

# The ‘elected’ and the ‘excluded’: sociological perspectives on the experience of place and community in old age

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article explores various issues concerned with belonging and identity in the context of community change and residential location. It examines the changing nature of community attachments in later life, and their impacts on the quality of old age lives. It also notes the increased importance of environmental perspectives within gerontology, not least because environments are being transformed through the diverse social, cultural and economic changes associated with globalisation. The argument is developed that globalisation offers a new approach to thinking about community and environmental relationships in later life, and that the impact of global change at a local level has become an important dimension of sociological aspects of community change. It is argued that it is especially important to apply these perspectives to older people, given that many have resided in the same locality for long periods. At the same time, globalisation also gives rise to new types of movement in old age, and is constructing an expanding mix of spaces, communities and lifestyle settings. A key argument of the article, however, is that global processes are generating new social divisions, as between those able to choose residential locations consistent with their biographies and life histories, and those who experience rejection or marginalisation from their locality.

**KEY WORDS** – environmental gerontology, community studies, globalisation, elective belonging, social exclusion, urban change.

## **Introduction**

An important set of questions in social gerontology has concerned issues about belonging and identity in the context of community and residential location. The approaches taken have been interdisciplinary, with varied contributions from geographical, sociological and social policy perspectives (Karn 1977; Warnes 1982; Laws 1997; Andrews and Phillips 2005; Katz 2005). Such themes have been extended through the sub-discipline of

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environmental gerontology, which emerged particularly through the work of Carp (1966) and Lawton (1970), and have recently been elaborated in, for example, the volume of essays edited by Wahl, Scheidt and Windley (2003) and further reviewed by Wahl and Weisman (2003).<sup>1</sup> Some of the issues addressed in this area have found additional expression in research on the centrality of home in the construction of self and biography (see Kellaher, Peace and Holland 2004; Rowles and Chaudhury 2005).

The theoretical questions debated in this body of work include: the influence of the physical environment on the ageing self (Wahl and Lang 2004); the management of bi-national identities among migrant retirees (Mullins and Tucker 1988); the role of space and place in the construction of identity (Laws 1997); the impact of neighbourhood characteristics on health and wellbeing (Krause 2004; Deeg and Thomése 2005); the experience of home in the context of ageing (Rowles and Chaudhury 2005); and the impact of urban change on later life (Phillips *et al.* 2005). These and related questions have emerged as influential themes in gerontology, and have stimulated diverse empirical projects with a comparative as well as single country foci (Rodwin and Gusmano 2006).

Taking the cited work as a starting point, the theme developed in this essay is that, valuable and important though such studies may be, the basis of this research is being transformed through the social and economic processes associated with globalisation. Although the impact of globalisation on ageing has been assessed at a political and economic level (*e.g.* Baars *et al.* 2006; Walker 2005), issues relating to place and the environment have received far less attention. The argument developed here is that the influence of globalisation at a local level – or ‘glocalisation’ as termed by Robertson (1992) – must now be given serious attention by social gerontology, and in particular must be integrated within the broad field of studies encompassed by critical gerontology (Estes, Biggs and Phillipson 2003). This theme will be developed as follows: first, the essay will outline the challenge to traditional approaches to place and community posed by globalisation; second, the broad field of community studies will be reviewed in relation to research on older people; third, a specific argument will be developed about changing attachments to community and locality in old age; and the conclusion will reflect further on the main identified issues.

### **Environmental insecurity and globalisation**

Environmental and community issues, and related concerns about the experience of place and space, have been enduring themes during the

development of social gerontology. Such themes have acquired new significance with the influence of globalisation on the routines and structures of everyday life. *Globalisation* is taken in this essay to refer to those mechanisms, actors and institutions that link individuals and groups in different nation states. David Held *et al.* (1999: 49) noted the extent to which 'trans-national networks and relations have developed across all areas of human activity ... far from this being a world of "discrete civilizations" or simply an international order of states, it has become a fundamentally interconnected global order, marked by intense patterns of exchange as well as by clear patterns of power, hierarchy and unevenness'.

One view of the consequences of globalisation, identified in different fields of literature, is that it has fragmented and distorted the experience of community and place for older people. Rather than the mutual solidarities presented as typical of locality ties in the 1950s and 1960s,<sup>2</sup> community life is now regarded, in the words of Beck (2000), as 'unsettled [and] friable'. In Bauman's view (2001: 47), the present period is characterised as 'times of disengagement': 'gone are most of the steady and solidly dug-in orientation points which suggested a social setting that was more durable, more secure and more reliable than the time-span of an individual life'.<sup>3</sup> More generally, some commentators have seen recent changes as reflecting the decline of social capital, or the 'disembeddedness' of individuals and families from a stable community existence (Putnam 2000; Charles and Davies 2005).

The link between globalisation and themes associated with rootlessness, mobility and impermanence have become familiar and might be judged as a factor that limits the relevance of community to the current lives of older people. An alternative view, however, would be that globalisation provides an opportunity to re-conceptualise issues relating to community and place in later life, and provides a vital new dimension to current approaches in the expanding field of environmental gerontology. Before elaborating this view, the next section examines findings on older people's experience of community life, with a focus on British studies since the late 1940s.

### **Community studies and older people**

Ideas about older people's relationship to their community and environment have had a complex history in social gerontology. On the one hand, many of the most influential British studies, notably those by Harold Sheldon (1948), Peter Townsend (1957) and Bernard Isaacs, Livingstone and Neville (1972), are regarded (and were presented) as studies of older people in the context of family and community-based support. On the

other hand, it is a mistake to view these studies as providing a clear demonstration of community help and assistance. Certainly, the evidence that they compiled indicated the significance of long-established patterns of locality-based mutual aid. Townsend, for example, emphasised that older people did indeed identify with Bethnal Green, the inner London suburb that he studied, and more generally with the 'East End', and that 'solidarity with relatives, neighbours and friends was strongest in some of the oldest streets' (1957: 127). Isaacs and his colleagues studied informal care in working-class districts of Glasgow, and suggested that 'neighbourly help was related to the person's environment. Of the patients who lived in old tenement houses with outside toilets, twice as many were helped by neighbours as was the case with patients in more modern houses' (1972: 90). Sheldon's study of older people in Wolverhampton, an industrial West Midlands town, observed noticeable differences in neighbouring by the type of housing: the more dispersed housing and the open spaces of the new public-housing estates symbolised a greater detachment of people from one another. He argued that in the areas of older terraced houses with shared back-entries, 'people live[d] in constant touch with one another', and neighbours were a potential source of help, 'accounting for slightly more than one-third of [all the] help that would be available if needed' (1948: 177).

But even in areas such as Bethnal Green, the limits of community-based ties were also emphasised. According to Townsend, 'most people were very restrained in their relationships and not many [older people] had even one close friend outside the family; and the majority affected by church and club activities was small. ... Moreover, in old age ... non-family activities diminished' (1957: 133). Ross McKibbin (1998) summarised the general pattern of neighbourhood ties in British working-class communities during the 1950s:

Relationships with neighbours were more complicated [than family ties], and the common belief that there was much 'popping in and out', though not exactly untrue, is largely romantic. ... Unless people had known each other for many years, relations with neighbours tended to be superficial, and women rarely kept up with neighbours if either of them moved. There is much evidence that people were suspicious of their neighbours and large numbers thought them untrustworthy (1998: 181).

Reports as to the limits of 'neighbourly support' were highlighted in Jack Shaw's (1971) *On Our Conscience*, the product of an investigation by a local newspaper into living conditions among older people in the city of Sheffield. The photographs and case studies provided a graphic account of the squalid housing conditions in the inner city and of the extreme neglect experienced by some older people. The latter were also identified by

Coates and Silburn (1970) in *Poverty: the Forgotten Englishmen*, an account of life in the St Anne's district of Nottingham, which confirmed the extent to which extreme poverty could undermine extended family life and foster alienation and mistrust among neighbours. Another study of older people living in an inner-city district, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the mid-1970s, featured their fears and concerns about life in the area, reflected in anxieties about 'being attacked in bars', 'having their house burgled', and the 'absence of good neighbours' (Phillipson 1977).

Such divisions indicated a number of social changes operating from the 1950s. Slum clearance was certainly crucial in disrupting long-term neighbourhood relations; the impact that this had on the lives of older people during the 1950s and 1960s awaits thorough investigation.<sup>4</sup> The sociological evidence about life on the new estates mainly concerned young people and families but tended to emphasise the steady retreat into more privatised lifestyles (driven by the emergence of consumerism), which began in at least the early 1950s (McKibbin 1998; Sandbrook 2005). Research in the United States also identified problems arising from the accelerated social and geographical mobility affecting urban communities, with older people lamenting the impact of social change on neighbourhoods (for an example see Vivrett 1960: 560). Studies in the 1970s of older people living in downtown single-room occupancy hotels (SROs) found similar problems in cities such as Detroit (Stephens 1978), although Cantor (1975) was more optimistic about the extent of neighbourhood and kin-based networks among New York City's elderly residents.

Given the above evidence, it might be argued that the idea of groups of people being 'disembedded' from community life, as argued by Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2001), has very deep roots, and pre-dates the changes associated with globalisation. A significant feature of the new wave of community studies, especially those conducted from the late-1990s, is nonetheless the strength and prevalence of older people's assertions about the apparent loss of community in comparison with the early post-war period. The return visits to the scenes of classic studies by Phillipson *et al.* (2001) and Charles and Davies (2005) have cited evidence of older people lamenting the passing of community – though in the case of Swansea this was also mentioned by older people in the original study (Rosser and Harris 1965). 'Nostalgia for a past community' is a striking feature of the accounts of lifestyles and identities in four districts of Manchester by Mike Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005), and was intensely expressed by the older residents in their sample. Kearon (2001) produced similar findings from another Manchester study. Similarly, Blokland's (2003: 194) study of social change in inner-city Rotterdam found elderly residents lamenting the 'loss of unity' and the 'togetherness' of community life earlier in their lives.

The important issue here is to find a convincing sociological explanation for the experiences and views reported by older people. One tendency in recent commentaries is to view the current generation of older people as constrained – to use the formulation of Ferdinand Tönnies (1955) – by attachments characterised by a *Geimeinschaft* (community) mentality, in contrast to their sons and daughters who have moved rapidly to the *Gesellschaft* (association) that in modernity and late-modernity has supplanted earlier ‘close-knit’ forms. But to generalise this polarisation may be unhelpful given the diversity of social groups and the range of conditions that constitute the experience of growing old (Blaikie 1999; Vincent *et al.* 2006). Indeed, the argument developed in the next section of this paper is that the importance of globalisation may lie precisely in its generation of much greater variation in the communities and environments experienced by older people.

### **Globalisation and the reconstruction of environmental gerontology**

Making sense of older people’s nostalgia for past imagined communities is important – for theory as well as policy. Explaining the issues in theoretical terms would help clarify questions about ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ – themes that have been increasingly important in sociological and social gerontological research (Morgan 2005; Daatland and Biggs 2004). In policy terms such questions are also important, especially if older people’s sense of wellbeing in urban and rural communities is to be maintained and improved. The difficulty here concerns the limitations of conceptual and theoretical models for dealing with many of the identified issues. Environmental gerontology has undoubtedly re-emerged as a major field of enquiry (as noted earlier), and in the process raised significant issues about older people’s relationship with the physical and social contexts that shape everyday life. Wahl and Lang (2004: 17) emphasised that older people’s day-to-day behaviour is embedded within given physical and social surroundings, which themselves are ‘socially constructed, socially filled out, and socially shaped physical environments’. On the other hand, environmental models remain wedded to an ecological perspective on ageing that provides only limited insights into the contextual factors that influence the relationship between the individual and the environment (see for example Parmalee and Lawton 1990; Scheidt and Windley 2003; Wahl and Weisman 2003). Proponents of this approach themselves note the lack of theoretical innovation and the tendency to focus on some models to the exclusion of others.

The argument developed here is that work around the theme of globalisation offers a way of re-thinking issues about ageing and the environment, especially in relation to questions of community, environment and identity. Three reasons for this view might be advanced: first, although early approaches to understanding globalisation tended to marginalise issues of locality and community (in keeping with sociology generally during the 1970s and 1980s), later work has focused on the interconnections between global and local change (Eade 1997). Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 3) argued that ‘the local is not transcended by globalisation, but rather that the local is to be understood through global relationships’. In relation to older people, the impact of the global on the local may be especially important given the length of time individuals are likely to have resided in the same community (see for example Phillipson *et al.* 2001; Scharf *et al.* 2003), and the extent to which their mobility may at some point be restricted to defined territorial boundaries (Krause 2004).

Secondly, globalisation introduces complexity at a local level through the emergence of transnational ties and relationships – which themselves may evolve into communities in their own right. Levitt (2001: 4) suggested that the rise of the transnational community reflects ‘how ordinary people are incorporated into the countries that receive them while remaining active in the places they come from’. Warnes (2006) has referred to the ‘multiple affiliations and residences’ of a range of groups across Europe – labour as well as retired migrants (see also Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Gustafson 2001). Taking the example of Turkish migrants in Belgium, he commented that:

Many Turks migrate to and from Belgium at all ages, with the inward and the departure flows both showing the ‘adolescent’ and ‘retirement’ transition peaks. Many other long-term labour migrants in retirement ‘shuttle’ at least once a year between the two countries. They have inherited from their distinctive life course the exceptional ‘capital’ for old age of access to both Turkey’s low living costs and Belgium’s superior health and social services. Maintaining dual residences (with the help of relatives and friends) enables the group to maximise their social and family contacts and quality of life. Such transnational residential patterns are replicated by an increasing number of affluent northern Europeans who acquire second homes in, and retire to, southern European countries (2006: 216).

Thirdly, in general terms, globalisation may be seen to be the driving force behind new types of movement in old age. Globalisation leads to the development of a more mobile form of social ageing – less controlled by the ideology and bureaucracy of welfare on the one side, more differentiated and fragmented on the other. The new attachments range from specialist retirement communities, ‘second homes’ and recreational

vehicles (RVs) to more traditional seaside bungalows, care homes and sheltered housing. The meaning of old age is being reconstructed through a diffuse range of spaces and an ever-expanding mix of communities and environments. Katz (2005: 211) viewed this part of the ‘gerontology of mobility’, ‘includ[ing] the trans-culturality of both people and places as they age while adding a dynamic sense of retirement “flow” to the more static tradition of retirement “time”’.

The importance of these developments is that they pose new questions about people’s sense of belonging to, and integration with, particular communities and environments. As suggested above, older people’s sense of ‘belonging’ to their community has always been hedged with ambivalence (see for example Thane 2000). But the argument developed below is that this has changed to a much clearer division between, on the one hand, those able to choose and to identify with particular locations, which are viewed as consistent with and affirmative of their own biographies and life histories, and on the other hand, those who experience rejection or exclusion from their locality and who see neighbourhood change as incompatible with their own view of themselves and their peers. The next section of this paper examines this division in more detail by drawing on two concepts from sociology and social policy that have been used to examine the relationships of groups to particular areas and localities, ‘elective belonging’ and ‘social exclusion’.

### **‘Elective belonging’ and identity in old age**

The concept of ‘elective belonging’ has been given clearest expression by Mike Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) in their exploration of lifestyles and identities in the context of globalisation. It refers to the way in which the historical associations and ‘place biographies’ of particular localities have become less important for some groups, as compared with their personal biographies and identities. Increasingly, it is argued, people are making conscious choices about where they want to live and the lifestyles they wish to live by – the place of residence emerging as a central feature of this development. Savage and colleagues made the point that this involves people in a different relationship with their locality and neighbourhood:

Belonging is not to a fixed community, with the implications of closed boundaries, but is more fluid, seeing places as sites for performing identities. Individuals attach their own biography to their ‘chosen’ residential location, so that they tell stories that indicate how their arrival and subsequent settlement is appropriate to their sense of themselves. People who come to live in an area with no priorities



to it, but who can link their residence to their biographical life history, are able to see themselves as belonging to the area. This kind of elective belonging is critically dependent on people's relational sense of place, their ability to relate their residence against other possible areas, so the meaning of place is critically judged in terms of its relational meanings (2005: 205).

The derived idea, that some people select locations as a means of 'announcing' or 'reaffirming' their identities, is helpful in terms of understanding the development of new communities in old age. Much of the work around retirement migration and retirement communities reflects the idea of people choosing locations shaped by their own biographies and lifestyle preferences (Warnes *et al.* 1999). As important is the notion that people move to areas that achieve 'congruences between the capitals [economic and/or cultural] of the residences and their sense of feeling at home' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005: 207). Illustrative of this in Britain are the small non-metropolitan districts in favoured rural areas that are increasingly colonised by retired people (often relatively affluent property owners), settlements in the Cotswolds, Welsh Borders and Peak District being obvious examples. Similar examples are widespread in other European countries and in the USA.

Many of the insights drawn from studies of retirement migration – that of multiple place attachments, transnational mobility, identification with particular lifestyles or social groups – incorporate the theme of retirees choosing locations which are congruent with both their past and their expectations about life in the future (King, Warnes and Williams 2000). Thus, although Gustafson (2001) emphasised the different types of attachment to Spain among his sample of Swedish migrants, the uppermost theme was of people shaping their new location according to particular biographical choices and priorities. In this context, however, there is no agreed form of belonging to their new community: some migrants focus on cultural adaptation to Spain; others emphasise their links to the local Swedish community; others simply see themselves as temporary visitors to a different cultural setting (see also O'Reilly 2000).

Settlements of retirement migrants underline the observation of Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 29) that the experience of belonging can in certain circumstances be detached from that of a fixed or defined community. This point was anticipated by Longino and Marshall (1990), whose studies of Canadian 'snowbirds' (retirees who seasonally migrate between Canada and Florida) concluded that: '[they] were nomadic in the sense that their social ties were primarily with the same migrants in the communities they shared at both ends of the move. *Their ties were not to places but to the migrating community itself*' (my emphasis) (cited in Katz 2005: 222). Implicit in this observation is an illustration of

the use and control of space in old age. Laws (1997: 99) drew attention to what she referred to as the spatiality of age relations, and suggested that 'this is not to say simply that old people live in space. There is a much more powerful role for the spatial in the creation of ageing identities. The experience of being old, for example, varies according to one's environment. Situation can thus actively affect ageing' (see also Bernard *et al.* 2004; Katz 2005).

The example of people 'electing' where to live in old age may also signify new types of integration, solidarity and belonging. For the individuals involved, family relationships may continue to be important in some measure, but they will almost certainly be just only one element in the broader and more fluid spread of relationships which Wellman and Wortley (1990) defined as characteristic of 'personal communities' – the world of friends, neighbours and leisure associates, as well as family and kin.<sup>5</sup> The idea of communities in old age having 'elected' dimensions in relation to place and personal ties is also a reminder that space may be used as an expression of human agency in old age, alongside the development of strategies for maintaining and developing identity through old age (Bernard *et al.* 2004; Tulle 2004).

### **Social exclusion and identity in old age**

The notion of older people making conscious choices about where (and by implication with whom) to live conveys the way in which belonging may be secured through choosing places and spaces which reflect biographical identities and preferences. Such possibilities are clearly not new, with retirement resorts, to take one example, having existed for over 100 years in both Western Europe and the United States. But the idea that substantial groups of older people are able to control and shape their environment is relatively new – reflecting factors such as the emergence of positive attitudes towards retirement (Phillipson 1998), improvements in living standards for certain sections of the older population (Gilleard and Higgs 2005), and the influence of globalisation in spreading awareness of new lifestyles and associated forms of consumption (Baars *et al.* 2006). It is equally the case, however, that while it is possible to talk of older people 'electing' where to live, a substantial group of older people have much less freedom to influence the physical and social environment of which they are a part.

The idea of people being 'excluded' in some way from particular environments is especially associated with the literature on the impact of urban deprivation (see for example Scharf *et al.* 2003), where the concept of

'social exclusion' in British debates has been most often applied (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). Although the impact of rural disadvantage among older people should also be emphasised (Scharf and Bartlam 2006), the evidence to date has tended to feature exclusionary processes in densely populated urban settings (Ogg 2005; Phillipson and Scharf 2005; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) 2006*a*).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the association between urban change and problems in later life has been poorly addressed in the literature of social gerontology. Birren (1969) and Clark (1971) highlighted the difficulties facing older people in cities (in Clark's case, particularly the inner city), but the link with broader perspectives on urban change (*e.g.* from sociology or geography) was not developed substantially in these essays.<sup>7</sup> Despite the British research during the 1950s and 1960s in the tradition of the Chicago School (Burgess 1967), their focus was on social groups other than older people (*e.g.* Glass 1961; Rex and Moore 1967). Urban change (and slum clearance in particular) was central to the investigations of Townsend (1957) and Young and Willmott (1957), but theoretical connections with traditions in urban sociology such as the Chicago School (or indeed other approaches) were not especially prominent.

On the basis of the available empirical data, at least three dimensions of social exclusion in urban settings can be emphasised: as a consequence of neighbourhood change; arising from pressures operating in the urban environment; and through economic development and growth, most notably in association with globalisation. The area dimension of social exclusion has been a distinctive feature of British research, reflected for example in the work of the Labour government's *Social Exclusion Unit* (2001; ODPM 2006*a*). It has defined social exclusion as, 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit 2001: 10).

As implied earlier, the neighbourhood dimension may represent a much more important aspect of exclusion than is the case with other age groups. To reinforce this point, in comparison with younger age groups, the present generation of older people are much more likely to have lived in the same community for much of their lives. For example, taking the 39 *New Deal for Community* (NDC) areas in England (urban areas characterised by severe deprivation), 43 per cent of the residents of all ages had lived in the locality for *less* than five years, and only 22 per cent had lived in the area for more than 20 years, most of them elderly people (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2003). A study of localities with NDC characteristics found that 79 per cent of older people had lived in their neighbourhoods for

20 years or more, and nearly one-half (47%) had been in the area for 40 or more years (Scharf *et al.* 2003).

Studies of the same communities at different times have indicated that older people derive a strong sense of emotional attachment from both their home and the surrounding community (Townsend 1957; Phillipson *et al.* 2001). Indeed, Rowles (1978: 200) made the point that 'selective intensification of feelings about spaces' might represent 'a universal strategy employed by older people to facilitate maintaining a sense of identity within a changing environment'. While this may be possible in relatively secure and stable neighbourhoods, some residential settings impede the maintenance of identity in old age. The argument, which requires detailed empirical testing, is that the effect is much more likely in certain types of urban environments than in others or in rural areas. It may, for example, be especially the case in the 'zones of transition' marked by a rapid turnover of people and buildings, and in unpopular urban neighbourhoods characterised by low housing demand and abandonment by all but the poorest and least mobile residents (Rogers and Power 2000; Newman 2003).<sup>8</sup> Disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, and their residents, may also be prone to 'institutional isolation' (Gans 1972), as services and agencies withdraw and access worsens to basic facilities such as food-shops, telephones and banking (Scharf *et al.* 2003).

On the other hand, social exclusion may also operate in neighbourhoods that are not threatened by economic decline but are undergoing various forms of gentrification (Butler 2003). This aspect remains under-researched but has been identified by Phillipson *et al.* (2001) and by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 44), who commented in relation to one gentrifying Manchester locality that, 'there is no sense of a past, historic, community that has moral rights on the area: rather the older working-class residents, when they are seen at all, are seen mainly as residues'. The use of the term 'residues' revealingly indicates the sense of division between older residents and the more recent arrivals. But the issue of difference is almost certainly one of age *and* social class, with older working-class residents lacking the resources to match the lifestyles of younger middle-class residents (discussed further below). This point was also brought out by Phillipson *et al.* (2001: 112) through the example of a working-class widow living in what had become a middle-class estate – her situation exemplified isolation and alienation in a relatively prosperous neighbourhood.

Exclusionary processes within neighbourhoods may be exacerbated by the generic problems of urban environments. Although there is limited empirical research on this theme, especially in Britain, there have been valuable studies in the United States and France of the situations of older

people in the midst of environmental crises most revealingly during extreme weather. Klinenberg (2002) examined the 1995 heat-wave in Chicago that over one month alone killed around 600 people, of whom three-quarters were aged 65 or more years.<sup>9</sup> As well as the specific acute factors that caused such high mortality, Klinenberg pointed to widespread and chronic attributes of the urban environment that reduced the quality of life of elderly residents:

In recent years, a number of studies have shown that older people living in violent and deteriorated urban areas tend to be more isolated and afraid of crime than those in more robust regions. Among the mechanisms producing this concentrated fear and isolation in ecologically depleted and politically underserved places are the lack of local commercial venues and service providers to draw people into the streets; barriers to physical mobility, such as broken stairs, crumbling sidewalks, and poor lighting; the psychological impact of living amongst signs of disorder; indifferent government agencies who neglect the local infrastructure; and the decrease of trusting and reciprocal relationships in areas with high levels of crime' (2002: 55).

Generic issues were also identified by Ogg (2005) in his analysis of a heat wave in France during 2003 that resulted in an estimated 15,000 deaths, most of whom were older people. Ogg cited several French studies that demonstrated that the highest mortality rates were in urban areas, particularly the Paris and Lyon conurbations. While it was suggested that the support networks of older people were mobilised to greater effect in rural than urban areas, the data were inconclusive. Ogg (2005) concluded that, as with the Chicago experience, the French heat wave raised important questions about the quality of life of older people living in densely populated urban areas. He argued that, 'these environments are often not adapted to the needs of older people and they can be one of the primary causes of social exclusion. Spatial and mobility-related aspects of citizenship are increasingly recognised as important dimensions of social inclusion ... and older people in inner cities often face many disadvantages related to access to services' (2005: 35).

A more general set of questions concerns the extent to which, within the context of globalisation, modern cities are experienced as exclusionary by particular groups. On the one hand, cities are increasingly viewed as the key drivers of a nation's economic and cultural success. A British government report, *State of the English Cities* (ODPM 2006*b*), unequivocally expressed this view: 'These are exciting – if challenging – times for cities in many countries. During the past decade, many cities in many countries have emerged from a period of decline to find new economic, political and cultural niches. There has been a sea-change in how they are regarded. Governments, the private sector and researchers increasingly see cities as

the dynamos of national and regional economies rather than economic liabilities. Cities are becoming again the “wealth of nations” (2006: 6). On the other hand, the extent to which this development – with in particular the rise of ‘global’ or ‘world cities’ – will prove a positive development for elderly people (especially those with limited incomes) requires further empirical study.

Sassen (2000*a*) identified the way in which large cities concentrate both the leading sectors of global capital along with a growing share of disadvantaged populations (see also Rodwin and Gusmano 2006). Cities, she argued, have become a strategic terrain for a series of conflicts and contradictions – among which the management and support of vulnerable populations is certainly one of the most acute. An important question here concerns the extent to which the construction of the modern (or late-modern) city as the ‘site for the new consumerism’ (Savage, Warde and Ward 2003: 149) results in social exclusion for groups such as older people. In residential terms, there seems little doubt that the new residential developments in the central areas of the largest British cities are largely for young-adults; the central areas of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, for example, are being ‘re-branded’ as rejuvenating areas in which young, successful professionals live and work. Manchester now has around 15,000 people living in new central-area apartment blocks, and most are aged less than 35 years; there is similar evidence from Liverpool and other large cities (Nathan and Urwin 2005). In Dundee’s city centre, 4.4 per cent of the population is aged 65 or more years, compared with 15.9 per cent of the population of Scotland. For Manchester and Liverpool, the figures are respectively 5.6 and 7.9 per cent, compared to 15.9 per cent in England (Nathan and Urwin 2005).

This re-construction of urban centres as spaces of and for younger age groups reflects in large measure the force of investment capital. Rodwin, Gusmano and Butler (2006: 7) made the point that while world cities offer extensive cultural and entertainment opportunities, they are expensive places in which to live. They illustrate this point by citing a study of New York City which found that only one-in-20 older households had sufficient money to take full advantage of the quality of life offered by the city. Comparable data are not available for British cities, although a relevant finding from the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing (ELSA) for the Social Exclusion Unit was that a larger percentage of older people living in London than in the rest of the country were multiply excluded (ODPM 2006*a*). This is consistent with an analysis of global cities that emphasises the increasing divergence of the lifestyles and opportunities of wealthy and poor residents, which is itself a manifestation of growing inequalities linked to social class, ethnicity and, in some respects, age.

An additional dimension of social exclusion in cities may be the extent to which the environment is perceived as intrinsically alienating and discordant with older people's biographies and values. Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) provided support for this contention from older residents' own statements. Their respondents of all ages viewed the city 'as a space largely hollowed out from social relationships, as a physical shell whose visual surfaces they scan for meanings' (2005: 129). Although supporting evidence from other studies is still fragmentary, these expressions raise an important issue about how different social groups experience and regard the visual images and the opportunities provided by the changing city landscape. Much of the literature on older people's experience of urban living has focused on their engagement with (or disengagement from) the physical environment of cities, viewed as geographical sites with facilities and opportunities (see for example Phillips *et al.* 2005). But an equally important dimension (and potential source of social exclusion) is the way in which cities are appropriated symbolically by particular groups in pursuit of their interests – commercial, social, cultural and political. This draws us into the need for what Castells (2002) referred to as 'urban semiotics', the interpretation or reading of urban change (and of particular cities) for the meanings that they convey for different generational groups. The implied research question concerns the way in which both the *visual* and *physical* attributes of urban centres are changing in ways that are experienced as excluding by certain groups of older people (as well as others). This question is yet another that has still to be tested empirically: the possibility that regenerated urban centres are being constructed to the advantage of only certain age or generational groups deserves further investigation.

## Conclusion

In a useful description of the issues facing older people in their relationship to communities undergoing the various changes associated with globalisation, Tomlinson (1999) suggested that the 'paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people ... is that of staying in one place but experiencing the "displacement" that global modernity brings them' (cited in Savage, Warde and Ward 2003: 146). The argument of this paper is that reactions to such displacements reveal sharp differentials among older people. The debate during the 1950s to 1980s about community in old age focused on its potentially supportive role, even if the evidence suggested limited and somewhat ambivalent ties with neighbours. More recent research has focused on the anxieties arising from an apparent 'loss

of community', especially among older people (Charles and Davies 2005; Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). This article argues, however, that variations in community attachments now illustrate significant inequalities within the older population: most notably between those able to make conscious decisions about where and with whom to live, and those who feel marginalised and alienated by changes in the communities in which they have 'aged in place'.

Further investigation would doubtless reveal other types of community attachments, each reflecting different combinations of resources and locations.<sup>10</sup> But the key point is the extent to which community attachment or belonging has now emerged as an independent variable that influences the quality of life in old age. This development has itself been driven – in large measure – through the influence of globalisation, thus resulting in different forms of migration through the lifecourse, the creation of transnational communities, and the rise of world or global cities. For some groups, such changes have clearly resulted in an expansion of opportunities in respect of residential choice and location. For others, however, the evidence would suggest that change is understood as an aspect of the loss of traditional community supports. Yet it is important to be clear about the different ways in which this can be interpreted: the evidence is not unequivocal about past patterns of support, and concern about 'loss of community' has been voiced in various studies for at least 50 years. So the concern about fragmentation of community (as identified by Bauman and Beck at the beginning of this article) almost certainly pre-dates the trends associated with current globalisation. What does seem clear is that while some groups of older people can actively re-shape communities which are meaningful to them in old age, others are relatively disempowered from the option of managing community and neighbourhood change. The key change over the past 50 years may lie precisely in the social division that has opened up between two groups: those that have expanding life styles options, and those whose experiences of their neighbourhood are dominated by marginalisation and alienation.

This article has explored community attachment and belonging as an important dimension of the experience of growing old. A substantial research agenda can be proposed on the themes that have been discussed. First, environmental gerontology must, it can be argued, re-discover the community dimension as a key influence on the quality of life and on wellbeing in old age. Crow (2002) made the point that, accepting the various difficulties associated with community sociology, such work has 'a solid track record as a testing ground for general theories of social change [and in revealing] the active engagement of individuals and groups in the re-making of their social worlds'. Moreover, in focusing on the impact of



social change, community studies offer a way forward in terms of the examination of how macro-sociological and economic forces, including globalisation, work on the ground to influence the daily lives of older people as well as the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Secondly, in keeping with the approach taken in this article, given the rapid changes in many metropolitan areas (notably those associated with 'world' or 'global' cities), new approaches to understanding older people's relationship to urban change – and city development in particular – is urgently required. Following the argument in Phillipson and Scharf (2005: 73), there is a strong case for more work in 'urban ethnography' to capture the disparate experiences of those living in cities that are now experiencing intense global change and that are strongly influenced by complex patterns of migration. Sassen (2000b: 146) pointed to the need for detailed fieldwork as a 'necessary step in capturing many aspects of the urban condition'; such work is especially important for understanding the impact of urban change on specific groups of older people. Urban sociology was founded (through the work of the Chicago School from the 1920s) upon detailed studies of experiences of urban life, particularly of disadvantaged and insecure people from different migrant populations. Ethnographies would bring to the surface the attitudes, motivations and experiences of older people who are 'ageing in place', and will deepen our understanding about the way in which cities are changing, and about the positive and negative contributions that the changes have on the quality of daily life in old age (Scharf *et al.* 2003; Newman 2003).

Finally, an underlying theme of this article has been the increasing variety of attachments that older people bring to their communities and neighbourhoods. These represent significant opportunities for raising understanding of the range of lifestyles involved. In this respect, it will be especially important to increase our understanding of the processes that link globalisation with urban expressions of social and cultural change. Pathways through later life will be increasingly shaped by older people's control over and access to the city's resources that are being shaped by the volatile forces associated with global change. Exploring the different attachments to such environments, and their consequences for later life, is a vital new challenge for social gerontology to address.

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## NOTES

- 1 See, especially, the review in Wahl, Scheidt and Windley 2003.
- 2 Delanty (2003) and Blokland (2003) provide general overviews of some of these debates. For an earlier discussion see Crow and Allan 1994.
- 3 For a recent statement of the latter see Dench, Gavron and Young 2006, and for earlier views see Seabrook 1974 and Harrison 1985.
- 4 See however Chapters 2 and 8 in Rosser and Harris (1965) for interesting observations about the impact of slum clearance on older people.
- 5 This theme is developed in more detail in Phillipson *et al.* (2001); see also Morgan (2005).
- 6 Detailed empirical work is needed to confirm or refute this argument, and tests in different types of urban environment are a priority.
- 7 Fischer's (1977) network analysis of relationships in Detroit was closely linked to the urban sociology literature but his sample of respondents excluded people aged 65 and over.
- 8 The 'zone in transition' is a Chicago School term for the ring of obsolescent buildings and rapid land-use change around a city's 'central business district' or downtown.
- 9 Klinenberg's study is reviewed in Phillipson (2004). Newman (2003) also explored some of these issues in her study of the experience of older people in black communities in inner-city New York.
- 10 Developing a typology of such attachments, based on empirical research, would be a useful next step from the arguments developed in this paper.

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The pioneering European sociologists, however, also offered a broad conceptualization of the fundamentals of society and its workings. Their views form the basis for today's theoretical perspectives, or paradigms, which provide sociologists with an orienting framework—a philosophical position—for asking certain kinds of questions about society and its people. Sociologists today employ three primary theoretical perspectives: the symbolic interactionist perspective, the functionalist perspective, and the conflict perspective. These perspectives offer sociologists theoretical paradigms for e

### Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective is based largely on the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. According to functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole.

### The Three Main Sociological Perspectives

#### 1. Conflict Perspective

The functionalist perspective views society as composed of different parts working together. In contrast, the conflict perspective views society as composed of different groups and interest competing for power and resources. The sociological perspective is the study of human life, social interactions and how those interactions shape groups and entire societies. The sociological.

#### Social environments and factors that are studied include gender, ethnicity and age. Additional factors include income and education. One of the goals of the sociological perspective is to show how deeply a person is affected by society and its social forces, even when it comes to what may seem like personal issues. By seeing the world through the sociological lens, it's possible to explain social behavior. The three major sociological perspectives are the symbolic, functionalist and conflict perspectives. Each theory helps one gain a better understanding of what shapes a person's lif