and expanding coverage for professional support, running training groups for volunteers who may later become leaders in their communities, leading educational campaigns in schools, promoting manuals and pamphlets regarding good practices, creating visitors-volunteer schemes and so forth. Mothering thus seemed to be something achieved and learned through instruction given by professional experts.

The third axis of Rose’s genealogy of subjectification refers to authorities. In this case, authorities such as doctors, district nurses, health visitors, social workers,
psychologists, psychiatrists, priests, ministers, etc., authorised themselves via institutions such as universities, legal apparatuses, churches, political institutions and so forth, to speak about women’s problems and also to define what kind of women and mothers the nation (the UK) needs. Professionals governed by codes of ethics and bureaucratic protocol were portrayed as knowledgeable concerning how to mother someone. This kind of knowledge, whilst likely important, has its limits when different cultural contexts are considered. Such professionalised visions typically depict a culturally monochrome view. Such a view largely ignores different forms of marriages, relationships and intimacies which were to be found in diverse and complex societies (see Smart and Shipman 2004).

Finally, the last axis of the genealogy of subjectification refers to strategies. One of the most popular aims of family intervention is "[helping] to increase the confidence and independence of families". This purpose itself is comprised of several processes such as bringing practical assistance, bringing people together, promoting friendship and strengthening emotional well-being. This emphasis on emotional as well as practical support comes to represent the desires of a certain kind of individual and family. It is an internal domain not to be ruled but to be self-understood in such a way that people act upon it. Help and self-improvement can therefore be thought of as individual achievements.

Being a mother as being a particular kind of person

The ways in which “psy-knowledge” and its practices of promoting and defining what kind of a human being, what kind of a subject and what kind of person a mother should be, entails questions concerning the “modes of production” of human beings. As Rose points out, “the way in which [one] answers this question depends upon the conceptions of human beings prevailing [...]: as moral individuals, as bundles of habits, as socialised ...” (1989: xvii). Similarly, Carrithers et al (1987) go further by asserting that the category of person, defined with reference to its socio-political and ideological origins, is distinguished from the self, conceived of as a biopsychic entity and philosophical category. Carrithers (1987) compares ethnographically Western and non-Western conceptions of the self and person in an effort to break the myth of the

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53 This is actually the explicit purpose, stated on official manuals and documents, of the volunteering program in which I was involved.
uniqueness of the Western notion of individuality. He starts his analysis from Marcel Mauss’ notion of the "person" (*personne*) as primarily the product of a socio-cultural tradition. Mauss argued that the idea of the individual is unique to Western thought (Fontaine 1987:123). Mauss' used an evolutionary method in order to understand a primitive consciousness of a multiple self, consisting of communally mediated "roles" (*personnage*) and the unique development of a Western individualistic conception of a distinct person as the locus of legal rights and moral conscience. More precisely, it was the Romans who established the notion of the person as a legal entity (citizen) and Christianity that provided its metaphysical foundations (the soul). In the wake of the modern Enlightenment, Kant posited the self as that transcendental ground of all human. Drawing upon recent ethnographic evidence, social anthropologist J. S. La Fontaine (1987) refutes Mauss' contention that the idea of the person is peculiar to Western thought. The Western conception of the person is unique because of the social context; not the greater sophistication of conceptual thought. From role to person, from the juridical to the sacred, and from the rational individual to the categorical, the person, concluded Mauss, has evolved in socio-historic fashion to its present status as the core of modern liberal individualism. Charles Taylor (1987) goes further in linking personhood, agency, and language. It is the public character of language - its intersubjective nature - that defines personhood. Persons exist because we have created and maintained a political world, a public space of disclosure, through which we assert both our individuality and humanity. The implication of this is that while the "self" exists in all types of societies, the "person" comes into its own in political societies (see Carrithers, Collins et al. 1985).

Building upon this argument concerning what is entailed in being a person thus raises the question of what kind of person a mother becomes through engaging in everyday practices of motherhood in Wythenshawe. In attempting to answer this enquiry I will be looking at three women’s biographies as a way of bringing to the ethnographic analysis those resistances and practicalities characteristic of mundane everyday life such as caring for children and other family members, domestic work, nurture, teaching and discipline. In the following section I will now introduce Annie, Sharon and Pam whom I met during my fieldwork in Wythenshawe and to whom I am also hugely indebted as they have helped me to understand, through shaping their own biographies and experiences, a little bit more of what it means to mother someone through caring, love and endurance.
Meeting Annie: “She’s my Nanny”

I met Annie while being a home-visiting volunteer at Start-Up in Wythenshawe. Annie, her three children and husband were the first family assigned to me by the Start-Up coordinator (a social worker) and my initial job was to visit them at their home once a week with the purpose of providing practical support such as going to the doctors, playing with the children, going shopping together, etc. I started to visit Annie’s house in March 2008 and slowly as a sense of trust grew between us, we became friends and later I became her youngest son’s godmother. The first time I went to their house on my own (I visited them at first with the Start-Up social worker who made all the necessary introductions) was in the spring of 2008. Annie and her family were living in a two bedroom ground floor council flat in the Peel Hall neighbourhood (a predominantly white area) of the Wythenshawe District. That day, Annie was unexpectedly in the Hospital due to gynaecological complications after her third son’s birth. As I knocked on the door I was surprised to find Josh (Annie’s husband) there alone with the children. I was expecting to meet Annie instead. He informed me that Annie was not at home and appeared to be in some distress. Nevertheless, I decided to stay anyway and play with the children. That day was sunny but chilly, the children were running around the flat in circles shouting and chasing each other, while Josh was trying to sort out a considerable mess in the kitchen. He looked overwhelmed with blushing cheeks, a sweaty forehead and had a tired tone of voice. The baby boy (two-months-old at the time) was crying loudly with hunger. Josh walked into the kitchen for perhaps the tenth time and brought out a milk bottle. He sat down on the sofa between clothes and toys probably left there from the night before and began feeding the new born baby, trying to calm down the other two toddlers. I asked to play outside in the front garden with the two eldest children, Chloe (2 years-old) and Carl (1 year-old). I immediately struck a rapport with the children and so we began playing and enjoying the sunny day. After a few minutes the baby boy was sleeping in his buggy, Josh was sorting out the mess in the house and I and the children carried on playing in the garden for as long as the two hours of my visit lasted.

From 2008 until the beginning of 2010, I regularly visited Annie and the children once a week or sometimes more. We usually spent time together walking around the Estate, going shopping, visiting the doctor, or going to fitness classes or the playground with the children. On a couple of occasions I even babysat my
godson alone, for instance when Annie or the eldest children were at the hospital. This is completely against Start-Up’s rules and regulation. In fact, the guidelines state that a volunteer must never look after the children when their parents are absent. However, we broke the guidelines anyway as an act of friendship and mutual support. It was an emergency situation and was not imposed by anybody; it was a real act of friendship and trust. This deliberate action of breaking Start-Up’s rules marked a difference from earlier on in the relationship I had with Annie. It proved to be a stronger sign of friendship built through practices of care and solidarity. I later informed Start-Up regarding my decision of going further in taking on some personal responsibilities regarding child-care as Annie’s friend rather than as a volunteer. Start-Up finally considered the matter as a personal commitment outside of the volunteer relationship. Implicitly they acknowledged that they could not regulate a private relationship between friends. This implies in a way a more interesting point (and ethical dilemma) regarding the blurry boundaries between my identity as volunteer, as friend and as ethnographer – each role having somewhat different ethical issues and responsibilities at stake. A prolonged engagement contributes to the complexity as relationships deepen and shift over time and participants accumulate a substantial reservoir of shared experiences. Ethnographers develop special relationships with unique individuals, as key informants grant them special insights. There is nothing “fake” in this. “These relationships often provide much-needed emotional support to the insecure researcher and create a genuine bond with his or her hosts or informants. This is the case whether the researcher is working close to home or in a different continent, because ... our methods inherently impose a certain vulnerability” (Peter Metcalf 1998:327-328 quoted in Fruehling and King, 2001:404)

Annie and I spent most of our time together at her house. The first year we met they were living in the small flat I mentioned. Organising everyday life with three little children had not been easy for Annie. Although she described herself as well organised, she believed she had far too much to do. As I mentioned earlier, Annie’s flat is on the ground floor. There is a second house on the first floor with a different entrance round the corner. The place has a reasonably sized front garden and a small backyard used for hanging out washing. The flat is modestly arranged. Inside it looks untidy but reasonably well kept. There is a pile of clothes in the corridor which grows as the children get dirty and Annie has to change their T-shirts, trousers, baby towels, etc. The floor has a fitted carpet which is in bad shape as Annie admitted. “I let the children do as they please on
this floor”, she says. The floor is constantly awash with different objects: hair clips, baby wipe packages, used baby wipes, crumbs of food from the previous dinner, toys, jigsaw pieces, Lego mega blocks, lost socks, shirts and so forth. The carpet is stained, especially in the case of the children’s room which smells fishy from the milk and fluids spilt constantly on the floor. Annie blames the condition of the house on the lack of adequate space. “This place is too small for all of us, especially now with the baby boy”, she says. The living room is packed with baby equipment (a baby walker, swing, baby gym, baby mat and dozens of little pieces of toys). In one corner there is also a plastic table for children and three little matching chairs. Under the table there is a big plastic box with jigsaws and little assembled components and parts, a blackboard and jigsaw frames. Annie gathers and disbands the living room as she needs. She also explains that the walls are dirty because the children have drawn with crayons on them or different kinds of liquids have been spilt over them. The kitchen is compact and maybe that is why it looks untidy with pots and pans piled up over the working surfaces and filling the few cupboards. The washing machine and the dryer are permanently in use, which makes the house’s interior extra noisy. Annie says that she changes the children’s clothes two or three times a day. The main bedroom is small but contains a double bed and a baby cot.

Annie remembers when they first received the house, the Estate agent handed her the keys outside the property and refused to go inside. They moved into the flat which was in a disastrous condition, as Annie remembers. It had no floor at all, the toilet had no bath and no floor, and the whole flat was soaked in dog urine because the last tenant used to keep two big dogs inside the house. There were either no doors or the doors were broken, the walls were covered in mud and the kitchen had no cupboards or cooker to speak of. The flat had previously been occupied by a drug addicted woman who was also a small scale dealer, as I later discovered. Annie said that the previous tenant was “a lazy person” who “could not be bothered with cleaning up”. But Josh explained that the flat’s derelict condition was due to her being disabled, maybe as a way of avoiding an explanation of the illicit activities of the previous tenant, but also, I think, as a way of detaching her from such associations with drug dealers. Annie told me that they invested a great deal of work into making that flat habitable.

In 2009, they moved into a different semi-detached three bedroom house rented through the main council housing association in Wythenshawe, Willow Park. I
remember going with Annie to have a look at the property initially offered from the outside, before she accepted it. I learned that you do not see the house you are applying for before accepting it; it is a kind of blind contract. Once you have accepted and signed, you can go inside the house. We went one morning to visit the address indicated; as I said, it was a three bedroom semi-detached house. Inside, the house was completely neglected. It had no doors or they were broken into pieces, the back garden was full of debris, refuse furniture and tools and old clothes with everything piled up everywhere. There were no fences dividing the property with neighbours walking freely through the backyard as sometimes people used to walk through as a shortcut so as to avoid a longer walk around a corner. Annie said that actually the house was not that bad and that I should have seen the state of the previous flat when they first moved in. She said emphatically, “We had a lot of work to do, but the house is a good size and close to the children’s school”. Later Annie told me that when they had signed and received the keys to move in and they entered the house for the first time, the condition was even worse than they had imagined. There were no toilets, no doors, no floor, muddy walls and so forth. The condition was similar to that in their first council flat.

As I learned afterwards, the previous tenants of the house had been evicted and they apparently belonged to a very well known gang in the area. I found this out when I asked Annie why some trainer shoes were hanging from the electrical cables outside the house.⁵⁴ Later on Annie said the police came over to the house looking for the previous tenants several times after her family had moved in. In the end, Annie and her father decorated the house themselves, fitting some new toilet seats and a bath into the bathroom. Besides carpets and wallpaper they made some other renovations. The council housing association fitted new doors, the back garden was cleaned up and after a few months the house and its garden looked cosy and family friendly.

Annie was an active user of Start-Up.⁵⁵ She was initially referred by her midwife.

Annie had three children in a short period of time, practically less than a year

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⁵⁴ I was told that hanging shoes from electrical cables acts a territorial sign post. It is a demarcation of local boundaries between gangs.

⁵⁵ According to the Start-Up volunteers manual, parents ask for help for all sort of reasons: “they may feel isolated, they may be finding it hard to cope because of their own or child’s physical or mental illness, they may be struggling with the emotional and physical demands of having twins or triplets”, etc.
between each. Annie reckons that she was not coping well with all the changes and difficulties that this new situation brought to her life. As she confessed:

The most difficult bit was with Chloe, by far the most difficult. And even though she’s nearly four, it still does upset me when I think about how sort of bad it was at the beginning because I didn’t accept feeling [the way] I did ... I thought you have to pass the baby and give birth to the baby and you get sort of ... you will feel all this love and you will be sort of happy. I didn't see Chloe for almost a day after she was born. They just handed me this baby who was nothing like I was expecting her to look like. All I felt was pain because I had such a bad time because of the big operation I had. So I was concentrating more on trying to sort myself out rather than look after a new baby and then, when I came home, it was such a shock to the system having to sort of adapt to being a mum and I don’t really having a clue what to do with her, and my husband, well, my partner [at that time], went straight back to work. I was at home by my own. I remember the first time I tried to bath her and I was just knocked on the floor, starting to cry because I didn't know what to do, so ... That was probably the hardest time I've ever had.

Annie did not ask for help straight away. She remembers herself being embarrassed and unaware that something was wrong, always crying and feeling uneasy with the babies and not in control of her own life:

It took me a long time to admit to anyone that something was wrong because, like I said, I was scared. I was ashamed. I didn't know exactly what was happening at the time. My midwife, after I had Chloe, the people that come around to visit you, had just had a baby and she picked up on something not quite being alright and she visited me every day for a month and a half and they are supposed to come for about five days, but she was there for every day for so long. It wasn't until I got pregnant with my second child, Carl. I was so scared because I had been through such a horrible time with my daughter and the only thing I knew it was such a bad thing that, when I found out I was pregnant, Josh thought it was brilliant and I just burst into tears because I was so worried. I wasn’t happy because I was pregnant again.
As she admitted, it was always difficult for Annie to socially acknowledge that she was in trouble and therefore needed to be helped. It was especially difficult for her to acknowledge that she was getting help from an institution like Start-Up, that supposedly works with so-called families in need. Annie did not want to be either associated or identified as being at the head of a family in need. She confessed to me that it was very embarrassing for her to let others (especially friends and family) know that she needed help. This was because this action implied a public recognition of failure. The fact that she was not able to cope, that she did not have the abilities or the skills needed to bring up a child was unacceptable in her eyes. Annie was very scared of being seen as a failure. She never wanted to be identified as such. Tellingly, Annie never introduced me to her friends or acquaintances as a volunteer from Start-Up but always as her Nanny. I was well known among Annie’s friends as her nanny which in itself was awkward because nobody in Wythenshawe has a nanny. Being a nanny and having one is a category full of class and race connotations. Having a nanny meant for Annie a positive distinction (social prestige) rather than the shame (of being considered a failure) of having a volunteer at home. On the very first occasion that this kind of introduction occurred I was surprised but I did not say anything. Annie did not warn me about the label she was about to ascribe to me. Weeks later, she admitted that she did not want others to know about what was going on with her family and if it was alright with me, she would continue to introduce me as her Nanny. She continued to do so for the duration of my fieldwork experience.

Using the Nanny tag to justify my regular presence at Annie’s home can be linked with forms of everyday resistance (see Scott 1985). Annie resists government technologies of classification and subjectification. She wants to be differentiated from a category known by professionals as “families in need”. She resists being classified and labelled as someone poor (nobody wanted to be

56 As Scott (1985) points out, most subordinate groupings through history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organised political activity. They are less interested in changing the larger structures of the state. Scott focuses his attention on everyday forms of peasant resistance, what he defines as “the prosaic but constant struggle between peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents and interest from them”. Scott examines “ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: food dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on”. Scott highlights that peasant class struggle has certain characteristics: “They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understanding and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority”.

115
identified as poor and needy). Therefore Annie used the Nanny tag in order to simulate and disguise her own position. Having a non-white, “Third World” Nanny fitted in well with her dissimulation strategy, indeed, it made more sense amongst her closest friends. In this sense, Annie’s idea of being a person, indeed, an *English* person could be associated with notions of English individualism (see Macfarlane 1978) in terms of depicting herself as an independent woman/mother; having a Nanny instead of a volunteer highlighted her own freedom, rights and decision-making skills. It attempted to show to others that she was “able” as mother and carer of her children. Moreover, she was trying to prove that her family was not in need, and therefore that she was not dependent upon institutions or the state. She is coping well therefore she is mothering well (a form of individual self-help strategy). Her strategy also attempted to distance her from Wythenshawe’s reputation (as an ordinary weapon she abandons her social “roots”, yet exhibits false compliance as this is a strategy which does not lead to a confrontation with authorities and/or professionals). Annie is proud to say that she has a Nanny. In a certain way Annie wants to prove that she is like everybody else, like a “normal English Person”, as she liked to say. What Annie could not possibly criticise was that what passes as an normal English Person is largely a kind of truth already defined by practices promoted and encouraged by discourses and images coming mostly from middle class English women. Class dis-identification (see Skeggs 1997) and practices of desertion (see Scott 1985) become everyday practices of resistance. They seem to be strategies that, more or less articulated, Annie deploys in surviving poverty and creating her own style of family life.

**Meeting Sharon: “You gotta choose in life”**

Annie introduced me to her closest friends, relatives and acquaintances in Wythenshawe. One of the first places she took me to was the “Penham Centre”, a community centre funded by the National Lottery that provides after school provision for children between six and thirteen years-old, as well as some classes for parents. I attended a toddler play group there called “Busy Bodies”

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57 Macfarlane (1978) examines the ways in which English society began to diverge from that of the rest of the world; the ways in which English culture was unique. He maintains that English Individualism finds its roots in the fact of its unique economic development (the first industrialized capitalist nation) and the origins of the Industrial Revolution can be traced back further to the classical peasant culture characteristic of the high Middle Ages.

58 I use pseudonyms throughout.
(funded by the UK government) and fitness classes for mothers. I also later participated in some outdoor activities with my own family, and some local children. The “Penham Centre” is a modern building situated at the heart of the District, occupying a large property which comfortably includes gardens, an outside playground, a basketball court and concrete football grounds, as well as green areas and a very impressive wooden playground built between the trees, including swings, slides, a hanging bridge and a jungle tower. The colourful community building stands right on the corner and it consists of several offices, a nursery, a big kitchen and two large rooms interconnected by a mobile wall that allows them to become one large area when needed. The walls are painted in lively basic colours, red, green, yellow; children’s crafts and paintings are the main decorations displayed on the walls. It is an open, colourful space. The parents’ classes were normally hosted in one of the big rooms and the babies were looked after in the nursery room in a crèche group organised as soon as the project started.

As I mentioned, in March 2008 Annie invited me to the fitness classes for women; the first day we went with both of her boys Carl (the middle one) and Andrew (the youngest), while Chloe, the eldest, was at school. Annie introduced me as her Nanny for the first time when we arrived, which drew the attention of the crèche workers and the PE instructor. They looked surprised and curious about it, but Annie was happy with this new status. They were very interested in knowing who I was, where I came from, how long I had been in the country and so on. Annie seemed satisfied with this social introduction and she enjoyed people’s curiosity, perhaps unaware that this Nanny label drew even more attention than saying that I was a friend or a volunteer. I was curious to know where we were going with this Nanny labelling, so we carried on. The fitness instructor was an Argentinean woman, Claudia, who is married to an Italian man in England. She has lived in the country for more than ten years; five of them spent living in Wythenshawe. Claudia was a fantastic PE teacher; she used to give extraordinary fitness lessons. Claudia later introduced me to the Penham Centre’s manager and we agreed that I would spend some time with them as part of my ethnography. I spent my first three months of fieldwork attending the after-school programme and the remainder of the year attending fitness classes for women in the morning.

59 PE stands for Physical Education Teachers in the UK.
Every fitness class lasted an hour and a half on Mondays and Fridays and they were normally accompanied by Latino or Techno music. Women who attended were all locals and had children. I met some of Annie’s friends there and later I made my own contacts as well. Not much time was left for socialising after the class, for most of the women took this class as a reward; as one of them said to me once, “this is ‘me’ time”. We normally had a chat before the lessons began and for a few minutes after, when everyone scattered to complete their chores: shopping, cleaning, visits to the doctor, school, picking up the babies and who knows what else. Initially it was not easy to get to know women in the group personally, but as time went by, we all began to share something of our lives with each other; it was a friendly environment although not very intimate. Women in this group came from different backgrounds, Pakistani, Chinese, Polish, Black British and White English locals.

Sharon was one of the local women. She is outwardly a very lively person and always had a smile on her face; she was friendly and funny when we were in classes, constantly making jokes about being fat and having a big stomach. We both attended fitness classes twice a week. Sharon was very approachable and so I invited her once for a diet drink after class. She preferred to go to MacDonald’s instead so we went there. On that occasion she shared some of her life stories with me. Sharon was originally born in Newcastle but has lived in Wythenshawe for four years. She told me that she and her family came to Manchester to get a better education for her eldest son, who has autism. Sharon wanted to get access to a better school for her son. In this first conversation, Sharon revealed to me that she is not happy in Wythenshawe; she wants to go back to Newcastle but she is on a waiting list for a council house there.

Sharon is the mother of two children, who were eleven and nine years-old respectively at the time I befriended her. When we talked about what it means to mother someone, she told me:

I don’t really know. I’ve never been taught to be a mum, you just do it, you know what I mean ... that’s a difficult question to answer in a way ... I’ve got one eleven and one nine [children] but I’m still learning as a mum ... I’m learning how to become a mum, what to do and what not to
do, looking at other mums ... There are certain things you wouldn’t do ... everything else you learn as you grow old.

Sharon remembers her childhood and reflects on how now as a mother of two she does not want to have the same kind of life her own mother gave her. Sharon is not resentful though of her mum, showing a very comprehensive understanding of her own hardship.

I don’t raise my kids the way they raised me ... I lived in three different houses. I didn’t live with my mum and dad. I lived between an auntie, my mum and dad and a friend of the family. So I lived in different families. I didn’t know a proper home but my children don’t live the way I did. My mum just didn’t care, she was quite busy. She was quite a young mum, you see. And I think when mums are quite young, some mums, not all mums, they haven’t grown up in their minds to have children. And my mum wasn’t grown up enough or responsible enough to have me. She had different boyfriends at weekends and stuff like that. I learned how to look after myself at a very early age. At the age of five I used to cook Sunday dinner. I used to cook family dinner and everything, I learned very young.

Sharon recalls how she survived childhood not because she was special but because she made a decision to change and give her children a different upbringing. As she put it, she “just didn’t want that kind of life”, referring to her own biography. She explained how she came to make a choice:

[As a child] I’ve seen things I shouldn’t have seen: speed and smack and needles. I did have members of my family addicted. I’ve got friends going into prostitution. I’ve got friends into heroin. I even had a friend dead [who died] ...and [because] the way I was fetched ... I could have ended up on drugs. I was sexually abused from the age of twelve till the age of sixteen ... [but] If you are on drugs it is because you want to be ... you are an alcoholic because you choose, you choose to be. I don’t want

60 “Speed” is the street name for a range of amphetamines such as amphetamine sulphate, dexamphetamine and dexamphetamine. “Smack” is the street name for heroin.
Making a choice appears as something given for Sharon. “You gotta choose”, appears to be something everyone should be able to do. Sharon is a good example of this possibility of personal agency (a notion of self-development) rather than playing a role of being a victim of social or economic determinants. She is by her own admission the kind of person who chooses, a person who overcomes her own circumstances and is able to choose freely. She is someone able to distinguish right from wrong, which paradoxically (or intentionally) matches very well with neoliberal notions of citizenship and democracy. Such personal qualities constitute the main objects of intervention in many state led schemes of intervention, especially those aimed at disadvantaged women. “Psychological knowledge” and their related disciplines fulfil this role by arguing that these are choices which appear “to emanate from our individual desires to fulfil ourselves in our everyday lives” (Rose 1998:17); when practiced, such “educated and informed choices” (Rose 1998: 20) are those exercising their necessarily learnt “autonomy” (Rose 1998: 17) to live democratically; to live as “good” enterprising selves, active citizens, family members, members of the community. According to Rose, the fact that subjects of democratic modern societies are “obliged to be free” (1998: 17), has meant that the self has acquired increased salience: its subjectivity has come to be enhanced by those practices which encourage autonomous individuals to strive for “self-realisation” whilst at the same time they exercise their freedom in the right kinds of ways. As Sharon explains, choosing the right thing is a personal given virtue, there is nothing special about it. It is an individual decision that needs to be updated; a given option that you can take or leave. Sharon’s truth about being a person is her “power to choose”.

**Meeting Pam: “Being a mum? It's hard, it's really hard”**

As soon as I moved into Wythenshawe in 2008, I was invited to Annie’s wedding –by that time I had been visiting Annie’s family for nearly a year. I met Pam at Annie’s wedding. After the ceremony held at the local Council Office, we went directly to the party. Unlike most of the guests, Pam and I went by bus. We arrived at the local Pub at the same time and we sat together for a few minutes.
Pam has her son’s name tattooed on the back of her right arm, and I told her that my son is called Sam as well. The conversation did not progress that much on this occasion. Pam is shy and a woman of few words, as Annie told me. I later discover that she is Annie’s best friend. They grew up together, Annie informed me. They both had a very similar upbringing. Pam is 25 years-old. Her partner is of Afro-descent and their only child – at that time - was a two year-old boy. However, as I later learned, she normally comes alone to social events. Actually I only saw her partner once at a Halloween party at Annie’s. Pam was born and bred in Wythenshawe. As I said, Pam takes pride in being reserved. We always met at Annie’s house or when Annie organised some children or a family party. As time passed she felt gradually more comfortable with me. We met only once at my flat to have a more private conversation about her own life. Pam spoke of what it means to be a mother, the struggles with the task ahead of her and so forth. She remarked repeatedly that:

[Being a mum] It’s hard … money, the restrictions that you have … not being able to provide … struggling to provide for your child … it's hard to put in words ‘cause I love being a mum. I love the feeling of being a mum, but it's just … it's so much hard work and nobody even told ya about how hard it is. How you are responsible for somebody else’s life and the patience you need. Finding money for clothes and nappies … Dealing with not getting enough income to pay for food, bills, discipline, you know. The way, you know what I mean, you set the boundaries. Just stuff like that, it's hard to find your feet, especially when you wasn’t given a role model yourself, so it's struggling to learn from those around ya.

For Pam motherhood is also about making ends meet. She comes from a large family from which her own mother was absent. In fact, she had been the person in charge of looking after their younger siblings since she was ten years old. She still lives with her fifteen year-old brother. As she told me,

I remember when Charlie was born, being, I was only ten, nine or ten. I was then sort of pushed into being kind of more than a mum. ‘Cause I was the one who has to do all the cooking by that time. I had two older sisters who have moved out ‘cause they are older, and they've got like
boyfriends and all. They did their own things. So I was the one who ended up having to do all the cleaning, all the cooking.

Pam learned early in life to care for other members of the family. She did not attend courses or read manuals. Pam has learnt by doing. She did not have any family member close enough to her to ask for help – her own mum had left the house. She had neither a health visitor nor doctor available to coach her in what to do or what not to do (because she was a child at that time in charge of her siblings). She became an expert in her own right with no state intervention.

I was about ten, yeah. Which has helped me now ’cause I can cook, I can clean, I can do everything. But obviously I was a child. That's why I don't see myself as having had a very good childhood ’cause I can kind of got ignored as a young child and then pushed to grow up very quickly.

In synthesis, it can be said that the kind of knowledge Pam has developed is a situated learning (Bourdieu 1990; Lave 1998). It is tacit knowledge, imprinted in the habitus of everyday activities. It is not codified; it is practical and located in rather mundane tasks. A person who mothers, as Pam sees it, is someone who engages with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, going to the doctors, going to the shops, and so on. In this sense, it could be argued that the "individualisation" thesis (Beck 1992; Giddens 1992; Bauman 2003) is being challenged on the grounds that women in their everyday activities do not see families or children as uncertain or vague, neither have they made easy or selfish choices. On the contrary, they have committed themselves, in different ways, to caring for and loving their kin and their own children (see Smart and Shipman 2004). What constitutes a person is not just a matter of language (i.e. different categories with their different ways of dividing up people, e.g. "homosexual", "working class"), and their correlative forms of explaining and evaluating human behaviour (Rose 1989). Accordingly, the language of the welfare state with their social services offices and workers; the language of health with its surgeries, health visitors and consulting clinics; the language of charities and their volunteers, forms and policies, have helped to make, produce and reproduce motherhood and women’s selves as mothers in certain ways. Nevertheless women have resisted, through everyday practices and have created and reproduced their own practical knowledge - far from adopting a
romantic adherence and complacence to state intervention. Women’s knowledge and expertise tends to be negotiated through a more realistic dialogue between mothers as everyday experts (“indigenous”) versus professionals and volunteers as experts. Mothering can thus be seen as a social practice; mothering as not fixed or determined but always socially negotiated and produced.

In the following chapter I attempt to link the notion of mothering examined with specific practices of mothering and disciplining the children. Looking specifically at parenting classes aimed mostly at women coming from the most deprived communities in Britain, I address the question of whether or not mothering practices and everyday relatedness play an important role in shaping not only subjects and citizens but also notions of belonging. I will examine the linkages between mothering, discipline and the imagined nation-state and how the sphere of relatedness connects with the politics of the state policy for families.
CHAPTER FOUR: “MOTHERING, DISCIPLINE & NATION”

This chapter sets out to explore the links between mothering, discipline and the imagined nation (Anderson 1983) in contemporary England, examining hypotheses and assumptions underpinning “parenting classes” organised nationwide with a focus on women from the most deprived communities. I attempt to show how relatedness (friends and family) and public spheres (state policy) are intertwined through the politics of mothering children and the imagined nation. Connections between nation and mothering seems to work subtly through idioms of discipline, responsibility and care, where distinctions of class, race and gender are culturally embedded into discourses of morality, social responsibility and individual rights and obligations. Good and bad parenting practices as they classify are also classed, raced and gendered: whereas poor and ethnic minorities parents – especially mothers - are normally depicted as ignorant, immoral, lacking in control, careless and dependent, middle class parents, on the contrary, are often portrayed as being well educated, socially connected, in control, caring and responsible (see Skeggs 1997; Gillies 2007). As Gillies points out, “motherhood is a site where interactions of class, ethnicity and gender are commonly naturalised and normalised” (2007: 31). But it is not just class at stake here; concerns about ethnicity (white majority and ethnic minorities) are also identified as problematic. Indeed, often “whites are portrayed as angry, backward losers, while immigrants are pathologised as insufficiently integrated freeloaders” (Gillies 2007: 31).

During my fieldwork on The Estate in Wythenshawe, class and race were issues that women were reluctant to talk about explicitly, yet national belonging was something invoked in many of the narratives I encountered. National belonging involves more than simply material procedures of containment such as borders and passports, which demarcate absolute distinctions between insiders and outsiders. It also includes a more diffuse sense of being, a lived experience, ways of thinking, everyday routines, acts of identification (or dis-identification) (Byrne 2006:141), or even a sentiment, as Gellner (1983) defines nationalism in the political arena. Women have long been considered central in the UK as the

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61 Working class people and their life-style in the UK are often pathologically depicted in the press and mass media. TV series such as Shameless, Little Britain, and even Coronation Street make a contribution in that sense.
biological, cultural and symbolic reproducers of the nation, although they have only been recently included in discourses around nations and nationalisms (Yuval-Davis 2001). For some scholars nations appear to be a natural extension of kinship relations (see Shils 1957; Geertz 1963; Van den Berghe 1979; Yuval-Davis 2001). Reproduction of the nation is not just biological, but dependent on hegemonic discourses in every historical context; women have been charged (encouraged, forced or forbidden) with having or not having children (see Phoenix, Woollett et al. 1991; Kligman 1998), and have been judged on the basis of right and wrong ways of looking after them. In other words, the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation comes to be seen as a series of gendered narratives in which relations between mothers and children in the family, domestic life, as well as ways of speaking, cooking, and even playing become naturalised (Yuval-Davis 2001). As such, collective identities are reproduced as imagined communities. Women in this sense become bearers of the imagined nation: “Women, in their “proper” behaviour, their “proper” clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity’s boundaries” (Yuval-Davis 2001: 127). Women and mothers thus come to embody the imagined nation. Women and children represent the idea of togetherness, relatedness, of family and the motherland. Mothers, children and citizenship thus become entangled in national discourses.

I would like to borrow Rutherford’s (1997) work on English whiteness and mothering, yet develop it in a quite different direction. Rutherford examines “the relationship between masculinity, whiteness and English ethnicity in the context of a cultural history of race, imperialism and colonialism. In particular [he focuses on] … the intimate connections between home and family, and the culture of English ethnicity” (1997: 6). He points out that “being white was a vague, amorphous concept to get hold of; it wasn’t a colour, it was invisible”. Motherhood in his argument was “the ideological centre of the Victorian ideal of the family. Mothers were endowed with a sacred mission to raise their children and provide a haven for their husbands away from the corrupting world of

62 Although this not the focus of my enquiry in this chapter there are others that see nationalism as a specific social feature of modernity and its obsession with order (see Billing 1995 for instance). For a more general and detailed analysis on the nation an nationalism see Gellner, 1983.

63 “In China, where the one-child policy was imposed in 1979 to control population growth, this limitation on family size prompted a variety of popular resistance strategies, including female infanticide. In Nicolae Ceausescu’s Romania where abortion was banned in 1966, the state demanded that each family produce four or five children as a way of forcing population growth. As a result, illegal abortion became the primary method of fertility regulation” (Kligman 1998: 1).
money and business” (1997: 7). Mothering came under intense scrutiny and women were subjected to a variety of taboos and regulatory practices. According to Rutherford it was this patriarchal institution of motherhood which contributed to the making of the English character.  

I want to argue that one way to understand the notion of motherhood could be through examining the connections between class, race and national belonging. I look into the politics of motherhood in terms of relationships between individual, local and national interests that impact upon child rearing, public policy and power relations. Motherhood is linked with belonging and identity, that of the nation as the “imagined community”. This is an imagined community that “the state serves and protects, and over which it exercises authority” (Kligman 1998: 5). Failures in mothering or reproduction are claimed to threaten the very existence of the family or the nation-state.

In this chapter I show how notions of motherhood and mothering that I have encountered in Wythenshawe revealed interesting connections between class and poverty (living on The Estate) and being understood as national (as synonymous of an unmarked category of being white English and in opposition to the category of immigrant). Parenting classes, according to different stages of a child’s development, place a strong emphasis on parental responsibility and seem to make explicit a liberal approach that seeks to balance individual mothers’ rights with social responsibilities and the state. I am specifically interested in how depictions of good and bad parenting, specifically ideas surrounding mothering practices, are entangled with particular ways of imagining and fostering the nation. Parents, and primarily mothers, are encouraged to shape children into the “right”, “proper” or “legitimate” kinds of person, primarily citizens, understood as being appropriate for the reproduction of the nation (citizens). This takes place through modelling and teaching discipline (limits, boundaries, proper behaviour and character). In this chapter, I look at the rather intimate sphere of the parent-child relation, in order to

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64 The idea of an “English” or “Serbian” or “Chilean” character is problematic though because it is an idea that nationalists use to help construct the imagined unity of nation. I borrowed Rutherford’s notion in a quite different perspective: to emphasize the links between mothering and the imagined nation.

65 Anti-nationalists argue that if the nation idea is an effect of the existence of states and their bureaucratic regularities then it is relatively recent invention.
examine how these narratives may be equated with the idea of the nation “imagined as limited” (Anderson 1983: 7), with finite boundaries and a specific system of representation understood, amongst others, in idioms of language, religion, class and race. I thus suggest that one way to marry the kinship domain of mothering children with the political domain of attempted nation-making, is by exploring practices of disciplining children and making citizens. On the basis of my fieldwork I would like to argue that the problem of imagining a nation arises when limits and boundaries are broken, whether this is undertaken by parents deemed incapable of disciplining their children (categorising them therefore as bad parents and/or citizens) or as some of my acquaintances put it, by “foreigners” who come in and distort the sense of “our” community, “our” language, “our” religion and “our” way of thinking and seeing the world (ultimately “our” nation). These broken boundaries symbolise not only bad parenting or bad citizenship; they also enact a badly managed nation, or a “soft” nation, as some of my informants termed it; a imagined nation where the lower classes are seen as lacking in discipline and women and/or mothers (often those in charge of child rearing) are depicted as incompetent, irresponsible, ignorant and lacking in confidence. A soft nation is one in which, according to some local beliefs, belonging is no longer by birth right, for boundaries has been broken by outsiders who have ultimately corrupted the imagined community.66 It is not difficult to see how “pollution” beliefs – based on the idea of imagined differences and similarities - can be used to create unity in experience. Some pollution ideas are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order, the nation-state. As Douglas (1966) asserted “beliefs reinforce social pressures”. There are beliefs that certain social groups are a danger to the other through contact in everyday activities. The ideal order of society is protected by dangers of transgressors (outsiders). Dirt (in the form of class or ethnic difference) offends against order in Douglas’ words.

Consequently the argument set out will examine mothering as closely intertwined with discourses of identity and belonging, particularly to the idea of contemporary England as a “soft touch” nation. New Labour’s policy on families has strongly focused its strategies on parental responsibility shifting away the

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66 Similarly, multiculturalism discourses are based on an argument for diversity often rooted in a claim to integral singularity. The premise of many multiculturalist arguments is that people “naturally” feel at home in one culture that is either smaller than a nation-state or cuts across the boundaries of nation states. Yet it is not clear that the claims about the constituent or cross-cutting cultural groups are really always of a different order from those about the nation-states that constitute the primary arenas for multiculturalist discourse.
duty from the state. Family values became a moral and social responsibility. Women and mothers become bearers, in this discourse, of the moral fibre of the nation. I will illustrate ethnographically how notions and practices of disciplining children can act as a bridge to connect individuals with the state and the nation and vice versa. Accordingly I will introduce two different ethnographic accounts. The first section deals with ideas about “being soft”. It shows how some parents and professionals are linking “bad parenting” with notions of “being soft” as a nation. The second section explores notions and practices of disciplining children through the experience of attending a series of parenting courses during my time spent doing fieldwork. I offer a detailed account of how the promotion of discipline as a parenting skill can become a paradoxical way of imagining and belonging: a social virtue of those deemed as fine citizens, but at the same time, a failed strategy when applied to those living at the margins.

Being soft; from “bad parenting” to a “soft-touch” nation

According to some of the women I met during my fieldwork on the Estate, being a bad parent could be equated with being a “soft-touch” nation, as they described it. This places a working class biased connotation with a lack of discipline within a new sphere of connotations. In these terms, the imagined nation is conceived as a “soft-touch” because it allows foreigners to get in, supposedly with greater ease than its European neighbours. Therefore being soft or lacking discipline is not just a matter of being working class, it is also understood as part of being a soft nation as a whole; thus spanning all social classes. The idea of “being soft” is multi-layered since being soft can imply at the same time, being kind, being caring (on the level of relatedness) and also being tolerant, democratic and open minded (on the political level of attitudes towards others in the UK). Being soft also has paradoxically quite different connotations: it can refer to having lax immigration rules in the country compared with its neighbours; or it can mean being loving and caring with your own children; at the same time, it can mean being liberal in terms of life style, religion and civil rights. Being soft is also a gendered category; it is normally a female feature: being soft and girly (as in popular teasing expressions: “she’s a softy”, “don’t be soft”, “how soft are you”). The imagined nation in these kinds of narratives always appears as female (the mother nation) and “she” can thus be loving,

67 See Naomi Finch’s article “Family Policy in the UK”, available on line at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/nordic/ukpolicy.pdf [accessed on 21/09/2011]
caring, liberal and lax with “her” citizens just as women and mothers can be with their children.

At the domestic level being soft connotes various meanings simultaneously, not just at the individual level but also within the community. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, I met Annie while volunteering at Start-Up. Annie distinguishes between being soft, as in the little treats she gives to her children (“they get kind’a extra treatment”) and also being soft with boundaries, rules and consequences for her children’s behaviour at home (“the majority of times I probably just ignore it”).

Right, with my children I am [soft] … Carl is [being treated] by a psychologist now and she actually said it, is it because I’m soft … “if Carl was naughty what would you do?” I’d put him on time out, and she [the psychologist] said, “if he kept on coming back enough times?” I’d say if he was quiet the majority of times, I would probably just ignore it and think, right, well, he’s being good now … that’s really classed as being soft. Because … obviously he hasn’t learnt his lesson, he hasn’t realised that what he’s done is naughty and he’s been punished for it.

However, for Annie “being soft” also means sometimes giving special treatment to your children. Annie believes that being a proper mum, who loves her children, means being caring and responsible with them, which is also about being soft on the right occasions. As she comments:

If they’re poorly, they get kind of extra treatment but I don’t feel like I’m that soft, I feel like that’s just being a mum … even my mum who was really horrible with us as children, even if we were poorly, she’d still do the little things like she’d buy us a bottle of Lucozade which sounds like pathetic, but you know, I wouldn’t buy Lucozade, but I’d buy her like a treat or let her lie on the settee watching whatever DVD she wanted, she’d have me waiting on her hand and foot, going and getting her whatever she wanted to eat, when she wanted to eat it but I think that’s just being a Mum … like Carl at the moment, I’m so proud of him for being at school so I am soft with him … I buy him like, I took him to his first day at school and then he was only in there for an hour, and I took
him to Frankie and Benny’s for his dinner, I bought him toys from the shops ... that is soft ... 

Another acquaintance I met at the Breastfeeding Group had a similar outlook on “being soft”. Sarah suggests that being soft presents an option for a quieter life at home although it also entails certain limits:

[My husband] he’s always accusing me of being soft. I am sometimes, ‘cause I can’t be bothered with the hassle. I’m a non-confrontational person really, and I’d rather not have an argument with John [her son] about food for example, that’s our biggest problem. Then, I would rather just say okay, have a packet of crisps. So I think, I can be soft but I think it’s ‘cause I’m all in it for a quiet life. I don’t like seeing John upsetting his sleep but there are times following the parenting course that I’m doing “ignoring” [a behaviour technique taught on the parenting course]. That works, except I do not tolerate him kicking or hitting. [When he does it] He’s straight on the step, so there are certain things that I let him get away with, but there are certain things that I don’t let him get away with at all, like violence, no way. I won’t have it, because I think what they do now, will be what they will be doing when they’re thirteen, fourteen; if they’re nice now they’ll be nice when they are grown up then.

Conversely, Annie emphasises that being soft is not always about children’s behaviour inside the house but also what children do outside the home, at school and within the community. She maintains that it is very common in Wythenshawe for children to be excluded from school. According to her, that happens not because “they are naughty” but mainly because, “they are children brought up by children”. She goes on to explain:

Many young parents at the age of fourteen have children, and they don’t distinguish between what’s right and wrong.

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68 Lucozade is a name for a series of very popular energy and sports drinks that are produced in the UK.

69 The Breastfeeding group was a self-help community initiative supported by the NHS that worked at the Forum Centre in Wythenshawe. I attended this group for six months on a weekly basis.
She further explains that many children on The Estate, at the age of thirteen or fourteen are hanging out on the street until one or two at night even during school days, which can be considered, as far as Annie is concerned, a sign of parents being soft with them. Annie remarks emphatically that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable; she thinks that in this respect she “is not that soft”. As she comments,

If my children do that [go out at night till late], I will go out and find them. I will knock on every door until I find them, and I’ll drag them back home.

Drawing upon her experience, Annie quickly suggests that the problem with children’s behaviour at school and on the streets is their parents’ fault.

It’s not always about being soft … It’s to do with the parents being lazy because if they didn’t want their child to be like that, they’d get up off their backside and do something about it, because if I found out Carl had got an anti-social behaviour thing, I’d go mad at him. There’s no way I’d let my child be in that situation or be even be at risk of getting one. If the parents were that good ... they wouldn’t have allowed the child to be in that situation in the first place, they would have been able to guide them to be doing something else. Even if they’re fifteen they are still a child and I do think that, you know, I remember being sort of like that [at that] age and my Mum saying, “you have to be in by this time”, and being in by that time because if I wasn’t, I knew I would be in trouble. I think these days parents just think “oh well, if he’s not bothering me I’ll just leave him to it”.

Similarly, discourses of being soft at home and leaving children to do as they please, are reproduced, imagined and represented as metaphors of the government and the nation, with a special focus on immigrants (foreigners). In

70 The ASBO or “Anti-Social Behaviour Order” is a civil order made against a person who has been shown, to have engaged in anti-social behaviour such as arson, drunken behaviour, intimidation, racism, spitting, stealing/mugging/shoplifting, vandalism/criminal damage, between others. I will address this topic in more detail the next chapter.
this sense, one of the most persistent narratives I heard during my fieldwork was that British society has become “too soft” and this was the reason why children and parents have become less disciplined and worse behaved. For example, one day at one of the volunteer training sessions, we were discussing issues of “bad parenting” and discipline, when one of my acquaintances, Liz, said:

This society is too tolerant ... because of multiculturalism many things have to be organised in a very wise and wide sense ... to accept everyone’s beliefs ... so when something happens – like binge drinking or trouble - nobody says nothing ‘cause people don’t want to shout out.

She was not just blaming society for the lack of discipline but also focusing on an unwillingness to confront antisocial behaviour out of supposed respect for cultural difference, racial tolerance and increasing multiculturalism, which was seen as something twofold: positive for a “nation” (“we” are tolerant) but on the other hand, this positive feature could become undesirable and excessive (“we” are too tolerant and this leads to antisocial behaviour). This is a very interesting narrative because the paradox of being a tolerant country is that precisely the people considered legitimate citizens are not tolerant, especially when it comes to defining who belongs to the nation and who does not. What I learned during my fieldwork was that this kind of boundary, in other words, of how people engage with and imagine the nation with which they identify and define their belonging, has come to be highly racialised on The Estate. Belonging is delimited through an invisible racial marker, normally white, and against any foreigner, who come to embody the image of the Other (who is normally non-white - although not exclusively - but mainly referred to as a foreigner; as non-English). One of my acquaintances at the fitness classes for women, Sharon, explained this very clearly when she pointed out:

This country now is a soft country, Britain as a whole is a soft touch, out of all the other, all the other countries in the world, we’re the softest, the softest country, the softest ... how can I put it, government, and from any other country. America would not take as many immigrants as what Britain has, so yes, in that way we are very tolerant of other people.
On a different occasion, at one of the volunteers training sessions on “drug awareness”, the topic turned to the reasons people drink, focusing especially on youngsters. Again, issues such as role models, family values and bad parenting were signalled as the main triggers for young people who drink. Someone at the meeting specifically mentioned the weather, saying that cold weather encourages people to stay indoors and to eat and drink too much. “This weather gives us few opportunities to go out and do different things”, while another participant replied “Well, we like a drink when it is nice and sunny, to celebrate, don’t we?” Someone else added “when it is sunny you don’t want to go in [to work]. Sun makes me drink”. One of the organisers that day, a senior social worker, told the story of “Julie”, a fifteen year-old girl (one of his clients) who normally has a hundred units of alcohol every weekend (he explains that such a measure is equated with two bottles of wine, two pints and a bottle of vodka). The girl lives with divorced parents. Her dad gives her £100 every week, “so she’s got quite a lot of pocket money to spend on liquor”. This example created a highly heated debate. One of the volunteer participants said, “It’s fine to give a little bit of alcohol to a little child as a way of training or creating resistance”; whereas, one of the participants with an English-Asian background, shouted out loud “It’s unacceptable!” Immediately one of the local women replied, “I don’t think it’s unacceptable. It’s been like that for several generations. I don’t think it’s wrong”. Another local woman in her sixties commented “My husband has a PhD and he and his friends used to drink till they got under the table. It’s not about education”. The discussion ended up when the social worker intervened saying:

Well, you know ... Some people say they have tried [drugs] as something recreational. Some other people know about other people who have tried [drugs], or they have family who have ... Most people have experimented or still use drugs as recreational, but in terms of problematic behaviour, like when there is a dependency on drug/alcohol consumption, when your money goes out of control, when you are building up more resistance and consuming more ... and all this is affecting your family and work relationships ... then it becomes a concern.

I use pseudonyms throughout.
He did not directly address the different opinions in the group but he went on to draw upon the example given initially about Julie, to demonstrate how bad parenting and softness can actually harm children and young people. He emphasised that occasional consumption was not problematic but that dependency, reliance and abuse were something to be careful about as parents. Role models and family dynamics were highlighted as the main triggers of drug and alcohol abuse in teenagers. “It is a kind of ‘macho’ thing in England” one of the volunteers said, interrupting. The facilitator simply ignored the comment and carried on arguing that role models were a key issue when it came to drug and alcohol abuse. He pointed out that family problems in the sphere of relationships (parents, parent-child relationships, siblings), work-related and mental health were among the most important factors to look into. Again discipline, boundaries, rules and consequences, appeared to be protective factors against a “very liberal and accepting kinda society” as one of the participants pointed out. Here again, being soft as a society is provided as an explanation of the weaknesses and failures of individuals and especially parents. If we failed as parents it is because we live in a liberal, accepting, too tolerant society that “makes us” like that, as one of the women concluded.

The notion of bad parenting and a lack of discipline seems, in this way, to be linked to the weakness of the nation as a whole. As stated above, “being soft” appears to be a doubled edged trait reproduced not just at a domestic level but also at a political one, namely the trait of “being very liberal and accepting”. Poor role models and soft images of parents came to represent an image of what it meant to be a bad citizen and therefore an incomplete person. Only a complete person could be seen as a citizen of the nation and, as such, had to be responsible, caring, confident, well educated, socially connected, and committed to children’s education and so on. Furthermore, parents should be tolerant, able to discipline and teach socially acceptable norms to their children. In this sense I argue that parenting processes are not entirely individual but also social and political. Becoming a complete person or citizen requires gaining a mastery over the finest norms and values of a given society; a delimitation of who belongs and who does not; it creates entitlement; a sense of belonging and community. Thus being a soft nation implies uncertainty and anxiety; a breaking of the boundaries, it pollutes and contaminates. Interestingly enough this breaking point opens up new definitions, limits and expectations of what it entails to belong to this contemporary, imagined English nation.
As I have mentioned, idioms of “being soft” work on various levels. For instance, at the educational level, schools are characterised as being soft by allowing young people who do not conform to the minimum standard of a normative curriculum to leave mainstream education. As Katie, a psychologist and organiser of one of the parenting courses I attended pointed out:

I think schools have a very important role to play in obviously educating children and young people, but also I think that a lot of antisocial behaviour, not all, I’m sure is created by young people who are out of school. For one reason or another they are [out of school], whether the school isn’t meeting their needs, or they’ve got learning difficulties of some description or other, or you know, they’re turned off school because we have a very prescriptive curriculum, that you know doesn’t meet a lot of young people’s needs. I suppose I work with a lot of people whose children are out of school ... most of the parents will have children who are not in school, either they’ll be on a part-time timetable or they’ll be, you know, between schools or trying to get into another school, or excluded from school. And so, you know, they’ve got a whole day with no purpose, and obviously there are other young people who are out of school that they can mix with, and you know, what do you do when you’ve got not a lot to do during the day? Mess about, and engage in things that you know might not be good things. I don’t think it’s necessarily the school’s fault, but the education system, we need to be looking at those young people and providing for them within school or elsewhere, you know, I think it’s not acceptable [to have] people who are not in school.

Schools, in Katie’s view, have gone soft for they have given up on children who have had trouble coping with the highly normative curriculum, thus excluding them from classes. Schools in her opinion are not integrated enough in the role they assume when dealing with communities and families. She thinks that schools as state institutions have gone soft, and that they are not responding accordingly to the community’s needs. Katie goes on to explain:
I think there’s something there about schools being more responsive to their community, you know. So if they exclude a pupil, then that is going to have an impact on people in that community, because that young person is going to be out of school and I think they need a bit of responsibility and say actually we need to keep this person in school, somehow or another ...

Katie acknowledges that the issue of discipline is complex, rooted neither simply with parents nor at school. She believes that parenting and discipline must be addressed by society as a whole. Discipline can be seen as a shared image of what it means to belong to a certain community; in other words it defines a moral and/or social value. Katie’s point of view shows us how discipline may be considered to be both parenting skill and social-value, especially for those imagined as lacking it (the lower classes and mothers). It can therefore function as a way of promoting belonging and identity under the abstract, collective idea of the “nation” but in doing so it also creates different forms of exclusion. The definition of certain rules of accepted and acceptable behaviour helps to determine social boundaries. In this sense, idioms of a lack of discipline and inadequate parenting can be linked with class (the working classes), gender (women) and racial differences (immigrants) as those deemed precisely to be lacking those virtues. Lack of discipline can be equated with many other lacking aspects such as not being wealthy or educated enough, not talking properly, a lack of tolerance, a lack of rules and routines, a lack of democratic values and moral fibre. In this scenario working class mothers come to be seen as frightening, rigid and pathological (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989).

Katie, as a psychologist working for the Manchester City Council, organized and led one of the parenting courses I joined during my fieldwork. She emphasised during the groups sessions the idea that discipline is neither a social endeavour nor simply a parent’s or school’s responsibility alone. She pointed out that raising a child is a matter of gender, social class and racial differences as well as individual accountability. She commented one time we met for a cup of tea, I meet parents who feel blamed for their children and young people’s behaviour, so they feel like the school is just very critical of them. And what actually happens is that they both blame each other, so if you talk
to teachers in school, not all of them but some of them, they will say “well, it’s the parent’s fault. They can’t control them”. If you talk to the parents they’ll say “it’s the school’s fault”. And what you actually need is both of them working together and helping each other to meet this young person’s needs. And I mean, I suppose, most high schools are serving quite a big population where you’ll have, you know, middle class areas, poorer areas, and I mean, there are families that are much more likely to be excluded. The figures on exclusion are if you’re black, there are a higher proportion of excluded pupils. Boys, a higher proportion of boys are excluded, and I don’t know how it relates to socioeconomic factors but certainly there are ethnic differences in that, which are concerning. What’s that about? Is it about the school not meeting the needs of those young people? Is it about the culture and expectations of those young people? Is it institutional racism? You know, what is it about? It’s probably a mixture of all of those different things.

Katie ascribes accountability for discipline and care for children to society as a whole. She sees parenting as integrated in a broader context that includes class, gender and race elements. In this way, discipline and parenting are situated within a discourse of nation making. Seeing parenting and specifically mothering as classed, gendered and raced practices connects individuals (parents and children) with the state and the image of the nation. This brings up the question of what kind of person is seen as integral to the nation. It creates images of “us” and “them”, images of inclusion and exclusion. Mothering serves as a link to highlight the complexity of formal and informal relations between the state and their citizens or noncitizens, as the case may be (Kligman 1998). State intervention and its rhetorical and institutional practices in everyday practices entails tacit complicity between states and their citizens, which brings to the fore the question of what techniques of control are utilized to shape conduct? I suggest that discipline in the lives of mothers and children may be an effective way of linking the body politic and public culture.

Discipline: “It takes a village to raise a child”

It seems that in the eyes of most policy and state strategies of intervention, discipline is something that the lower classes lack. Discipline appears to be
something that has to be taught. It is both an individual virtue, whilst conversely serving as a desirable social value. In this section I wish to turn my attention to how discipline – or the lack thereof - is used to explain the social structural dimensions of class inequality, situating the roots of failure in parenting, as embedded in the subjectivities of social actors (Lawler 2005). The mothers I met during my fieldwork, and also the professionals who were working with them, believed and used this discourse as an explanation of children’s and parents’ failure in many aspects of life. Consequently, many of the state and third sector interventions tend to assume that inequality and class differences can be transcended by improving personal parenting skills, especially concerning how mothers discipline their children.

During my eighteen months living on The Estate, I participated in many community activities aimed at mothers and children. One of these activities consisted of parenting classes. I attended three courses in total; the shortest consisted of eight weekly sessions, whilst the longest consisted of twelve. Two were organised and funded by the City Council and one was run by Johnson’s.org. I will not consider here details of every parenting course I attended but instead I will draw on some significant events which occurred during my involvement in those courses. In writing this account I have also drawn on Emily Martin’s (2007) ethnographic account of mental health support groups.

Parenting courses are support groups for parents or carers. They are normally organised according to children’s age and normally place a strong emphasis on teaching strategies concerning how to discipline your children and how to establish a better parent-child relationship. In one of the groups I attended a weekly meeting which was held in a local community centre. Every meeting was conducted by two workers who played a role as facilitators. Pete and Joyce were in charge of one of the courses in which I was involved. Pete is of Irish descent, in his late thirties, a very nice, not very tall, chubby man. He was born and bred

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72 Manchester City Council organizes a series of Parenting Classes for different children’s development stages all over the city, normally linked to schools or local charities.

73 Johnson’s.org is one of the largest charities for young homeless people in the UK, although real names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

74 Martin’s own experience with Bipolar Disorder provides an interesting insight into the psychiatric world surrounding cultural life that mania and depression have outside the boundaries of diagnosis.
in Manchester and has been a community worker for twenty years. Joyce is an educational psychologist in her forties, starting work as a new facilitator in this project with parents.

Our first session ran smoothly through brief personal introductions to the members of the group, in which everyone listed some personal details concerning themselves or spoke about particular issues connected with their own teenage children. One woman began confidently saying “Hi, I’m Denise. I was a cocaine addict. I’ve got Daniel, who is normally excluded from school”. Another one continued by saying, “I have a son with Down’s Syndrome. I don’t know if I should be here”. A third woman, Samaria, added up, “I’m doing this for the third time. It hasn’t been very effective with my daughter who still disregards my authority”. Paul, the only man in the room, very quietly said “I’m a single parent in charge of a teenage boy. I’ve got another son in care but I don’t want talk about that. My social worker thinks this course will be useful for me”. Another female participant, very confidently also told us, “I’m a foster carer of a boy with physical disabilities. My daughter is fourteen” (I learned later that her daughter has a physical disability too). Breaking up the pattern, Toya, Puje and Dulna, the Mongolian family, were represented by Toya (who speaks English more fluently) who said “well, our daughter spends the day watching TV and she doesn’t do homework on time”. I introduced myself as a researcher. I clarify that I would not be writing notes at the meetings. I also explained that I was interested in learning in the group like other parents, and also making my own notes later. Accordingly I introduced myself telling all present that I moved to Manchester from Santiago, Chile, to undertake my postgraduate studies, along with my thirteen year-old son and my partner. I also followed the lead and said “I want to break my isolation and get back my confidence as a mum”.

From the outset it was remarked upon by the organisers that this group was a “very diverse” group of people, probably because there were a number of people from abroad participating in the group. The group consisted of eight other adults (mostly women), all of whom were parents with one or more troubled teenaged children. Most of the parents were white English, but there were also second generation English-Pakistani, a family (both parents and grandmother) from Mongolia and myself from Chile. Pete and Joyce highlighted the importance of accepting other people’s ideas and views, of mutual respect (“not putting people down”) and avoiding abusive language. It was a support group, not
psychotherapy and is “not a judgmental space”, as they defined it. People in the group were aware of why they were attending, whether they have been sent by social services or court orders (like Paul and latecomer Gareth), or rather by their own will (like Samaria who had attended three times). I had the impression that those parents sent by professional services knew how to play the role expected from them, that they had to be there and that they knew they had to get involved in a pleasant manner (sometimes complacently). They were, of course, monitored by social services and reports of their involvement were handed in for court procedures. Paul and Gareth knew what was expected from them so they acted accordingly as if they were acting out a pre-set role.

However, they genuinely got involved in every activity. They shared their personal biographies, they listened respectfully to others and they completed the homework given every week. However I wonder how deeply this experience could actually have impacted on their life since it was something imposed and monitored by professionals within the framework of other legal processes (we did not learn what kind of circumstances necessitated their presence within the group but I suspect it had something to do with child protection or domestic violence, judging on the basis of their narratives during the sessions).

During the first meeting we were asked to think collectively of the kinds of lives we hoped for our children in ten years from now. We commenced the session by conversing in small groups. One of the parents said, “I imagine my children working, married, having children and happy”. Another parent shouted out loud “travelling, on holidays, living in a big house”. Some others were more cautious saying “I want him to be independent”, “well educated”, “debt free”, “to be good parents”, “healthy”. Pete, one of the facilitators, listened to all of us and concluded by saying “in order for this to happen, we, as parents, need to work on it”. He also noted the reasons why parents normally attend these kinds of groups, and in an attempt to normalise everyone’s reasons, pointed out that confusion, the need for advice, methods of discipline and simply support are the most common motives for parents attending such groups.

During this course I met a woman named Denise. She was a blonde, in her forties (although she looks older than she is). Denise was born and bred in Manchester and has two children aged twenty one and fourteen. She had just starting living with her youngest son once again for the first time in several years, a period in which the boy was in foster care. Denise told us that she had
been a drug addict for several years, addicted to heroin and cocaine, although she also told us that she had been “clean” for the last two years. Her fourteen-year old son named Daniel had been excluded from school on several occasions due to disruptive behaviour, which included beating up one of his teachers. According to Denise, Daniel also had problems with the neighbours who had accused him of throwing stones at their windows and committing other nuisance behaviour.

I also met Gareth, Paul’s best friend. He was a freckled, tall, very slim man. His brown hair was shaved all around except on the top of his head where his hair is cut short; this particular haircut shows off a small rounded head full of scars; he had no front teeth which makes him look in his late thirties although he was probably younger. Gareth told us that he has no biological children of his own but four step-children, all brought to the family by his partner Molly who worked as a nurse and acts as the breadwinner at home. He described himself as an alcoholic sent to the course by his social worker with the intention of improving his relationship with his step-children and also he admitted, to reduce his level of violence at home. I later discovered that Gareth is an active member of the English Defence League (EDL) a right wing and racist political movement which promotes white supremacy in England, although they themselves claim that they are not racist but that they are opposed to the Islamisation of England.

Ann was in her forties, had a slim figure, short brown hair and blue eyes. She had a thirteen year old son with Down syndrome. He is at a mainstream school, but as she pointed out, he “is reaching a point where he needs alternative ways”. Ann explained to us: “The way I brought him up makes him look younger than he is, but inevitably he’s growing up fast and becoming a teenager”. She concluded: “At this point there are things I’m not sure about, where to go and how”. Ann was not sure whether this group was suitable for her and her son. She was looking for help but did not know where to go to get the best advice possible. She also looked better off than the rest of the participants. As mentioned another member of the group was a woman named Samaria. She had long black hair, a robust complexion and was in her late thirties. She had married traditionally through an arranged marriage agreed by her parents who have a Pakistani background and she had three children from that marriage. The eldest was a fourteen year old daughter. “She rules the house”, Samaria confessed, troubled. “I want to get control back over my family”, she demanded,
describing the “abusive” behaviour of her eldest daughter who does not help with the everyday chores at home, smoked and was verbally abusive towards her mother and younger siblings, as Samaria told us.

Parenting classes were advertised widely throughout the community and in public services. I found out about them through a leaflet I read in the library. In each case I rang the office and enrolled myself. Most of the time meetings were held in a spacious carpeted room where everybody sat down on chairs arranged in a big circle, so that participants could face each other. On one of the first occasions we met, the organisers asked us to split into small groups and discuss amongst each other what they called “ground rules”. I worked with Denise and two other parents, writing on a blank sheet what we thought was important. One thing stated was the importance of confidentiality (“what is said in the room stays in the room”). While we were completing this task one significant event took place in the middle of the first session. A group of four Somali women turned up late to the meeting. Their presence was disruptive not just because they were an hour late but also because they were all wearing the traditional burqa scarf fully covering their faces. It was disruptive because several reasons: they did not speak English, one of the women spoke on behalf of the others. They did not (or could not because of the language barrier) join the groups already working. Their abrupt presence – not just because they were late but also for their traditional clothing - caused an extended stillness within the members of the group who stopped their conversation to stare at them. The organisers seemed nervous about this interruption but they did not cast them out; on the contrary they tried to welcome them to what was at that point quite a perplexed group of people. Introductions had already been completed and so Pete asked them to introduce themselves briefly; only one of the women spoke English fluently. She translated for the others and stated that one of the women has a three year old son. Joyce remarked, “Oh, well. This group is just for parents with teenager children”; yet the women failed to comprehend this. Pete interrupted by giving them some forms to fill in but the women struggled to complete them all, while the rest of us remained silent, looking slightly

75 I had a previous liaison meeting with the organisers who agreed for me to take part in the meetings as another parent. I did not take notes during the meetings. I recalled the experiences afterwards. All names and personal details have been modified to protect people’s identities. I also introduced myself as a researcher and parent in the first meeting, so the members of the group knew I was doing my research looking at mothering practices and they agreed I could stay. As a result of this, I was required to get involved in every task to the same extent as everybody else, doing homework and filling in questionnaires with my own son, who was not very amused by it.
bewildered. Before the awkward moment carried everyone’s mood away, Pete regained control of the proceedings by saying “OK. Forget about the forms. We’ll have a little word afterwards. You stay and pay attention. We are working on the basis of the ground rules now”. The Somali women stayed together and talked in their own language quietly.

At this point, interestingly, Denise intervened in the little group where I was, and commented: “we should avoid racism in this group”, clearly trying to address the different nationalities of the members of the group and the newcomers. The rest of us reacted by saying that there should be respect for diversity of religion, sexuality and disability, addressing the fact that there is not just ethnic or racial difference within the group. In the face of this, Denise acknowledged the message and said, “it is better if we write diversity”, instead of racial – referring to the ground rules we were working on. This apparently minor event shows how people in the group became aware of racial difference just because we were confronted with it in a confined space such as a parent’s group. Even though Denise’s attitude is not explicitly articulated as her racial identity (“white”) but instead as other people’s “racial diversity”, it can be said that this way of marking difference operates as an imaginary indicator of what it means to be local on The Estate. Being local is not being an immigrant; being local is not wearing a burqa scarf; being local is speaking native English. We all lived on The Estate at that moment, but foreign members (like myself, the Mongolian family and ultimately, the four Somali women) were noted for our “diversity” and as different from the white majority.

On a different occasion in the same parenting classes, the facilitators gave us a paper with three “questions to think about” and we were asked to bring the answers to the next meeting. The questions were as follows:

a) Observe the ways in which your child models or imitates your behaviour.

b) Think about your relationship with those who raised you. Was something said or done that influenced how you felt about yourself in a particular area?
c) Think about the types of discipline that were used when you were growing up and whether you are using these or different practices with your own family.

Interestingly the following week different parents in the course reported back answers such as:

Well, my son normally talks back.
I always got a negative response from my daughter.
I often ignore my children so they ignore me too.
She imitates me ‘cos she hides treats.
My daughter smokes, smokes, smokes just like me.
He is normally “blanking out”.
My children are normally having tempers.
They are going to bed late.
They normally answer back with the statement “Why should I?”
[Answers provided by several participants]

Additionally, some parents also reflected back on their own biographies:

I was abused as a child, so I don’t enforce discipline at home.
[As a child] I used to do a lot of cooking and cleaning.
I was brought up with smacking as a norm.
I’ve got too much to do, so I tend to shout, swear, hit and lose control.
I tend to be violent and abusive, ‘cos I can’t control my anger.
A lack of money, kids fighting, loud music, all this makes me angry.
When I confront my child I’m angry, that’s how I feel 24/7 [twenty four hours a day, seven days a week].
[Answers provided by several participants]
Most of the answers given tended to associate experiences of parenting and abuse. Memories charged with aggressive behaviour and strict control from parents over children were recapitulated over and over when they talked about their pasts. Interestingly, these memories were rarely resentful; course participants were not distressed remembering certain traumatic events in their lives. Moreover, some of them seemed to connect their current parent-child relationship with their own past as a way of understanding what was happening to them now in their lives. In an interesting manner, what was proposed here was self-improvement through reflexivity, linking individual effort (in terms of becoming aware of previous emotional barriers) with social success (as long as being aware allows us to improve on our present conditions). This capacity of citizens to act upon themselves highlights supposedly “autonomous subject[s] of choice and self-realisation” (Rose 1989: xviii). There was an emphasis on self-development when the organisers commented: “there is a lot of work to do with ourselves as parents”, and also when they emphasised that most of the progress or success of our children is achieved through “modelling”. This implies that failure (in terms of social expectations and what it means to be a citizen: responsible, caring, educated, hard-working, etc.) could be attributed to individuals (parents and mothers) as well as the social conditions that allowed or prevented them from their goals being subtly sidelined (it was your inability to absorb appropriate role models concerning the right kind of behaviour expected in society).

This can be considered a good example of how issues of social inequality can become situated at the level of individual responsibilities. The learning outcome of the parenting classes was highlighted in terms of the kinds of parenting skills that we, as mothers or fathers, have to learn and set in practice through modelling behaviour, which we then enact when around our own children. In actual fact, most of the work in these parenting courses focused on ourselves as individuals and how we can improve our personal resources, with special attention paid to how we can teach discipline to our children. No emphasis was given to social or historical conditioning. Poverty and exclusion were completely taken out of the equation; mobility and success were understood as due to individual efforts, which in turn would create more frustration and anger, as the nature of many of the problems that parents faced were in fact not just down to individual failure but consequences of their own social positions in society. In other words, the cycle of deprivation and poverty are structural conditions in which people live in and they do not change exclusively through individual
improvements. In particular, Denise and Gareth could not be classified as just poor and/or bad parents; they enacted common forms of marginality and poverty in their own personal biographies. I learned a little more about Denise’s biography one day when she brought back to the meeting some homework given on the previous occasion we had met. Everyone had been asked to bring something important to us, something that represented us, in order to show the group who we were. Denise brought an old photo of her Dad. Before she began the story, she had started to cry. She told the group that her Dad had left home when she was seven years old and that he had never come back since. Secretly her Dad had sold the house where she and her Mum used to live and they became homeless. “I was homeless at seven years-old”. She went on to say, “when I was fifteen I got in contact with ... coz I always wanted to be in contact with him, you know, I just wanted. I wanted to know why?” Tears continued to stream down Denise’s face, but she carried on telling her story, “I later discovered that he had another family. I never got to know why he did all this damage to me and my Mum ... he died two years ago”. Denise tried to lift her mood and said, “I still love him though, he was my Dad”. I later learned that Denise lives close to her mother and younger sister but she described them as drinkers; a reason for her to avoid them. “My mother” ... she told us:

They are all drinkers; even her sixteen year old daughter is [Denise’s sister]. She left school two years ago and she’s repeating the cycle all over again ... drinking. She’s sixteen [years old] now.

Denise has no family networks at hand. She recalled having had a tough life. She has been living away from her children because of her addiction and her supposed inability to look after them, as she explained. She talks loosely about her youngest son Daniel saying:

He’s fourteen. He smokes, but he does so in his room. He’s always in trouble. I’m always waiting for the police knocking on the door, or the phone ringing, to say something happened with Daniel. He’s always messing around.

Similarly Gareth told us he has been an alcoholic since he was seventeen [he must be in his thirties now]. He confessed to us: “My family’s broken up. I’m
adopted”. He lives with Molly, who has, as noted above, four children from a previous relationship. The eldest girl turned eighteen recently, an occasion on which Molly wanted to take the girl to the local pub for drinks. Gareth disagreed with it saying:

I know it’s not right. They won’t be happy until they’re hammered, I know that. She’s been hospitalised twice [for the same reason, binge drinking].

Gareth admits that his step-children have all been excluded from school at different times. The eldest girl gets drunk very often and their parent-child relationship is characterised by abusive language. Gareth reckons that the children at home intentionally ignored him and made alliances against him, as he put it. He is currently fighting his long-term alcoholism and attending group therapy, which had had relative success; he had been sober for four weeks when we met him. It did not last longer than that though. The second week he confessed that he had “got pissed” at the weekend. However, the struggle to contain his alcoholism had not taken away aspects of his relation to his step-children. He continued to be violent to them over time.

Denise and Gareth come to symbolise a thwarted notion of the English individual and person imagined by the nation-state. State intervention is aimed at these kinds of individual; to reform and transform them. The social concept of the person, spiritual and physical; the compound of jural rights and moral responsibility, “la personne morale” in Mauss’s words, is defeated by the rough reality lived by individuals such as Denise and Gareth. State intervention is therefore deemed necessary.

On this parenting course, as in the other two courses in which I participated, discipline was defined as “teaching by example”. Three modes of discipline were emphasised: modelling by example, praising and giving clear instructions. Most of the parenting courses’ contents were organised around methods and techniques of teaching discipline to our children, specifically through “establishing consequences, working and spending time with children, role modelling and grounding”, among others. Cognitive knowledge about self-esteem, self-discipline and social competence was delivered in the form of reflective exercises such as role playing, the revision of past experiences,
watching short documentaries and so forth. However, given Gareth’s and Denise’s background it seemed to me apparently unfeasible for them to deploy the expected kind of role modelling or disciplined behaviour their children are thought to require, even if they wanted to do so. Denise and Gareth reflected on their own position and background, showing signs of the kind of reflexivity needed (in accordance with the exercises done), as one of them acknowledged:

I don’t swear ... well, I try not to ... It made me realise I was quite abusive. I might be modelling negative behaviour as well.

How this process of self-reflection and improvement gets thwarted when confronted with lived experience and real biographies such as those of Denise and Gareth, who live in poverty, addiction and with a relative lack of support remains an open question. Denise and Gareth do not seek discipline; they have to resolve a number of other issues which they consider greater priorities: employment for Denise, abstinence for Gareth. Given this background, it appears highly unlikely that the mentioned skills of discipline and parenting could ever have an immediate impact on Denise’s or Gareth’s life, not just because one, the other, or both are not capable but because of their own life circumstances. An emphasis on moral tolerance and personal obligation (Gillies 2007) is simply at odds with those depicted as uncaring, irresponsible and out of control. Denise is alone with no family networks, she depends on state benefits, she is dealing with an addiction problem and is trying to get on with life in general. As she commented

I’m not able to do it [to express love verbally and physically] ... I’m so locked up; I can’t; I don’t kiss ‘im, I don’t hug ‘im, I don’t say I love ‘im, but ya know, I do love ‘im in a different way.

Inequality faced by families like Denise’s and Gareth’s come to be explained by state policy makers at the level of the developing individual. They therefore appear to be unfit to achieve and break up the “cycle of deprivation” (Gillies 2007). Discipline, in Gareth’s case, proves not to be the best pathway to achieve understanding and care in his family. He told us that normally, “when I confront my children I’m angry, shouting at them, screaming and threatening them”. Gareth’s way of dealing with family relationships brings the question of how
effectively this discourse of discipline can be applied within contexts of poverty, exclusion and addiction like the one Gareth inhabits. It would probably take more than discipline to improve Gareth’s relationship with his step-children, and it certainly is not exclusively a matter of individual effort.

Gareth defined himself as an “English lad”. He appeared to be a kind of contained person, reserved; he had temper control issues, as he described it. He was polite and spoke few words; he never made any offensive comment against people in the group while we were holding the meeting. He came across as very shy and reluctant to engage in any social conversation. He normally ate alone, not participating in mealtimes with the rest of the group except with Paul, his best friend. He would not say hello if I met him outside of the community centre context either. When we finished the course everybody took everybody else’s contact details, and most of us became Facebook friends. It was then, checking Facebook’s newsfeed that I realised that Gareth was heavily involved in the English Defence League (EDL). He would often post racist comments against foreigners, most frequently Pakistanis and Muslim people; he also published ads for meetings and EDL rallies around Manchester and would post homemade videos depicting scenes of clashes with the police or local opponents taken from the same rallies. This shows that social networks do exist and that people are keen to engage with them, even though networks are not always what professionals expect or what is supposed to help in the practices of good parenting.

In accordance with government efforts to break the cycle of deprivation and overcome the effects of disadvantage (Gillies 2007), we were advised as parents on how to allow our children to express themselves emotionally, how to praise them, how to give them attention, how to pick on the positive rather than the negative behaviour and sometimes the importance of ignoring some of the actions of others. It was strongly emphasised that parenting was a learning process. On one occasion we were told to think about what kinds of things our children did that upset us. We worked in small groups. Gareth said, “I get angry when they are pinching things”; Paul continued the discussion by saying “they

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76 The British government has identified a range of key factors that help children to break the cycle of deprivation and overcome the effects of disadvantage. These include having a strong relationship with parents, parental involvement with education, strong role models, feeling valued and individual characteristics such as intelligence (Gillies 2007: 7)
are put on school report and when they swear; horrible swearing I hate!”. Another member of the group replied, “well yeah, when they make me late”. Gareth interrupted and said:

I tried to get it right. I promise I’ve tried to use confrontation as you told us. But my daughter still doesn’t give me eye contact. How am I supposed to do it then? She’s texting on two mobiles at the same time and saying “I’m still listening Dad”. But she’s not. This is when I get really angry and I shout at them. I tend to be quite abusive when I lose my temper.

Pete intervened to calm things down saying “In my twenty years working with parents, ninety nine per cent of the parents are trying to do their best they can within the situation they are in”. Gareth quickly replied to it reflecting out loud, “sometimes we get it wrong. We need to apologise. It’s role modelling as well”. Pete carried on engaging with Gareth’s thoughts and concluded: “We call this positive discipline; well-done Gaz”.

Regarding these issues of parenting and discipline, later on (when the course was over), I interviewed Pete, one of the organisers. According to Pete, if there is someone to blame for the crisis in parenting, it is the lack of community spirit and lack of parental discipline. Pete has lived on The Estate for six years but he has worked in the local area with the Youth Offending Team for at least fifteen years. He is aware that the social context plays an important role in raising a child, as he says:

The programme I run is saying it takes a village to raise a child, so the idea that you need more than one person, you know, you need a community. The community has kind of broken down quite a lot, as far as that kind of support’s concerned, so it’s quite complex.

Pete’s analysis becomes problematic when confronted with parents like Denise and Gareth precisely because it seems that there is no community-building at hand. There is no such village helping them out; all the efforts required lie in their improvement of individual skills. Pete expanded on this idea, highlighting
the fact that financial constraints, network support and family history can affect the ways in which people deal and cope with problems and the way they raise their own children.

I think quite often the parents themselves were never looked after very well themselves, and never learnt ... all those skills and those strategies, as their small children get older they find it more and more difficult to manage their behaviour, they’ve got stresses and strains themselves from housing problems, financial problems, debts, all those kind of things, they’re under a lot of stress, they find it very difficult to cope with the little issues that young people come up with, so they’ve never been taught how to deal with those issues ... and quite often there isn’t a very good support network around them ... or extended family ... they’re not getting any support ... in fact they may get criticised from brothers and sisters or grandparents or neighbours and things, so there’s no community spirit, and there’s no communities or connections to get the support they need.

Additionally Pete also emphasises that there has been a change in direction since the eighties in the country; he identifies this change as a turn towards individualism.

There’s been a shift away from family towards materialism, and individualism, and there’s been a breakdown in faith as well, there isn’t any, hardly anyone of faith at all, and all the morals and values that come with that ... I’d say from the Thatcher years ... people’s attitudes are focused on making money ... so it’s just kind of a crumbling away of a structure that kept people together ... now you can do what you want and in this sense, you shouldn’t challenge anybody.

This turn towards individualism has meant, as Pete remarks, that nowadays the responsibility is given to somebody else but not parents, neither schools and certainly not communities. In this depersonalised, individualistic, industrialised new environment nobody seems to be in charge of child rearing. So everyone blames everybody else; the parents says it is the school’s responsibility and vice versa. The government says it is the parent’s duty and vice versa.
The idea that they’re not responsible for their child’s behaviour is so common ... if anything goes wrong, it’s the government’s fault; it’s always somebody else’s fault, they [parents] don’t take responsibility, I remember [the story of] a parent who took their child to a doctor’s surgery and the child was climbing up a tree and they said “well, you’ll have to watch the children because if they fall they’re going to hurt themselves”, and the parent said “well you should chop the tree down then” ... so her thinking is that she’s not responsible for that child getting hurt ... that mentality, that way of thinking about her responsibility or lack of it ... she doesn’t even think that she had a responsibility to teach, to train, to control, to discipline, to nurture that child ... that she had any responsibility for that child’s behaviour ... And that’s not an unusual case, you see it all the time, it’s someone else’s responsibility; “why aren’t the schools doing something, why aren’t the government doing something”.

Pete distinguished between the responsibilities of the government and of parents, emphasising a difference between who is exerting control over discipline in a child’s everyday life, emphasising that the problem is a strong protectionism within current family policies that goes in favour of children’s rights, allowing them to take control in matters in which they probably should not.

The government changes the rules - the laws and things like that - to protect the children, the pendulum has actually swung towards the children having all the power ... the discipline to control; so the children can say from a very young age “if you don’t let me do this or if you do that, I’m going to ring social services or I’m going to ring the police”, and I’ve heard stories told to me by parents where they have rung the police and social services have been on their back, just for trying to punish or control or to discipline ... the parents have been the way they were parented, they can’t parent like that anymore. And I don’t mean hitting or anything like that. I just mean that strong kind of sense, because the children have got the control, the power, if they say they’re not going to school, they’re not going to school. And there is nothing you can do about it, but they’ll still send their parents to prison, or fine them, but the parent can’t have any kind of strong control over them because the power has been taken away from them.
Pete goes further, analysing the effect of state policy on families and parenting in particular, emphasising the role he believes the state should have regarding positive parenting:

The Government ... in this liberal thinking ... parenting has been taken away from them. They’ve [parents themselves] never been shown a loving nurturing way to parent, they don’t know how to parent, they haven’t got a clue and their parents don’t know how to parent because this has been going on for a few generations, a couple of generations now. That’s where these parenting courses come in because they teach them about positive discipline; about building relationships; about having communication, having special time and building these up, you know, from a young age. Building up this kind of idea about what’s right and wrong and, this healthy lifestyle, and to know what that means and that sort of things, so you can’t just blame the parents ... It’s the whole sort of society. It’s the whole of the way the government and their thinking has gone and the way of this kind of materialistic sort of [way of life]. No matter what, you’ve got to have the big telly, because if you don’t ... 

This liberal thinking connects with the idea of “being soft”, meaning being tolerant and laissez-faire when parenting; being liberal is akin to being soft. In neoliberal states each individual is held responsible and accountable for his own actions and well-being. This principle extends to the realm of welfare, education, health care and even pensions. Individual successes or failures are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings - such as not investing enough in one’s own human capital through education - rather than being attributed to any systemic property such as class exclusions (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal states favour strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade. Individual rights to freedom of action, expression and choice are sanctified and must be protected within this ideology and political system (Harvey 2005). Regulation and domination are possible through the promotion of “autonomous” entities of government that are not a part of the formal state apparatus. This is a government-at-a-distance (Sharma and Gupta 2006) that involves schools, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals that are rendered responsible. Discourses of participation, empowerment and democratisation
assume these strategies of governing that rest on building people’s capacities in order for them to become self-dependent, responsible citizens who can take care of their own welfare and govern themselves. They aim to empower and generate a sense of responsibility in persons and communities, and for them. “In the name of public citizenship and private welfare, the family has been configured as a matrix for the organisation of domestic, conjugal and child-rearing arrangements and the instrumentalisation of wage labour and consumption. In the name of social and personal wellbeing, a complex apparatus of health and therapeutics has been assembled, concerned with the management of the individual and social body as a vital national resource, and the management of “problems of living”, made up of techniques of advice and guidance, medics, clinics, guides and counsellors” (Rose 2006: 144).

It seems then, that parenting - especially mothering – is closely intertwined with and works through discourses of imagined nation/state identity and belonging. It speaks particularly to the idea of an imagined nation, consisting of a positive lifestyle, tolerant and responsible behaviour, free of violence, with positive parental role models, family and community unity and so forth. These can be deemed as effects of the legal and political regulation of the family. What Pete appears to claim is both a national responsibility, a “government” duty (policy strategy), yet at the same time, a “way of life” (an identity, belonging). When discipline, responsibility and parent modelling are conceptualised as a way of life and as failing, it is not only parents and children who are at stake, but also government and the nation as a whole (who “we” are). Therefore, understanding parenting also entails understanding and mastering discipline, not just for your own children as an individual virtue (parenting skills) but also for the social and moral value of the nation (citizenship).77 In that sense parenting - especially mothering - implies fostering and caring for the children of the nation. Mothering practices thus become an expression of belonging to the nation. I would like to argue therefore that the notion of discipline can act as a bridge to connect individuals with the state and the nation and vice versa. Discipline can be imagined as part of national discourses of belonging and images of a shared community, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Marketing discipline as a parenting skill and social-moral value, especially for the working classes who

77 Citizenship is about state belonging, not necessarily national. But national belonging can be used to naturalise state belonging. This is its power as nations claim to be older than states.
are conceived as lacking it, can be a way of promoting belonging to the nation-state and at the same time of exclusion. Pete in fact blames “the whole society” through “weak government” (a soft nation) and its “liberal thinking”. Parenting courses come in to the forum as one of the strategies to make up and rebuild this national understanding of what it means to belong to this nation: “to be responsible, caring, modelling the right kind of behaviour, violence free and healthy, within a context of ethnic, cultural and spiritual roots”. In this discourse caring and disciplining for your children can not only break up cycles of deprivation but most fundamentally, it allows them to later become fine citizens. The problem is that these disciplining skills and values, as we have seen, are highly classed and racialised. People who are actually categorised as lacking discipline and care are those like Denise’s son Daniel or Gareth’s step children. Denise and Gareth were sent to this parenting course by their social support workers, after being considered as needing this kind of skill, as unable to instil discipline, i.e. as being inappropriate reproducers of the nation-state.

In conclusion, the interest of the state (and nation) in motherhood and their citizens serves to illustrate how techniques of government are deployed to shape and discipline the body personal and body politic, the connection being an understanding, often little mentioned in the UK government policy literature, of individuals as social beings. Motherhood embodies the state and vice versa. Politics of mothering are being personified through practices and techniques of child-rearing. Social and biological reproduction (mothering a child) is claimed as political in the very existence of the family as a social institution and concordantly in the nation-state.

In the following chapter, I link this idea of imagined communities with the experience of everyday relatedness - as expression of mothering practices. I will explore the connections belonging and social space as a starting point through which to engage with wider questions such as how does everyday relatedness connect with the politics of mothering through state mechanisms of governance? I will discuss the significance of dwelling on The Estate. Concretely, I will provide an insider analysis of the ways in which the Anti-Social Behaviour scheme works on the Estate.

78 Extracted from “Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities: An Inclusive Parent Programme”, a non-published (restricted circulation) guide handed out at one of the parenting courses.
CHAPTER FIVE: “BELONGING AND TROUBLE”

In this chapter I am interested in exploring the significance of dwelling on the Estate as a practice of everyday life (de Certeau 1984). More specifically, I will examine how the set of practices which constitute dwelling relate to certain effects of both unmarked state intervention and local belonging at present, focusing, as in the earlier chapters, on an understanding of dwelling as classed, racialised and spatialised. In doing so, I will turn my attention to symbolic boundaries that delineate what it means to be local for residents in Wythenshawe and how these boundaries are produced and reproduced by both unmarked state routines and people’s everyday practices. Belonging will be understood as a “socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory ” (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005: 12 ). Notions of being at home will be linked with belonging to the place of residence but as more dynamic and relational markers of identification rather than as fixed, bounded territories. As Cohen (1982b) points out, people experience cultural affinities with others in the context of rather mundane circumstances, through the evaluation of everyday practices. People identify themselves as belonging in particular locales, by reference to various structures seen as fundamental: kinship, friendship, neighbourhoods, sects, being part of a “crew” and so forth (Cohen 1982). Similarly, these boundaries are also reproduced and imagined through practices connected with the state; boundaries that help to understand and represent relationships between people’s everyday practices and state routines and apparatuses. Therefore, in this chapter I wish to consider the different ways in which everyday tactics and strategies, unmarked state intervention and local belonging, fit together and what they tell us about the classed, racialised and spatialised experience of dwelling in Wythenshawe.

A substantial part of my fieldwork entailed learning how to dwell in the social space on the Estate. A substantial part of my fieldwork entailed learning how to dwell in the social space on the Estate. One of the things I learned more quickly and painfully

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79 Unmarked state routines refer to those invisible state practices that people do not think as connected with it.

80 According to Ingold, a “dwelling perspective” refers to the landscape constituted as an enduring record and testimony of the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left something of themselves in it (1993:152). Practices of dwelling thus engender a sense of belonging and of acting on the landscape.
during my fieldwork experience was “to stay in my place”. My experience of dwelling on the Wythenshawe Estate was firstly and mostly physical rather than intellectual. I experienced and thus came to embody the place. I found the sense of place to be all encompassing. As Feld (1996: 91) pointed out, “a place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place”. In this sense, dwelling on the Estate consisted of learning my place within a matrix of local cultural affinities. In doing so I learned what it means to belong and what it is to be local. People become aware of their own affinities and tastes when they stand at its overlapping boundaries. As earlier mentioned, belonging and being local on the Estate was a racialised, classed and spatialised experience. It was spatialised since it was thought, built and experienced through material (living in a certain physical place) but also symbolic boundaries (relational). Similarly, it was a racialised and classed experience because, as Garner (2009: 48) points out “race is not only about colour, but with tying culture to bodies in a hierarchical way”. Being a foreigner on the Estate meant that in the eyes of many local people I was understood through the category of “bogus asylum-seeker” who was claiming resources. Every time I met someone on the Estate the first two questions I was almost always asked were “where have you come from” and “why did you come here [to the UK] in the first place”. When I replied that I was a postgraduate student who was a temporary resident, people tended to answer back saying “well, that’s different”, as if the category of being a student with a temporary residence were not something to worry about.

Boundaries that carved out membership to the place were not only defined by colour or physical features but mostly by belonging to the place (historical entitlement marked by long term residence and knowledge of the place, people and institutions). I had to learn how to deal with institutions and organizations in a way that positioned me on the class and racial ladder as being someone out of place. I learnt the codes and values of being a council Estate resident. Looking at my experience retrospectively, in an amusing way my position reminded me of Hortense, the fictional character of a Jamaican trained teacher in “Small Island”.

81 There exists a long tradition of studies concerning the conceptualisation of space, consisting of scholars such as Henri Lefebvre (1991), David Harvey (1985, 1990) and Doreen Massey (1984, 1994), who have shown how transformations of modern capitalism have affected urban spaces and social experiences embedded within them.

82 As Garner (2009) points out, various studies have shown that there is a great deal of confusion over the different statuses of asylum-seekers, refugees, economic migrants and so on. Few know the difference between them, and non-white categories tend to be merged with long standing minorities in a way that everyone who is not white comes to be understood as an unentitled claimer of resources.
Levy’s (2004) novel. Hortense’s naive snobbery and disappointment when she arrived for the very first time in England reminded me of my own struggle when trying to settle in. In the novel she came to England after the Second World War only to discover that although she had attended a private school in Jamaica and been trained as a teacher, she was not able to get anywhere near an English classroom simply because she was black. Just as Hortense was unaware of the weight of her background, I was to learn what it means to be an immigrant in England, irrespective of how many diplomas I had hanging on my bedroom wall. In the same vein, this process was also a classed experience since class distinctions often work through different levels of exclusion, hierarchies, status and morality. On the Estate, class distinctions were unspoken but tied up with a specific set of metaphors and within the everyday practices of people I encountered.

As Fortier (2000) emphasises, belonging is not given but it is itself unstable, positing both states of “un-belonging” from which one comes, and possible future states of belonging to which one may aspire. I suggest, following Savage (2005), that belonging should be seen neither in existential terms (as primordial attachment to some kind of face-to-face community), nor as discursively constructed, but as a socially constructed phenomenon (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005:12). Dwelling on the Estate entails a physical embodied engagement with the place as well as with symbolic space. What it means to be local is produced and reproduced by racialised, classed and spatialised practices.

In the following section, I examine unmarked practices of state bureaucracies: the so-called Anti-Social Behaviour Scheme. I introduce one ethnographic account concerning my own experience of dealing with trouble and nuisance at my home residence on the Estate through the intervention of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team (ASBAT). In doing so I learned how not to belong to the Estate.

83 In the novel Hortense shows how many Caribbean immigrants saw England as their welcoming “Mother Country”. Due to her being brought up in a middle class family and having attended a private school, and mostly because of her “honey-skinned” colour, she was made to think she was better off than other dark-skinned Jamaicans. She used to think of England as her “destiny”. The reality she found when she met her new husband was one filthy rented room in Queenie’s (the white landlady), decaying house in East London and the realisation that, in spite of her Jamaican teaching diploma, she is not going to be able to teach. She is told that this is because her qualifications are not valid, but she knows that it is because she is black. Other humiliations follow for, although Hortense speaks beautiful English, using words such as “perchance”, Londoners can’t follow her accent.
Dwelling on the Estate: Belonging and Trouble

During my fieldwork I rented a flat within a brand new housing compound in one of the most deprived areas of Wythenshawe, Sharston, in the border of the Benchill Estate. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, it was an electric gated community which consisted of a relatively small three storey building - a modern red brick, L-shaped, group of flats. My son, partner and I were living on the first floor, so we had neighbours both above and below us. It was a very nice place in which to live, with two bedrooms, two toilets, brand new electric appliances, new carpets and fresh painted walls. We were the first family to live in that flat. We paid what I considered to be a reasonable rent of £500 monthly, which I later learned was considerably higher than the cost of a three bedroom semidetached house in the area under the housing association tenancy, which was normally at most £300 per month. As private accommodation, it was meant for young professionals or mostly people who were actively working. In other words, it was aimed at people not relying on state benefit, as our landlady told us when we attended a first viewing of the property. The compound is in the middle of Benchill Estate and its architecture stands out in the neighbourhood as new, modern and “posh”, as one of my acquaintances told me. The physical boundaries of the compound were demarcated by the architecture itself (distinctive from the rest of the Estate, which is mostly comprised of traditional semidetached red brick houses), by its supposed target public (in terms of financial means; no people on benefit were allowed) and by the massive electric gate that divided up the boundary between the inside and outside of the compound. However, those boundaries were not the most important ones. In the on-going process of learning to dwell on the Estate I became aware of the kinds of specific forms of relations and interchanges necessary to claim locality and belonging. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) argued, localities are not “given” but socially produced through processes of boundary definition. This compound defined a visible boundary between locals and supposedly wealthier newcomers and ultimately outsiders. Neighbourhoods are reproduced in the same terms as people’s imagination is used to differentiate their neighbourhood from the outside. As residents go about their daily life they encounter images, people and

84 As mentioned before, in 2000 Benchill was identified as one of the most deprived wards in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Later on in 2003, Benchill was divided into three new neighbourhoods: Sharston, Woodhouse Park and Northenden.

85 New private housing developments in Wythenshawe are part of a bigger regeneration project in the area aimed at instigating urban gentrification processes.
technologies from outside the neighbourhood which provide the potential to redefine the neighbourhood (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005:7). Imagination, according to Appadurai (1996), is part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people, especially when collective, is a staging ground for action not only for escape; it also creates ideas of neighbourhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule; and finally, may be understood in terms of a “community of sentiment”; a group that begins to imagine and feel things together. In this sense, the physical boundary of the compound demarcated by the electric gate came to represent an imagined difference. As Tom (the photographer) told me one day, “traditionally houses on The Estate have never had gates to separate them ... what are these gates for? For me, they are telling me to “stay away”. It’s an image of division between them and us ... the new comers and the established people”. The electric gate thus became an embodied and symbolic boundary between locals and outsiders.

As Garner (2009) shows, housing is an especially emotional site and has become over time a stigmatised, scarce resource. When existing populations in the UK have been whiter and longer term residents, housing policies have been viewed as a strategy for keeping unwanted minorities out, and have been accompanied by an emotive discourse of belonging and entitlement. Many residents I met in Benchill were particularly sensitive about housing and immigrants; many of them told me stories about the unfair use of council houses and priorities concerning being served by public services. Those stories helped to fuel discourses of unfairness, abandonment, loss and resentment that eventually engaged more broadly with struggles over culture, language and benefits against minorities and immigrants (Garner 2009). However, I wish to argue that people’s imagination can be transformed through everyday cultural practices and bodies. Life and subjects are embodied and lived. My approach in this ethnography is to show that both images can coexist; unfairness and acceptance; violence and social injustice coexist with solidarity and friendship; resistance and surveillance; nationalism and transnationalism. Council estates are not just a space for the poor, uneducated and/or undeserving citizen or recently arrived immigrant; they also embody an imagined architecture of social relations, moving from shared imagination concerning individuals to collective images of the nation and state. In what follows I describe the conditions, procedures and consequences of a state bureaucratic practice of surveillance named anti-social behaviour. I examine nuisance as a practice of everyday life and its correlative state measures of surveillance exemplified through ASBAT modes of operating.
ASBAT is a multi-professional team strategically allocated within Manchester City Council. Administratively it depends on the Community and Neighbourhoods Area and directly with the Department for Crime and Disorder. ASBAT was created to deal with ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders), a civil order that may be lodged against individuals who have engaged in actions that have caused harm, harassment or distress to one or more persons who live in a different household to him or her. ASBOs were introduced in 1998 as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, as introduced by the Prime Minister Tony Blair. Later on new legislation strengthened its application giving protection to witnesses, creating more courts to deal with cases, extending ASBOs to cover more offences, introducing higher penalties and giving the parish councils the power to issue penalties. ASBOs have proved to be controversial though. The main criticism has pertained to the increased criminalisation of youth, its institutionalised surveillance and populism, difficulties in proving the offences and inapplicability concerning sanctions given.

ASBAT works through an initial complaint made by phone or electronically through the website, followed by an interview where evidence of the problem is collected by one member of the team. According to the information published on the ASBAT website, they normally target young people as main offenders, taking actions not only against youngsters but also against their parents. As one of the ASBAT leaflets advertises: “support officers warn young people and their parents of the impact and consequences of antisocial behaviour through warning letters and/or interviews. They discuss any support needs that the young people may have and encourage participation in positive activities”. ASBAT actions also include parenting interventions, which “can include tip sheets, one-to-one support and parenting programmes, which help parents to take responsibility for their children and improve their parenting skills”. If the problem continues, they normally mediate between the various people involved until a satisfactory arrangement can be reached or in more extremes cases, eviction, if the problem has not been solved.

86 The legal definition of anti-social behaviour includes a range of problems such as: noise pollution, busking, drunken behaviour, abandoning cars, stealing, mugging, shoplifting, begging, vandalism, criminal damage, loitering, littering, fly tipping, dog fouling, the dealing and consumption of controlled recreational drugs, intimidation, fare dodging, spitting and dogging (theatrical public sex).

87 Available on line  www.manchester.gov.uk/asb

88 Available on line at www.manchester.gov.uk/asb see at “ASB_Leaflet.pdf” [accessed on 15-02-2011]
In what follows I examine the ways in which ASBAT came to illustrate its concern with the overall welfare of the population, or in other words, how unmarked state bureaucracy is deployed in communities and on families. In the following section I describe specifically in what ways the vertical encompassment of the state came to be spatialised in the everyday practices of dwelling in Benchill. In doing so, I also illustrate the dynamics involved concerning a nuisance problem I encountered when living on the Benchill area of the Estate and the way ASBAT dealt with it.

Initially, when I first arrived in Benchill in the summer of 2008, it was very quiet. We were one of the first residents. I had no neighbours around. After a few months the apartments around us were all rented out and life in the compound began to become nosier at night. Initially one or two parties were thrown during the weekend on the first floor, in flat 101, which was right below us. It was noisy but bearable, loud music until midnight and lively people having a party. One weekend there was yet another party at flat 101 but this time the music went on until two a.m. and suddenly I woke up because there was a fight between the tenant and apparently his girlfriend. That was the beginning of trouble (Evans 2006a) in the compound. The scene occurred below the French window in my bedroom and so I could hear and furtively witness (through watching behind my curtains) what was happening. It was a Friday night a little after two a.m. The music was playing loudly and people were coming in and out of the back door of the building, banging the entrance door every time they did so. The back door of the building is the one nearest the parking lot, and it happened to be just below my own bedroom. Due to this, we were made painfully aware whenever there was movement in and out, and such actions also sometimes prevented us from getting any sleep because every time someone banged the entrance door, the whole structure trembled noisily. That night there was a great deal of activity due to the party: very loud techno music, shouting, laughing, people moving in and out. Suddenly, directly below my window I heard a woman shouting, who

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89 What Michel Foucault (particularly in his lectures at the Collège de France roughly between 1977 – 1984) has termed as governmentality.

90 Trouble is not an idiom used by local people. I have taken trouble to refer to all kinds of violence, nuisance and harassment happening on the Estate, in the same vein as Gillian Evans does in her ethnography on Bermondsey, East London. Trouble can be violent, conflictive and dangerous but at the same time may provide good entertainment. It implies the enjoyment of drama and also prestige for those able to handle it.
was evidently drunk because of the contemptuous and baffling tone of her voice. The woman was crying and swearing at the tenant of flat 101, saying, “I love you, you f***ing idiot ... I’d give you f***ing everything”. My neighbour was also drunk – judging by his tone of voice and tumbling position - arguing and telling her to “shut up”. Initially, I was the only one overhearing the scene; it was too late at night and I was in bed, but the situation seemed to escalate more wildly as time went by. The woman was crying and screaming loudly so I thought she probably needed some help. I opened up my curtains and I witnessed my neighbour, the tenant from flat 101 actually wrestling with her and beating up the woman, who in response was screaming loudly. It was a violent scene that really scared me. I woke up my partner who told me not to get involved. I decided to ring the police. As I was doing so the police arrived at the compound. I could see the police emergency light bars glowing through the windows. Apparently someone else had rung before me, which meant that I was not the only one witnessing the trouble. The police took the woman and my neighbour to the police station. The party was over. It was four a.m.

After this experience, I resigned myself to the fact that this had been an unpleasant ending to a party. I did not realise, however, that it would become a regular feature of life in my new flat. The following week, we experienced party time once again on both Friday and Saturday. The same situation repeated itself again and again for several weeks: very loud music, shouting and screaming outside in the parking lot, people banging the entrance door in and out; drunken arguing between people outside, fighting in the car park and so on. As a result, I could not sleep at all. This trouble became a regular feature of every weekend and even sometimes occurred during the week, normally on Wednesday and Thursday, as well. One day, when I was feeling particularly angry because I could not sleep, I rang the police, which is normally what I would do in my own neighbourhood – although it is not a council Estate - if I had the same kind of problem. However, I learned that Manchester Police do not deal with nuisance. I could feel myself accumulating frustration and anger every time the noise went on until late and so I informed my landlady about the awkward situation I was in, leaving several messages on her inbox. However, I did not receive a reply. At the time, after two months with little sleep I began to feel the strain and I was irritable, fatigued and clumsy. When I told my acquaintances about it, they would normally laugh and say “you’ll be alright love”, as if trouble was something I should not be worried about – that it was something I had to learn to live with. Of course at that time, as a novice ethnographer and “outsider”
living on The Estate, I was not aware of the relevance of these events to my overall research. In fact I thought that this was marginal and not truly of anthropological interest.

Another random day I was at the Benchill Community Centre where I was doing some voluntary work every Thursday for the Welcoming Centre (a state funded project aimed at welcoming newcomers to the area – mostly foreigners and asylum seekers - offering information, networking opportunities and friendship). As one of the activities organised by the project, a couple of Community Police Officers came to the group asking if people were coping well within their new neighbourhoods. I was told by the community worker that the police make these kinds of visits as part of various projects in order to foster closer contact with local people and especially newcomers to the area, since there are often small incidents of harassment and/or antisocial behaviour directed against newcomers. As Garner (2009) demonstrated, there is generally a great deal of resentment against immigrants and newcomers on the Estate, mostly manifesting itself in arguments concerning supposedly unfair competition over housing and benefits. The increasing number of non-white newcomers moving onto the Estate over the last ten years has furthermore created a feeling of threat and despair. Consequently, there is a great deal of confusion concerning the different statuses of migrants. People tend to believe that everyone who is a foreigner is part of the same category of immigrant, and immigrant has a strong connotation with being a potential claimant of local services (in particular housing, health and social services). I was normally told that my status as student was different. It was as if being a student were “ok”. It was deemed acceptable because I was bringing something to the country and most importantly I would not be staying permanently.

When I look back at my experience of dwelling on The Estate I cannot forget those instances when I came across “trouble” in the compound. A further symbolic boundary or mode of not belonging concerned being annoyed or upset by trouble. I remember that after four or five months of living on The Estate, a single guy moved in above our flat. He was apparently a divorced or separated man in his late forties, a status I presumed as he received frequent visits from his two teenage children. He was not very tall, had very short brown hair (mostly bald), he was not evidently handsome and mostly not very sociable. For example, he never said hello or looked you in the eye, even though we shared
the same parking spot. As people in Benchill said, “he kept himself to himself”. One night I was at home watching television in my living room when I heard very loud music beginning to play. It was so loud that I could actually hear it over the volume of the television. Initially I thought that it was another party taking place in flat 101. The music was accompanied by singing through a speaker or some kind of amplifier, like karaoke. I turned my television volume up and carried on watching movies. The situation continued till half past twelve at night when suddenly the music stopped and a very strident argument commenced. The voices came from above us (flat 301). My apparently shy neighbour upstairs was having a shouting match with a woman – trouble once again. The noise made was so exceptionally loud that it overpowered the high volume of my television, which was already at full throttle. I could discern in the melee a couple insulting each other using abusive language. After a while I could hear the main door to the flat being violently banged and few minutes later the entrance door downstairs being banged again – a sign that someone had left the property. The couple carried on arguing loudly in the parking lot. Interestingly the architecture of the building and its French-windows allow one a panoptical gaze of the compound, so you could actually see such spectacles as they were taking place, even if you did not want to. It was half past one in the morning when all this was happening. I went to bed and I managed to fall asleep while they were still arguing outside. Two hours later I woke up suddenly to the noise of very loud panting, moaning and screaming voices coming from upstairs. I quickly realised that the insulation in my flat was not thick enough and that evidently my upstairs neighbour was having sex in a very noisy manner. I thought that it would not last very long, but unfortunately for me, it lasted nearly two hours. I moved into the living room and slept on the sofa. The next day, at nine in the morning, after a night of really bad sleep I woke up again to the sound of loud music coming from above. The same scene repeated: loud music, banging doors and singing with speakers and the microphone on. It was a nerve-trying situation that began to happen every weekend commencing on Thursdays and lasting for six months. It was exhausting not because of the noisy sex itself or the music, but because I could not get any night time sleep during all those months. Boundaries between inside and outside, between private and public space were challenged. Later, once I left the field site, I understood that what I called noisy behaviour - or trouble - was in fact a claim of delimitation and territoriality, a claim of personal intimacy. Paradoxically, trouble and noise (fighting, arguing, music, noisy sex) came to be seen as a way of demarcating the inside or intimate space from the world out there. As Stoller pointed out,
“words are powerful and sounds carry force” (1989:122). Sound and noise as expressions of trouble thus also acted as powerful markers of belonging and class. Socially accepted behaviour mostly defined upon middle and upper classes values is challenged by lower classes deemed as pathological. Working class people enacting trouble may be seen as one of the ways of subtle defiance.

One day at the Benchill Community Centre meeting, some Asian women stepped forward saying that they have been bullied by neighbours (mostly youngsters) when they went shopping or when they took out their rubbish in communal areas. I learned that verbal abuse and stone throwing were the most common problems, listening in on their conversation with the police. In the context of this community support group, I decided to file a complaint regarding my nuisance problem with them. I chose to do so, not in connection with my migrant status but as something related to community life. The Community Police Officer took my personal details and gave me an appointment for a further interview at my flat. We met two days later early in the morning, in my living room. A female police officer took all my personal details and I gave a very detailed description of what was going on in terms of nuisance and drunken disorder at night in the building. She revealed to me that there had already been a couple of complaints filed against the same address for the same reason. She also said that the police had some recorded proceedings – other complaints - at the same address. Such a revelation was a relief in that I realised I was not the only fussy one shocked with the situation. It also encouraged me to take a stand against it and that trouble was something that not everyone in my compound was happy with. Finally the police officer told me they could only record the incident at present but could not take any further action unless there was proved violence or damage to the property involved. They also advised me to contact the City Council to make a further complaint with the Anti-Social Behaviour Office. From this experience I learned that not belonging also means confronting problems on my own.

It took me a great deal of courage to write about these events in my ethnography, for these experiences were emotionally very difficult and draining for me. I was not thinking as an ethnographer at the time, I was not even writing about it. I was just trying to keep my life rolling. I was physically but not intellectually dwelling on the Estate. After more than six months of a lack of sleep and continuous parties, noisy neighbours and fighting happening below
and above my own flat, I decided to follow the police officer’s advice: to file a formal complaint to the City Council. Accordingly, I contacted the City Council office and made a written complaint with a special unit called the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team (ASBAT). A female support worker contacted me and we met for an initial talk at Manchester Central Library. She interviewed me for a full hour and a half, hand writing a detailed account of what had taken place. After that she revealed to me that an investigation had already been opened and was currently running with the intention of taking further measures. In other words, I was not the only one complaining. She informed me that there had been other complaints made against the same flats (101 & 301) by other neighbours in my building – she did not say how many or who made them because of the anonymity policy. This ASBAT support worker instructed me in how to proceed in future, if I faced further new nuisance events. There were help-phone lines available and it was important that I register written details concerning every event. The procedure also included a set of instructions for keeping a diary – given by the Council - where I was to write down every single new piece of “evidence” (as they called it). The ASBAT support worker also explained to me that the neighbours involved would be contacted and interviewed by the Council in order to find out their own version of the story and make them aware of the nuisance caused to other people around. This example is very illustrative of how unmarked state practices are experienced and lived by people on the Estate. Support workers and neighbours engage in the ritual of surveillance and control on and over the Estate. The object of surveillance for these support workers was in fact the act of surveillance exerted by local neighbours on their own next door neighbours and fellow citizens. The relationship between the ASBAT support workers and people who report problems come to enact the state’s vertical encompassment. Interviews, phone calls, written registers and anti-social behaviour orders were normal procedures through which verticality and encompassment were practiced.

91 “ASBAT offers a service for homeowners and private tenants in Manchester free of charge. ASBAT deals with complaints about: loud music from residential premises; use or threatened use of violence; abusive or foul language; hate crimes such as domestic violence, homophobic or racist language or behaviour; and damage to property”. Available online at http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/98/anti_social_behaviour_and_nuisance/4188/anti-social_behaviour_action_team [accessed on 11-02-2011]

92 Panopticon: they don’t say which neighbours lodged a complaint, so the individuals concerned will have a sense of being gazed upon by those around them.
The resident from below my flat was issued an ASBO but he resisted and continued to party every week while apparently more complaints were filed with the City Council and more police reports were likely issued as fighting in the parking lot and outside on the street continued to happen every time they had guests and got drunk. My landlady, who was also the owner of the ground floor flat, finally got involved – probably after the ASBAT gave them a ring, as I learned afterwards. As a result of these many interventions, the tenant from flat 101 was evicted after four months of noise and trouble. In the meantime, my neighbour from above carried on with the same noisy behaviour (music and fighting) with one more spicy ingredient (noisy sex) for another six months. New reports were written as time went by. I filled up another three or four dairies (ten pages each) reporting and also monitoring every single event until eventually I got tired of it.93 I ended up sleeping on my sofa for most of the time, and as a consequence I developed a terrible irritable mood. I was really struggling to keep up with my daily work as I was extremely emotionally tired. One of the ASBAT support workers interviewed the tenant above several times, I learned later. I was informed that he acknowledged the problem caused and promised every time to keep it quieter. This obviously did not happen to its full extent. Initially the loud music and singing became less noisy but the sex related moaning at night increased, or maybe I could hear much more since the music was less strident. As the trouble continued, the ASBAT worker decided that an independent witness was necessary. My landlady was called upon to witness the exact moments in which the events (moaning sex) were occurring, and she did so. The situation was escalating in the direction of increasing nuisance and heavier surveillance. On one occasion, loud music, banging doors, shouting and screaming began at six in the evening on Saturday and continued until two in the morning. The next morning it was sunny and I opened my bedroom windows to enjoy the morning sunlight around nine ‘o’ clock. I realised there were few people - probably guests from the party the previous night - upstairs smoking and throwing all their ash out of the window carelessly. As a consequence of the wind all the ashes were blowing into my bedroom. I had to close my window and go out instead. This caused me an enormous amount of frustration and anger. It made me feel powerless and unable to make choices in my own house. The situation only came to an end when the tenant above decided to move out and left the building after six months of sleeplessness and many letters, diaries filled,

93 At that time I was so deeply emotionally involved that I was somehow unaware of the consequences of this symbolic surveillance implied in recording and reporting. This insight came later on after I had left the field site.
phone calls and mediation completed by myself and the ASBAT support worker. I was not immediately sorry or guilty about what had happened. I just wanted to get some quiet sleep. I started to process everything only three or four months after leaving the Estate.

It is interesting at this point to highlight that my resistance to trouble on the Estate could have been something to do with my ethical disposition (Evans 2006a). In other words, it was my middle class feeling of entitlement that made me feel so angry and abused. I felt that my inalienable right to sleep and to have a peaceful life was being unfairly violated, so in a way I felt compelled to act against it. I also felt that as a citizen I had the right to sleep at night and to have the quiet life I righteously (as I believed) deserved. This sense of citizenship shows as well how the local sphere of the individual can be connected with the national interest through an appeal to state operators and their procedures. ASBAT procedures drew attention to the way behaviour was governed: "by institutions and agencies, including the state; by discourses, norms, and identities; and by self-regulation, techniques for the disciplining and care of the self" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:989). Trouble had to be controlled and obliterated by individual self-control; otherwise it would be punished - in this case by eviction.

The process of learning my place or what being local on the Estate entails, among other things implies enduring trouble. As Evans (2006a:248) argues, "becoming a particular kind of person entails on-going learning about the structure of one's relations with others ... those relations always take the form of an exchange". As Evans (2006) explains, the problem arises when the kind of participation required in order to understand the forms of relations under study implies an ethical disposition that is at odds with what the ethnographer thinks it is right to do. My resistance and the conflict caused by it became a strategy of emotional accommodation used in order to make sense of what it means to dwell on the Estate. My mode of participating on the Estate drew on my ethical disposition and complaints, which were indicative of an acquired middle-class habitus.94 It helped me to understand that actual boundaries between people,

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94 A "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they
although apparently in opposition, are continuously teased and breached. Trouble has a paradoxical character, enjoyable but dangerous; entertaining yet annoying. Learning to dwell on the Estate requires gaining the ability to cope with trouble as well as with state bureaucracies and apparatuses. When I talked about trouble in my compound with my local acquaintances, they normally dismissed such events, laughing at me or trying to calm me down with sentences like “oooh, that’s awful honey...people can be nasty, you know” or saying, “welcome to Wythenshawe love”, or simply saying “you can’t do anything, can you? These people are rough”. Following this, they normally went on to tell me endless similar stories about trouble and noisy neighbours. I learned that trouble and noisy neighbours were things to expect in the neighbourhood but were not meant to be harmful or directed at me in particular. It was a way through which people made statements amongst friends in their locality. Trouble came to be seen metaphorically as a marker of the uses and understandings of social spaces, of what their boundaries are. Trouble is a symbolic marker. Trouble normally happened at home, displayed in a way that everybody else could see, hear and feel. Trouble may be seen as a way of setting symbolical boundaries between insides and outsides: a way of showing and also a way of being seen. Trouble normally happens at home; it marks an inside; it is a way of saying to the outside world that this is my place. Annie told me about a few rows she had with her husband at home and how their neighbours were complaining – banging on the wall - because they were too noisy. She shouted, “how cheeky you are, banging on my wall to make us shut up!! This is my house and I do as I please”. Pam also told me of how her neighbour upstairs constantly had rows, shouting loudly and throwing furniture (chairs, lamps, ornaments) through the window. “They are not nice”, Pam remarked, clearly unimpressed.

Dwelling on the Estate reminds me of Helliwell’s (1992) “community of voices” in terms of how trouble can mark off space in a highly permeable way. Trouble is always marked by noise.\(^{95}\) Noise is the sign of trouble beginning. Noise permeates the walls and windows of all our flats. It alerts us to gaze and

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\(^{95}\) Recent scholarship has begun to pay more attention to sounds. Noise had been mostly understood as something annoying. Sensorial research and especially hearing has been dominated by the study of other senses: olfactory, tactic and visual. However in more recent anthropological work it has been argued that smell, taste and sound are central ingredients shaping social relations. (see Stoller 1984, 1989; Feld and Basso 1996; Howes 2005)
comment upon the situation. “A person’s spatialised gaze creates distance. Sound, by contrast, penetrates individuals and creates a sense of communication and participation” (Stoller 1989:120). I could not understand at that time that noise and trouble could be markers of intimacy on the Estate. They showed us the boundaries between what is inside (the intimate sphere) and what is “out there” - the world. As Stoller (1989) pointed out, “sounds allows for the interpretation of inner and outer worlds, of the visible and the invisible, of the tangible and intangible”. Flows of noise and trouble force intimacy. In a useless attempt I tried to stop it, ignoring the fact that noise and trouble were meant to have an audience. People making noise enjoyed the public gaze in the compound. It actually made and forced the compound to become like the Gerai Longhouse (see Helliwell 1992), a place of sociability. Helliwell argued that the space delimited by the Gerai Longhouse "is not ‘private’ space, radically separated from the similar spaces beyond its partition in the way that the space within an English semi-detached house normally be ... although there are many apartments, basically there is only one trunk". The Gerai Longhouse shows us the permeability of the boundaries separating those dwelling in a same building, “there it is not the walls which make good neighbours, but the gaps and tears that occur within them” (Helliwell 1992:191).

My acquaintances on the Estate were used to trouble and noise and they seemed to endure this closeness with humour; everyone had a story about noisy neighbours and trouble around them. They recommended I wear earplugs at night or take some sleeping pills. Pam for instance - Annie’s best friend - had an extensive account of trouble on the Estate for she was born and bred in Wythenshawe. Pam and I used to live two streets from each other in the Benchill area. She made the following comment when we were discussing the nuisance problem I had had:

Sounds bad when you say it, but when you’re brought up in an area like this and you say ... you try not to categorise people, but ... if you say to anybody, a lot of people regardless of whether they’re from, “where are you from? From Wythenshawe”. Well, automatically they hear of it, they think it is full of ... it is like say Moss Side, for people ... it is a bit like a bad name, it's a name, 'n when you say [what kind of] people you think

[they] are ... council estate, single mums, teenage mums ... I am not saying there is not nice people here, 'coz obviously there's people like yourself, like Annie, 'n people like that ... but there are people who haven't got any choice to get out because when you're in it, it is very hard to get out of it ... unless you've got a very well paid job and you can afford to rent a house ... this place is just so hard, even here now there's a three to four year list for a house ... so it's not like ...[ you can just move out of it].

Pam was remarking that what was happening to me was something that could have happened in any other place but because it is happening precisely here - in a place like Wythenshawe which has a bad reputation - it acquires a negative moral value. She was preventing me from falling into the easy path of being moralistic. There are ‘nice people’ on the Estate, therefore not everyone is annoying and noisy, she remarked. Pam is asserting that not everyone is like the portrait that society has made of a council estate (“full of uneducated, poor, single and teenage mums”). She goes further in explaining the reasons for this reputation by saying that those people who “are not nice” probably act like that due to the lack of chances they have had to learn something else (“a choice to get out”). I understand now, after having left my fieldsite that it was my middle class habitus and its ethical disposition that was being challenged by noise and trouble. My resistance was also part of my own embodied liberal thought of “right-to-choice” (to choose silence in this case). My physical reaction (lack of sleep, irritability, anger) prevented me from learning about certain forms of relations but at the same time enabled me to uncover my own position in relation to others and understand what constitutes appropriate interaction between “us” and “them”.

In conclusion, the significance of dwelling on the Estate as a practice of everyday life is embedded in imagined boundaries constructed via processes and understandings of historical entitlement, long term residence, local experience and local knowledge about people and places, values and distinctions. Images and metaphors about what it means to belong were unspoken but tied up in questions of class, race and space. I learned what it means to belong to the Estate through the experience of not belonging. Belonging is not something given; it is unstable and socially produced. Imagination and mundane practices
coexist in a kind of architecture of social relationships, resistances and surveillance, state agents and state practices and their invisible effects.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has moved between analyses of social space, belonging and relatedness, mothering practices, discipline, imagining the nation-state, class and volunteering understood as a neoliberal technology of governing. This ethnography shows how mothering practices in contemporary Manchester, in the context of a council Estate whose population is mostly white and live on low incomes, contribute to particular ideas about the kinds of persons women and children should be, seen through the lens of a classed, racialised and spatialised perspective. My central argument is that mothering practices have come to articulate, the political sphere of the imagined nation-state and the relationality of kinship as played out in the everyday lives and routines of the mothers with whom I worked on the Estate.  

Mothering practices had traditionally been seen as pertaining to a personal, intimate or private sphere, outside of, or at least distanced from the state and/or political intervention. Only recently, at the beginning of the twentieth century, since the rise of the welfare state they have been targeted by public policies. Mothering has become the focus of explicit efforts to mould and regulate subjectivity and citizenship. Mothering has now become defined as a form of expertise that requires qualified skills based on a wide range of values on the grounds of the complexities of “psy” knowledge, comprising all sorts of guidelines linked with developmental psychology and scientific objectivity (see Gillies 2007). I claim that mothering has become political in this sense, promoting, creating and reproducing certain kinds of subjectivity. This research has looked at the politics of mothering and the links between everyday practices and the production of particular kinds of subjects. More specifically, it has explored how specific parenting programmes and volunteers schemes for

97 Relationality is a concept expanded upon by Janet Carsten (2000, 2004, 2011), for she links kinship with understandings of the body and person. Relationality is variable; it takes bodily substance further away, transforming traditional notions of kinship into more fluid and mutable relations. It is not necessarily about procreation but is always about relations with the other.

98 The United Kingdom, as a modern welfare state, started to emerge with the Liberal welfare reforms of 1906–1914 under the Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. These included the passing of the Old-Age Pensions Act in 1908, the introduction of free school meals in 1909, the 1909 Labour Exchanges Act, the Development Act 1909, which heralded greater government intervention in economic development, and the enacting of the National Insurance Act 1911 in setting up a national insurance contribution scheme for unemployment and health benefits from work (see http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/field_01.shtml consulted on 10/09/2012)
supporting mothers, which promote the cultivation of a particular kind of disciplined, autonomous and highly individualised citizen, are linked with a more mundane sphere of mothering, nurturing, caring and loving the children. In doing so, it reveals how notions of specific persons are created and reproduced, permeated by classed, raced and spatialised notions. Specifically this research shows how predominantly white, working class women, produce, reproduce and regulate themselves and at the same time, how they resist dominant, ideologically charged discourses in line with neoliberal notions of responsibility, community and citizenship (see Clarke 2005; Barnes, Newman et al. 2007; Barnes 2009). 99 One very illustrative example of this twofold relationship is shown through the way one of my key informants dealt with community services on the Estate. Annie and many other women I met during my fieldwork were quite happy to make the most of community resources (home-visiting volunteers like myself, crèches for babies, after school centres for children, child minders, and a huge variety of courses and professional home services, and so on). At the same time they were resistant to many of the indications given by those professionals and experts regarding childrearing, care and discipline with their own children. They knew how to deal with professionals and experts in order to get the most of the help provided. I am not saying that this was something planned explicitly; on the contrary, women did as they pleased and they believed it was something about being “clever”, as Annie used to tell me. “Community services are there for us, we pay taxes for it … so we have to be clever about how to get the most of them”, said Annie. There is a link here to the work of James Scott in his famous book Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (1985). He spoke of everyday covert forms of resistance pursued by peasants in Malaysia during the 1970s.

These acts included foot dragging; theft of chickens of pro-elite households; burning of mechanized tractors that threaten their livelihood as manual workers; implicit collective bargaining for better working hours and pay by taking long lunches if the pay is too low and the forced ostracism of people who do not follow the social norms and values of

99 These three discourses – responsibility, choice and participation – are now at the centre of emerging governmentalities of self, community and citizenship.
resistance. They are covert and often, their actions do not get seen by the state.\textsuperscript{100}

Such everyday forms of resistance also occurred on the Estate: the ways in which some people subverted state benefits, such as disability benefits, housing, low income, dependent children and so on, by posing, lying or magnifying certain conditions needed in order to claim such benefits. One of my informants told me “you just need to prove that you have done some interviews looking for jobs ... no big deal, just go there and ask to have my document signed”, suggesting that some people only have to pretend to be someone looking for job in order to carry on receiving unemployment benefits. Annie had just managed to obtain a free child-minder service, in her own words “to have some time off”. “Why not?”, she remarked. Resistance in this sense is neither collective nor organised; rather it is a form of undercover everyday defiance.

I have also focused my attention on how belonging and Otherness appear as metaphors for what it means to be a person valued on the Estate. What I learned was that in order to be valued on the Estate one must properly deal with local knowledge about the space and places, that includes noise and trouble, and that knowledge comes not only with long term residency, but also with a sense and pride of being local and English (people I met during my fieldwork defined themselves as English, implicitly meaning most of the time being white and a non-foreigner). Belonging thus came to be experienced not only through residency but also through creating sameness and difference in terms of racialisation (being English and proud) and spatialisation (where you live specifically on the Estate, and whether you are an established person or a newcomer). Notions of being at “home” are linked with belonging to the place of residence; not as fixed, bounded territories but as more dynamic and relational markers of identification. For me and my family, living in Benchill was charged with both feelings: boldness and enduring intentions of becoming part of the social space.\textsuperscript{101} Those intentions were positively valued by my co-

\textsuperscript{100} See the article on whether or not Singaporeans adopt weapons of the weak in dealing with the State. Available online at \url{http://www.singaporeangle.com/2007/05/weapons_of_the_weak_everyday_f.html} [accessed on 11-11-10]

\textsuperscript{101} As mentioned Benchill was named in the Index of Multiple Deprivation as the most deprived ward out of 8414 in England (the Index is a governmental measure of local employment, income, health, education, housing, child poverty, and availability of local services). Since the release of the index, several schemes have been set up to assist the residents of Benchill. Following a review by the
conversationalists and finally allowed me to gain access to some of their everyday experiences.

When we look at belonging not as a fixed, territorially bounded marker of identification but as something more dynamic and relational, we can point out that mothering appears to be a metaphor of the imagined nation-state, picturing and fostering what it means to belong and what it means to not belong. Mothering practices under an expert gaze aim to produce and reproduce a certain kind of citizen: a responsible, self-sufficient, autonomous, hard-working citizen. All of these qualities are perceived by experts, professionals and government schemes as something lacking in many low income or working class families – and especially in women.

I have used the notion of nation-state in the sense of an imagined, inherently limited and sovereign community (Anderson 1983). People and places create and imagine boundaries – physical and symbolic - that underlie the sense of an imagined community. In that sense belonging appears on the Estate as connected with social space and everyday practices. Sameness and difference are embedded in such imagined boundaries: new fashionable residential buildings with electric gates, built as part of a regeneration project, compared to old houses from the Garden City for local residents; local people (long term residents) versus incomers (people just arriving); “trouble” versus ASBO orders; town (Manchester City Centre) versus the Estate; English (mostly white) versus foreigners. These imagined and symbolic boundaries are created and reproduced not only physically and then racialised but are also maintained on the whole through everyday practices. As Corrigan and Sayer (1985:141) point out regarding English state formation, new subject identities are produced through the categorisation, regulation and routinisation of everyday life. The power of these everyday state routines and rituals lies in their capacity to produce new individual and collective identities. This ethnography has shown how the routinisation and regulation of mothering practices contributes to the moulding of certain kinds of subjects – citizens. Psy-knowledge and experts in particular

Boundary Committee for England, Benchill was dismantled as a local government ward in 2003, and the area was divided between the neighbouring wards of Sharston, Woodhouse Park, and Northenden. The area also gained national media attention in February 2007 when the Conservative Party leader David Cameron – at that time - visited the estate, only to be targeted by a group of youths, one of whom made a gun gesture with his hand towards him that was caught on film.
form a particular kind of authority based on moral values, scientific standards and practical techniques, that make it possible for human beings to conceive, judge and conduct themselves. Individual responsibility is revered as the key element to success or failure in people’s lives (see Campbell 2010).\textsuperscript{102} In this sense, volunteering comes to occupy a key role as a technology of governing (Rose 1990). Local volunteers act as role models for local women, who are defined by the authorities and professionals as not having the right kind of knowledge, and who thus face the challenge of empowering and enabling their fellow neighbours. Local women actively engage in the use and appropriation of those resources, resisting and transforming them according to their own needs and desires.

As I mentioned earlier in the introduction, I have borrowed Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of social space to link space, place and belonging. Lefebvre articulates three concepts: spatial practices (daily routines), representations of space (conceptualised space), and representational spaces (spaces lived through images and symbols, space as inhabited and used). From this starting point I attempted to address the key question of how the social space of the Estate embodies (or not) such social relationships. What I have learned through my fieldwork is that “spatial practices” such as going to the right stores or cafes at the Civic Centre, carrying “baggies” or driving a car, walking around the alleys and avenues on the Estate, knowing where to go and where not to, and so on, make a difference and help to produce a sense of sameness or otherness. They are also intertwined and give meaning to representations of space. Living on the Benchill Estate for instance carries certain negative connotations, while at the same time is associated with a certain pride for being able to endure its difficulties (such as a lack of services, trouble between neighbours, vandalism in some public spaces, poverty and local unemployment). Benchill enacts and represents images and symbols of moral and social failures. It is the opposite archetype of what planners, engineers and urbanists thought it would be. Wythenshawe was planned as a model “Garden City” but many of its inner districts became a symbol of marginalization, inequality and “problem

\textsuperscript{102} Loïc Wacquant points out that we need to expand the definition of the neoliberal state to include four parts: (1) economic deregulation; (2) welfare state devolution, retraction, and recomposition; (3) the emergence of an expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus; and (4) the development of the cultural trope of individual responsibility, which preaches that how you fare in the world is up to you, not the State (Campbell 2010: 60)
The Estate as initially planned is no longer the same, it has become dynamic, always changing, permanently being redefined through the people who inhabit those places.

Dwelling on the council Estate is not just a physical act but a permanent negotiation of who you are as a person in a particular social space. This thesis has also dealt with the way in which I learned my sense of belonging on the Estate, which implied in the first place, learning what it means not to belong in and to Wythenshawe. I became aware of what it means to dwell in a place like Wythenshawe through its spatiality but also through my own racialised and classed background. Being a non-white immigrant dwelling on a council Estate like Wythenshawe was something which determined my whole experience of fieldwork. It allowed me not only to be more conscious of my own position but it also helped me to look at the positions of local women. It also allowed me to get to know certain aspects of social life on the Estate but at the same time it prevented me from getting involved in other aspects. As such, my own position determined not only my access to local knowledge but also my shortages in this endeavour. To put it simply, because I am a foreigner I could learn certain aspects better, but being a foreigner also blocked me from apprehending others whom I did not know and whom I cannot recall in this piece of research. My intention was not to describe “the” white working class women in the UK because such a grouping does not exist as a monolithic faction of any society (although at many times they have been portrayed as such in newspapers or on television programmes). On the contrary, what I intended to do in this thesis was to explore the social space of the council Estate through looking specifically at mothering and volunteering practices. In so doing I encountered mobilising metaphors of the social imaginary of women and/or mothers who dwell on the Estate, as a main target of state-intervention but also as key pieces of resistance to technologies of government (community schemes of intervention such as home-visiting volunteering) and new modes of relationality such as friendship, solidarity and a common sense of pride and belonging to a certain social space. I have addressed the key question of how local idioms of relatedness – through friendship, work, and local residency – may symbolise the metaphor of the imagined nation–state (as often deployed through discourses of the nation as an imagined and ordered family; an often racialised community of shared roots. I

103 As I mentioned in the first Chapter, the "Garden City" movement is a method of urban planning that was initiated in 1898 by Sir Ebenezer Howard in the United Kingdom. Garden cities were intended to be planned, self-contained communities surrounded by "greenbelts" (parks), containing proportionate areas for homes, industry and agriculture.
now want to conclude with the following ethnographic vignette as an example of such metaphors:

One morning at the beginning of my fieldwork, Annie phoned me asking for help because her eldest child Chloe had woken up feeling ill and she wanted to take her to the doctor at the civic centre. It was a freezing winter morning. I quickly went to her house and we finished dressing up the three children and before we headed on foot to the medical walk-in centre together. I pushed the single pram carrying Chloe. Annie was pushing a double buggy carrying Andrew & Carl. When we arrived at the medical centre, Annie went directly to the desk while I stayed with the children, taking their jackets off and looking after them. I noticed that the reception desk at the medical centre had an automatic check-in machine situated at the entrance, which offered an interactive menu in two languages: English and Polish. I asked Annie about it and she said,

Many people disagree with that. It’s kind of unfair. If you’ve got to live in a country you must make the effort to learn the language, don’t you think? If I go to Poland, I would have to learn Polish. If you come here [to the UK], you need to learn English first. You make an effort. When the medical centre changed its whole system many people were mad. There are lots of other people. Asians, Pakistanis and they don’t get the language changed.

Annie linked the use of different languages with a discourse of fairness across different nationalities and in doing so she turned to racial distinctions when she said,

I am not a racist but I think it is not right. For example, we cannot use the word black anymore in this country black because it is racialist. We [Annie and her family] used to play with a toy called a Golliwog, a black doll with a big black head. But it was banned. We cannot play with it anymore because black people get offended. It’s the same with the use of
the blackboard at school. It is no longer called a blackboard now, you call it a whiteboard. It’s ridiculous.\textsuperscript{104}

Moreover, when I inquired in more depth about it Annie quickly went on to tell me a story about the difference between being a real racialist and not being one.

During the Halloween party last Friday, Jack, Marie’s husband, came in to the house but he didn’t greet Sam’s dad because he’s black.\textsuperscript{105} I’m gonna talk with Marie about that. That’s being racialist. I’m not gonna tolerate that happens at my house. He can do that, he can be a racialist but not in my house, with my friends, at my party. Jack is like that. He can be very racialist. He thinks the worst about Polish people – with which I agree the most - but he shouldn’t behave like that with my friend’s partner. [What did exactly happen? I asked] Jack came in, my friend’s partner said hello but he didn’t reply to him. He completely ignored him, he blanked him out.

When I told Annie that I had met Jack at her wedding but that he hadn’t been nasty with me, she said, “Well, yeah. That’s it because you’re not black. And also he would have been nasty with you if you weren’t from Start-Up. Because you are from Start-Up, he’s been nice”.\textsuperscript{106} Annie differentiated what it means to be a racialist from what is not. Apparently one becomes racialist when the offensive or racialist language or behaviour occurs face-to-face, and also when the people involved have certain emotional ties linked with their lives. It is neither offensive nor racialist to think that Polish immigrants (as a group) are intrusive and morally inferior. Clearly for Annie, her house, as an intimate space of friendship, establishes a boundary. She defines herself as a non-racialist and she does not tolerate this behaviour in her house. The boundaries are set upon her intimate space of relationality, a social space that creates an imagined community of

\textsuperscript{104} The golliwog was a children’s toy very popular in the US, the UK, Europe and Australia during the 1960s. It was a doll which had very black skin, eyes rimmed in white, clown lips and frizzy hair. The image of the doll has been a subject of heated debate. Accusations of racism pertaining to the doll’s image have been argued to be an insulting caricature of black people’s physical features.

\textsuperscript{105} Sam is Annie’s best friend’s son. Her best friend Pam has a partner of African descent and together they have Sam, who is the same age of Annie’s youngest boy.

\textsuperscript{106} Start-Up as local charity may represent the state’s authority.
friendship and family. Annie explained further, “I am not a racialist. I had an Asian boyfriend and he was lovely. Also, I have friends from different cultures. You, for instance.”

This apparent contradiction in Annie’s discourse about what it means to be racialist, actually helped me to understand later on, when I left the fieldsite, that these contradictions are part of the puzzle of this research project. Racialised and classed markers of social space should be seen as intertwined, fluid and mobile. Someone who disagrees with the presence of immigrants, under Annie’s eyes, is not always a racialist. It depends on the context. It is fine for Annie to think that Polish people are intruders taking over the resources in the community but it is not fine to behave in a racialist manner when at a party celebrating with friends at her house. It is perfectly alright to have had a boyfriend and to have had friends from different racial backgrounds which also prove that someone is not racialist, even though she is against foreigners coming in to the country. Being an immigrant is therefore an ambiguous position. It depends on the context in which relationality is seen. A racial background for some people on the Estate, is not an issue if it happens within the context of a personal intimate relation such as friendship or love. However, the same situation seen within the context of the labour market or concerning access to resources such as housing, health or school places makes a complete difference concerning how it is perceived. The social imaginaries of foreigners work through stereotypes as well as social imaginaries of working class people. The idea of the unemployed, single/teenage mother, dependent on state-benefit, works in parallel to the idea of the non-English speaker, multiple children, and over-religious people taking advantage of council housing and/or state benefit or taking over job positions and community resources. However, what I have learned through my fieldwork is that those images are more a symbolic vehicle through which to express difference and otherness, a way of mobilising a common identity through emphasising difference. Difference and otherness provide a more coherent sense of sameness and identity; they help to articulate aspects of an imagined community.

Additionally, my initial interest in mothering practices arose from my experience as a home-visiting volunteer working with mothers and children who are residents in the Wythenshawe district, which made me aware of the tension
between government schemes – like the one I was volunteering in - and social relations as classed, racialised and spatialised everyday experiences. When I set out to begin this research I intended to address some understandings of what kind of interventions were being made in mothers’ everyday lives. I wanted to learn in what ways mothers were assisted not only by organisations but also by their own networks of kin or neighbours or friends as well as the kind of resistance mothers have, if any. I wanted to understand the logic behind this assistance for mothers and children and the ways in which women produce and reproduce what counts as socially appropriate for mothering a child. I have addressed the question of how the focus on relationality may contribute to new analytical models of thinking about different sorts of mothering practices. I argued that social space, class and race are interwoven and that these knots can be observed on the Estate through the politics of mothering practices - specifically the way mothers are compelled to care, nurture and discipline their children with the help of professionals and experts. What I learned during my fieldwork was that home-visiting volunteers mobilise a set of strategies aimed at empowering and promoting autonomy in many ways that are consonant with neoliberal subjectivity. As an insider volunteer, I was trained and encouraged to promote autonomy, individualism, self-direction, decision-making, and to mobilise and manage personal skills for communication, empathy, listening and flexibility. Drawing strongly but not exclusively on Rose’s (1990) account, I have outlined connections between volunteering and neoliberal technologies for self-development, psy-knowledge and indigenous knowledge. I have attempted to give an account of the subject on a more general level that enables us to highlight how an analysis of social space plays a role within a framework which allows us to broaden understandings of belonging, class and relationality within contemporary mothering and volunteering practices on the Estate. The literature review completed whilst more general, is thus read through my field experiences. Let me now summarise once again the path I took through the ethnography:

Chapter one describes and maps Wythenshawe in relation to other districts of Manchester and specifically its inner social and spatial features. It examines distinctions between space and place showing how both are shaped and lived through social relations, becoming social space. It explores how indigenous idioms of relatedness, such as “born and bred” (Edwards 2000), connect kinship to a particular geographical place and the past, as well as connecting persons and relationships. Insiders and outsiders do not exist as fixed categories, but
more as imagined and symbolic boundaries. This chapter contains ethnographic accounts of what being local entails through an exploration of social and cultural boundaries and ways of inhabiting the space on the Council Estate. It also shows how dwelling on the Estate implies knowledge and the ability to read and see “invisible layers” of meaning. I explore the ways I learned to be local through knowledge of the place and the kind of relationships embedded on it. I look at social space in the district of Wythenshawe, as a constitutive part of people’s everyday practices and identities, as something never fixed and always negotiated.

Chapter two attempts to address the key question of whether or not mothering practices, understood as everyday relatedness, are locally socially, politically and culturally produced through disciplinary techniques taught by state agents and/or experts. This chapter discusses what are the state-effects through politics of care and moral strategies deployed to assist mothers in local communities. The state becomes invisible and unmarked through home-visiting volunteers, while volunteering becomes a neoliberal governing technology for self-development and citizenship. I describe and analyse ethnographically how volunteering practices may invoke the neoliberal state through a politics of care, specifically deploying moral strategies that shape and govern what it means to be a woman and a mother in contemporary England. I turn my attention to neoliberalism as a form of governmentality. More concretely, I examine home-visiting volunteers as ‘technologies of government’. In this chapter I argue that volunteering practices can be considered ‘indirect’ mechanisms that work upon the supervision of ‘expert’ knowledge promoting self-regulation and independence among women and their households, creating paradoxically, an indigenous knowledge based on parenting skills. Local home-visiting volunteers therefore become indigenous experts who exert their authority indirectly, mirroring the ruling values of an advanced neoliberal democracy. Being a volunteer can thus be a “political technology” through which the state conceals its own operations of governance. I contend that these political technologies tend to obscure class, gender and race relations. Issues like poverty, social deprivation, exclusion, domestic violence, racism, and so forth are masked with the veil of moral responsibility, liberty of choice and self-development.

Chapter three analyses how mothers negotiate “psy-knowledge” coming from disciplines and professionals, with their own mundane everyday practices and
expertise. It shows how meanings about mothering are socially negotiated, reproduced and sometimes resisted. I explore some ways in which mothering practices resist and overlap with discourses and practices derived from established and legitimised “psy-knowledge”, highlighting what may be considered indigenous knowledge. I draw on Nikolas Rose’s “genealogy of subjectification” in order to examine mothering practices as a genealogy of personhood in contemporary England. I doing so I analyse what kind of person a mother becomes through engaging in everyday practices of motherhood in Wythenshawe. I examine three women’s biographies specifically looking into resistances and everyday activities such as caring for children and other family members, domestic work, nurturing, teaching and discipline.

Chapter four discusses the question of whether or not mothering practices and everyday relatedness play an important role in shaping not only subjects and citizens but also notions of belonging? The chapter draws upon ideas underpinning parenting classes in order to examine the links between mothering, discipline and the imagined nation-state. It connects the sphere of kinship with the politics of the state policy for families. Notions of discipline and being “soft” engage in discourses of proper parenthood and citizenship connecting distinctions of class, race and gender in rather subtle ways. This chapter shows how intimate (family) and public (state policy) spheres are intertwined through the politics of mothering children and the imagined nation-state. It describes how notions of motherhood and mothering I encountered in Wythenshawe reveal interesting connections between class and poverty (living on the Estate) and being national (as synonymous with an unmarked category of being white English and in opposition to the category of immigrant). I examine how depictions of good and bad parenting; specifically ideas surrounding mothering, are entangled with particular ways of imagining and fostering the nation-state. Parents, and primarily mothers, are charged to make and produce children as the right kinds of individuals for the nation (citizens) through modelling and teaching discipline (limits, boundaries, proper behaviour and character).

Chapter Five deals with the question of how place and space become embodied and bounded within imagined communities. I explore the links between social space, place and belonging as a starting point through which to engage with wider questions such as how everyday relatedness connects with the politics of mothering through state mechanisms of governance. I explored the significance
of dwelling on the Estate. This chapter provides an insider analysis of the ways in which the Anti-Social Behaviour scheme works on the Estate. In so doing it shows how material and symbolic boundaries come into being through notions of belonging and being at home. It focuses on everyday tactics, strategies, unmarked state intervention and the ways in which people link the mental and the social through a focus on the ways in which people deal historically with material things and the knowledge that derives from this process. I look at class, race and space as lived and experienced. I paid special attention to the sense of place and difference that renders one as not belonging. Place is no longer just tied to community (as a physical setting). Place has changed. Place is inextricably connected with space. As Massey (1984: 117) has argued, “spatially-differentiated patterns of production are one of the bases of geographical variation in social structure and class relations”. Space and place have moved further away from traditional relations of presence, so-called “local ties” (Agnew and Duncan 1989), into a wider struggle for the definition of culture itself (Ley 1989).

In conclusion I have argued that the politics of mothering practices on the Estate reveal their presence in and through everyday activities such as caring, nurturing, modelling and disciplining the children all of which account for the production of a particular kind of moral subject: citizens in a liberal democracy (individualised, independent, disciplined, hard-working) which in turn is linked with ideas of an imagined nation state. Social class becomes salient in this context where economic disadvantage, understood as markers of certain social spaces and places, and as a distinction, reflects inequalities in access to resources and status. As a consequence of my positioning as home-visiting volunteer during my fieldwork I have also explored how place, space and belonging were embedded in mothering practices, discovering dynamic metaphors of what belonging to the Estate entails and what not belonging entails. I have uncovered how local idioms of relatedness such as friendship, work, local residence, solidarity and resistance can be considered not just as defining kinship relations but also as a metaphors for a symbolised nation, an imagined and ordered family (including sometimes but not always referring to racialised community). Mothering may be seen as the metaphorical image of the nation state. I looked to mothering practices as everyday relatedness and also as governing technologies through the concept of psy-knowledge promoted by professional experts. In doing so I found that local volunteers, often women, became indigenous experts who articulate experience and notions of being at
home with belonging. Indigenous experts are thus unlike professional experts, for they value things differently and connect people and themselves to particular places and relationships in terms of lived experience. However, surveillance mechanisms attached to voluntary practices continue to be in operation and consequently on many occasions values and meanings promoted are still legitimised and reproduced by professionals and psy-knowledge. However, resistance and defiance exists and are visible through a number of practices. These include the practice of ‘taking advantage’ of state interventions in the forms of the uses and abuses of community resources (the learnt ability of making the most of them), and the mocking of professional advice; often women did as they pleased. Nevertheless, women’s responsibilities continue to be deemed by state policies as pivotal in order to maintain and stay true to the family and ultimately to the imagined community as metaphor of the nation state.
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