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Paradise planned: Socio-economic differentiation and the master planned community on Sydney's urban fringe

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INTRODUCTION:

Since the mid 1980s the character of residential development on Sydney's urban fringe has become increasingly socially and economically differentiated from older more established outer ring suburbs. Greenfield developments are no longer characterised by low income residents, and less affluent first home-buyers fulfilling their 'Australian dream'. Rather, contemporary housing development is being undertaken through the 'master planned community' that is catering for upwardly mobile groups of middle and higher income earners seeking to protect their social and economic assets. The 'community' this form of development creates effectively differentiates these places of residence from the lower prestige and socially disadvantaged areas of Sydney's western suburbs.

The purpose of this paper is two fold. In the first instance it considers aspects of demographic change and socio-spatial restructuring in south-west Sydney over the past decade. Secondly, it draws on the findings of qualitative case studies of two contemporary greenfield residential developments on Sydney's south-west fringe, to investigate the capacity of master-planning to effect socio-economic differentiation. To prospective residents, the master planned community presents as a secure environment. Utilising Bentham's notion of motive *in esse* and motive *in prospect* (*prior* events or circumstances and *future* expectations which motivate action) the paper examines factors which motivate residents to seek such a spatial utopianism.

SOCIO-SPATIAL RESTRUCTURING ON SYDNEY'S URBAN FRINGE

The process of rapid suburbanisation that occurred during the long boom following World War II involved a mixture of predominantly low, but also middle income residential development, weaving its way through a continually advancing urban fringe. Although pockets of high-income residential development sprang up along waterways and other geographically advantaged areas, most of the fringe development was not as acutely socio-spatially differentiated as the middle and inner-ring suburbs of Sydney (Gleeson and Low 2000). This was a period in which first-home buyers were able to secure their own version of the 'Australian dream', by securing a block of land and a new home (often owner built) in an infrastructure-poor

subdivision on Sydney's western suburban fringe. However, since the mid 1980s, the character of residential development on the urban fringe has seemingly become increasingly socially and economically differentiated, with planned developments catering for upwardly mobile groups of middle and higher income earners. This process of *embourgeoisement* is producing a more complex landscape of social upgrading on the urban fringe.

According to Cornish and Kelly (2001: 21), prior to 1977, 53.8% of first home buyers purchased a new home on the urban fringe. However, by 1999 this figure had fallen to just over 16%. The report indicates that rather than being first home buyers, those currently building and buying new homes on the fringe are more likely to be the financially secure, and second and third home buyers, over 40 years old and with teenage children. Further, the houses this cohort is occupying have increased in size by 43% over the past 15 years, from 166 sqm to 238 sqm. Consequently, rather than building suburbs of 'little boxes', new estates are being filled with rather larger 'boxes' albeit on shrinking blocks of land. The report indicates that new housing costs are a factor in the displacement of lower income and first homebuyers on the fringe. The increasing cost of new housing is an important factor in restructuring the socio-economic character of the urban fringe, and results from a complex set of relations between the state, the developer and the end purchaser.

Socio-economic change on Sydney's outer urban fringe since the 1980s is reflected in research on 'community opportunity and vulnerability' undertaken by Baum, Stimson, O'Connor, Mullins and Davis (1999). Comparing ABS census data from 1986 to 1996, the research notes that Sydney's fringe localities - the statistical local areas of Camden, Penrith, Wollondilly and Hawkesbury - are areas of 'suburban expansion', and significantly, of 'social and economic opportunity'. The distinguishing features of this particular cluster include a low incidence of low-income households, single-parent families and unemployment; strong labour participation rates particularly amongst females; and those employed are more likely to be either 'in-person service workers' or 'routine production workers', rather than the 'symbolic analysts' of the more advantaged 'global economy / high-income opportunity' cluster (see Reich 1993). This latter cluster, which includes the inner, northern and eastern suburbs of Sydney, is the only cluster to receive a higher 'opportunity' score than

Sydney's fringe localities of the 'suburban expansion / social and economic opportunity' cluster.

A further indication of social change on the urban fringe is in relation to a shift in political attitude as evidenced by voting patterns during the 1990s. This was highlighted most recently during the 2001 Federal election which witnessed a significant swing away from the Labor Party in outer western suburbs electorates (Humphries 2001). Consequently there is presently a 'blue ring' of Liberal electorates on Sydney's fringe, including the now 'safe' seats of Macarthur in the south-west, and Lindsay and Macquarie in the west. Until the early 1990s, prior to the development of the master planned estates, these electorates were held by Labor – the party traditionally of the working class.

As Sydney's western suburbs have become more ethno-culturally and economically diverse, master planned communities have come to offer middle income households the opportunity to move into estates built specifically to meet their cultural values, aspirations and insecurities. Paralleling recent research into gentrification, which indicates that inner urban gentrifiers are rarely returning to the city from the suburbs, but rather are "city dwellers remaining within the city" (Butler 1997: 37; Ley 1996), the residents of new middle class estates are socially mobile suburban dwellers, remaining in Sydney's west.

THE CASE STUDIES¹

Harrington Park and Garden Gates are located within the Camden local government area, some six kilometres apart and approximately 55 kilometres south-west of Sydney's central business district. Commenced in the early 1990s, the estates form part of the Narellan 'new release' area, and share the 2567 Narellan postcode.

Harrington Park is a *master planned community* of low density, detached housing, constructed on formerly rich pasture land. Bounded by Camden Valley Way and the Northern Road, the estate's single entrance is impressive, with a wide, curving road

¹ Data for the case study was collected between 2001 and 2002. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with estate residents, local government planning officers and property developers, structured questionnaires of residents and a period of participant observation with a community development organization working within both the case study estates.

stretching past tendered agapanthus gardens, parks and the Lake – the estate's primary aesthetic focus. Street landscaping, particularly along the main thoroughfares, provides a formal feel, with mature, deciduous trees dominating. Harrington Park has well-resourced playgrounds, and a network of well maintained walkways, bike trails and picnic grounds and a community hub comprising a public school, community centre, child care centre, land for a neighbourhood shopping centre and sports facilities including a cricket ground resplendent in white picket.

By comparison, the *planned 'infill' estate*² of Garden Gates is aesthetically more relaxed, and even a little unruly in parts, with its proximity to the native botanical gardens, and extensive use of indigenous vegetation. Located in the suburb of Mount Annan, the estate is bounded by the Mount Annan Botanical Gardens, Welling Drive and George Caley Reserve. It has numerous entry points, the main entry being via Mount Annan Drive. At the time of the fieldwork, the public parks in Garden Gates were not as well maintained as they were in Harrington Park, nor were they as well equipped. Some looked windswept and desolate, although the drought at the time no doubt intensified this appearance. The estate lacks its own 'community hub' in the manner of Harrington Park's, although the local Mount Annan Public School is situated on the estate's border.

In the main the homes in Harrington Park and Garden Gates are large, brick veneered with two and sometimes three garages. Some homes, particularly in the newer sections of Harrington Park, are master built in the contemporary style: double storied, muted rendered brick, glass panelled balconies, and porticoed entry. However, most are project homes with features cherry-picked from bygone architectural styles: prim Georgian facades, Victorian fussiness, Queen Ann turrets, Federation finials, and the occasional shady, over constructed Californian porch. The houses are anything but austere. Front gardens are meticulous and lawns hold pride of place.

Census data indicates in 2001 the demographic characteristics of Harrington Park and Garden Gates were fairly similar (ABS 2001). Residents were overwhelmingly

² Garden Gates was specifically planned to differentiate it from established lower income housing of Mt Annan built during the 1980s.

Australian born, English speaking and Christian. They lived in detached housing, and were far more likely to be in owner occupation, at 85.8% in Harrington Park and 88.8% in Garden Gates compared to 62.7% in the Sydney Statistical Division (SD). The median monthly housing loan repayment at \$1,400-1,599 was higher than the Sydney SD (\$1,200-1,399). Occupationally, residents were less likely to be professionals (HP 13.8%, GG 16.1%, compared to 21.2% Sydney SD) or labourers (HP 4.5% and GG 3.8%, compared to 6.6% Sydney SD), but more likely to be an associate professional (HP 14.0% and GG 16.7% compared to Sydney SD 11.85%) or in an intermediate clerical position (HP 22.3% and GG 21.0%, compared to Sydney SD 17.2%). In short, in 2001 Harrington Park and Garden Gates essentially comprised middle-income families of Anglo-Christian mores, occupied in a white collar or service industry, and living in detached dwellings with substantial mortgages.

SEEKING UTOPIA

The following section comprises two sections. Utilising Bentham's notion of motive *in esse* and motive *in prospect* (Campbell 1998), the first part examines *prior* events or circumstances which motivate the actor's current action; the motive *in esse*. For the residents of new housing estates on Sydney's south-western fringe and more specifically in Harrington Park and Garden Gates, these events include perceived threats associated with public housing estates, including crime, incivility and effects on property values; the perceived undermining of a 'common way of life' by new migrant settlement patterns; and the 'economic failure' of Sydney's middle ring western suburbs. Hence, it deals with factors which *threaten* the actor's ontological, economic and physical security.

The second part investigates those *future* events or circumstances which motivate the actor's current action and which support the actor's life planning: the motive *in prospect*. For the residents of Harrington Park and Garden Gates, these interrelated factors comprise housing as a wealth creation strategy; the security promised by the 'good neighbourhood'; and the expectation of certainty and trust produced by a socially compatible, like minded resident population. Hence, it deals with factors residents are seeking to *secure* their world (Bauman 2001).

Motive in Esse

Most of the motivational prior events and circumstances discussed by informants were associated with the competitive urban process of 'dominance, invasion and succession'. This ecological perspective of the modern city was first expounded by the Chicago School urban sociologists following World War I (Pahl 1970). However, unlike the functionally derived ecological perspective of the city, which under-states explanations of racial and class conflict, the city is very much a contested terrain; a site of conflict and competition. This contestation can be observed at both a macro level, within the city and between cities, particularly in the global era, and at a micro neighbourhood level, within the neighbourhood and between suburbs. For instance, Sydney is widely 'imagined' to be socio-spatially divided between the wealthy suburbs of the north and east and the 'uncultured, poor, bland' suburbs of Sydney's west (Dowling and Mee 2000; Powell 1993). However, within the neighbourhoods of western Sydney, invasion and succession, of a racial and socio-economic dimension, is just as significant a feature.

Sites of Social Disorder

Issues of physical security were of particular concern to the informants of Harrington Park and Garden Gates, and greatly influenced their choice of housing. The following informant's explanation was typical.

I think it's the safeness of the area and the nicer people. I feel safe here. I still look out and see what people leave out on their front lawn of a night time and think 'oh I wouldn't leave that out there'. I'm still paranoid about leaving things out. [Is that from when you were living at Macquarie Fields?] Oh, I wouldn't leave anything out there, it would be gone. (GG3: F1: 11)

The desire for a 'safe' community as part of the utopian reality reflects Halter's (1998) experience in the United States:

In almost all consumer research conducted today, the fear of crime and the desire for safety are the most prominent concerns expressed by most housing consumers. Across the country, consumer surveys confirm that enhanced community security adds both perceived and real value to the community (Halter 1998: 8).

For my informants, however, the idea of a 'safe' community extended beyond the hardcore crimes of home burglary, car theft, drug dealing and personal assault. It involved behaviour which did not necessarily violate a particular law, but which violated their moral and social code of conduct. Such 'social disorder' included noisy neighbours, speeding cars, barking dogs, raucous youth behaviour, vandalism and even 'bludging' on the taxpayer.

Public Housing Estates

Two 'sites' of social disorder were particularly prominent amongst the residents interviewed: areas of dense public housing, and areas incorporating high numbers of non-English speaking migrants. In the 'experience' of many of the informants, crime and social disorder coalesce within these two sites. Two female informants described the insecurity experienced living near the public housing estates in Macquarie Fields, compared to their experience in Garden Gates.

F1: There was a lot of violence and that down there, and gangs. F2: Not where we were. F1: At the Housing Commission. That was Islanders. That was quiet scary down there. They would often get on and off the train and they were loud. And they would have a go at you and they were drinking. At Campbelltown, you get it with the Aborigines. And they're drunk and abusive. Here it's great. F2: They're all Australians actually. F1. They're not all Australians. Down there they're Yugoslavians. (GG3: 7-8)

One resident of Garden Gates had moved from a small, private housing estate close to the public housing estates of Minto, because he felt that the area was deteriorating. The move was motivated by his concern for his family's welfare and quality of life.

[And what was it about Garden Gates that you liked?] It was a nice new estate. The houses appeared to be of a similar size. Large houses. There were no housing commission problems out here, because it's away from all that. (GG9: 7)

The purpose here is not to disparage the socially disadvantaged residents of public housing estates. Rather, it is to examine, from the informants' perspectives, their experiences of living near public housing estates, and to trace how the insecurity and intimidation many of them felt became a motivating factor for relocating into their new estate.

Apart from the physical aspects, there was also an economic aspect to the experience of living next to public housing. That is, informants considered that public housing has a deleterious effect on surrounding property values. This informant interpreted her own experience, and the motivation behind moving from Rosemeadow to Harrington Park:

We over capitalised on our first place [in Rosemeadow]. We spent a lot of money on doing it up, back yard, extension and that, and we never made it back. We probably lost 45 grand on that house. So, yeh, we just wanted to build somewhere where we weren't going to lose any money. [Why did you feel that you wouldn't lose money here?] To live in Narellan or Camden it was the better end of Campbelltown. [Rosemeadow] was a young area, a lot of housing commission. We lived quite close to that and we just wanted to get out of that. We wanted to be far enough away I suppose from the stigma of Campbelltown.

(HP6: 5)

The informants of Harrington Park and Garden Gates clearly saw a relationship between low status ('stigma'), property values and proximity to public housing estates with its concentration of a particular social strata.

Influx of non-English speaking migrants

Perhaps even more than the fear of the effects of social disorder symbolised by the public housing estates, racial tension was an underlying motivation behind the move to Camden, and more specifically Harrington Park and Garden Gates. The influx of non-English speaking migrants into the more established suburbs of western Sydney, particularly since 1973, is an example of invasion and succession. For instance, since World War II the socio-demographic changes in Liverpool, from where a significant proportion of Harrington Park and Garden Gates residents had migrated, have been quite spectacular, and no more so than over the past decade.³ The extent of ethno-cultural change in Liverpool over the past decade, can be appreciated further, when compared with census data from other western Sydney statistical local areas (See appendix).

³ For instance, in 2001 the population of Liverpool was 154,286, an increase of 57.1% since 1991. Of this population, only 55.6% of residents were born in Australia, compared to 66.3% in 1991, a decrease of 10.7%; and 50.7% of people spoke only English at home, compared to 65.8% of people in 1991, a decrease of 15.1% (ABS Census 2001).

One informant was particularly articulate in explaining his observations of the process of suburban succession in Liverpool, and other areas of Sydney. The fear that this was happening in Ingleburn (a suburb of Campbelltown) was one of the motivating circumstance for his migration into Garden Gates.

[What is your perception of Liverpool?] Ahm, it's changing, changing like a lot of the suburbs with the influx of different people. In some ways certain areas are being degraded, losing their character, due to the type of people who are taking over the place. [What type of people are taking over the place?] Oh you're getting different walks of life, different people from different countries, buying up shops and selling their wares. I think its probably degrading – oh not degrading, changing, making the place look bad in some ways. (GG9: 14)

One informant, who had lived all her life in Liverpool prior to moving into Harrington Park, explained that it was her adult daughters who eventually pressured her husband and herself to move.

Liverpool had changed so much, that's one of the reason why we wanted to get out... And then one day our daughters had been together and they said, we want you to move. You can't stay here. And my second daughter had a little boy at the time, and they lived over at Narellan behind the shops. And so with the help of our eldest daughter we were able to build a new house here. (HP8: 4)

While her daughters' felt a degree of physical insecurity on behalf of their parents, for the informant herself, it was more a matter of losing the sense of the familiar that underpinned her ontological security.

[And so you lived in Liverpool all that time until you moved here? How has it changed?] Well the streets have all changed with the traffic and so much traffic, and the type of people that are living there now. Because you've got all the you know, different types of ethnic people, and it's just changed. It has grown, but not in a good way. And the type of shops had changed to cater for them, which is the way things go. (HP8: 5)

So from where do such 'experiences' derive? As indicated in Table 3, a high proportion of residents of Harrington Park and Garden Gates had migrated from nearby, more established local government areas which accommodate large public housing estates and have tended to bear the brunt of the influx of non-English

speaking migrants since the 1970s. Hence, many informants formed their views through direct experience of their changing suburb.

However, experiences are also mediated, particularly through newspapers, radio and television (Powell 1993; Dowling and Mee 2000). For instance, the ongoing coverage of Vietnamese drug activity in Cabramatta, the recent sensational trial coverage of a gang of serial rapists of Lebanese origin living in Bankstown, coverage of south-west Sydney's gang shootings, and the wanton trashing of public housing property (a favourite of commercial current affairs programs), connect the spatial and the social, and define these 'sites' as risky and unsafe.

'Value for Money' and the Fibro Legacy

A further motivation underpinning residents move out to the urban fringe is the legacy of fibro housing in the older, declining suburbs of western Sydney. Following World War II, these suburbs expanded rapidly as a result of the pent up demand for housing. Although not always a full 'quarter acre', housing lots were large by today's standard. The typical house was small, basic, austere and probably made of fibro. One informant's account of growing up in Panania⁴ typifies the post-War housing experience in the suburbs.

My father built the house in Panania. He was very good with his hands. It was a fibro house. I think he built most of it himself, either with his father, who was very good with his hands. [Is that the house that your mum still lives in?] Yep. I mean dad extended it all as the family grew. So it's still there. It's on a big block of land for these times. It's a deep block, like the old style houses are. Like 150 foot long. So these days they put duplexes or townhouses on them. (GG9: 7)

While post-War working class housing might have satisfied the aspirations of its occupants at the time, by today's standards such basic housing *demands* either extensive renovation or a 'knock down / rebuild'. Although this is becoming increasingly common, it is an expensive proposition. However, as the above informant alluded, it is more likely that such housing will be demolished to make way for medium density redevelopment. Such 'redevelopment sites' attract premium prices, putting them out of the reach of ordinary home buyers seeking detached housing. And if a purchaser does go down the route of extensively renovating or

rebuilding, in the future they may well end up with medium density next door. Hence, it becomes a more attractive, affordable and secure option to build a large, contemporary home amongst other large, contemporary homes in a new estate on the urban fringe.

The motives *in esse* for the seeking of utopia were generally related to informants' individual assessments of local conditions in their prior residential location. Such assessment was made either by personal experience or mediated imagery. Dissatisfaction with former neighbourhoods had both tangible and intangible foundations. The tangible reasons closely reflected Kearns and Parkinsons' (2001) argument that neighbourhood dissatisfaction is closely associated with housing satisfaction; the general appearance of the neighbourhood, noise, and the perception of crime and unfriendliness. Hence, apart from housing satisfaction, all the other aspects presented informants with tangible risk factors.

Motive in Prospect

The future events or circumstances which appeared to motivate informants' attempts to secure their world revolved around housing, and more particularly home ownership as an indicator of identity, as a means of controlling the domestic environment, and as a wealth creation strategy; and the 'nice' neighbourhood for the physical, economic and ontological security.

Home-ownership and Security

For the informants of Harrington Park and Garden Gates, security through housing revolved around the idea of home-ownership. There is nothing particularly unique in this. Some 40% of households in each Australian capital city own their dwellings, and between 23-33% are paying off a housing loan (Forster 1999). Australia has had a long relationship with home-ownership; from the 19th Century influx of British migrants seeking the 'working man's paradise', to the political agenda of primarily conservative politicians, particularly following WWII. As Troy (2000: 717) notes,

The policy of home ownership was designed to produce a patriotic, co-operative and cohesive society - one which agreed with Menzies' view of the world, that is: he wanted a docile, compliant society.

⁴ Panania is located in the south-west Sydney local government area of Bankstown. When this informant grew up there in the late 50s, early 60s it was a fringe location surrounded by bush
State of Australian Cities National Conference 2003

However, the relationship between security and home-ownership is multi-faceted. In the first instance, home-ownership forms an integral component of the residents' identity, conferring a moral superiority, and separating them from the less socially and economically successful renters (Henderson 1995), as indicated by this Harrington Park informant.

We take a lot of pride in our home and the other people here have the same idea. We lived near a lot of rentals in our old place and quite often they don't take as much care. And we thought that maybe that would change. But it doesn't. We still have quite a number of rentals here who don't always look after their place as well, and it can be a little bit frustrating. (HP11: 4)

Home-ownership was part of residents' value system which was passed down from their parents, and was in the process of being handed on to their own children. Home ownership here is the family norm. Passing on this norm is a form of 'social capital' that is rarely discussed. Treatment of the household as a site of social capital usually revolves around its effect on a child's educational attainment (see for instance Carbonaro 1998) and their social and cognitive development (Bianchi and Robinson 1997), rather than on the family norms which underpin wealth creation. In addition home ownership was recognised for its 'use value' providing physical security, and its economic value, particularly in regards to providing security in retirement.

The multi-faceted value of home-ownership provided informants with a 'protective cocoon' (Badcock and Beer 2000: 4), that was integral to sustaining their ontological security. In this regard housing provides a site of social and material constancy; a spatial context for the daily routine, a place away from surveillance and social scrutiny and a secure base for ongoing identity maintenance (Dupuis and Thorns 1998).

Trading Up and Moving Out – The Housing Career

However, owning a particular house for many middle-income households in Sydney's west is rarely a static thing (Clark, Deurloo and Dieleman 2003). Badcock and Beer (2000: 2) rather disparagingly observe that "most people really don't understand property". They argue that people tend to believe the illusion that home ownership benefits all equally, and that success on the 'housing escalator' is a matter of luck within a housing cohort, or confined to market players who 'work the cycles'.

Conversely, Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding (1992: 90) argue that although not all home owners make equal amounts of money from their ownership, “the middle classes are generally more likely to be in situations where returns can be achieved”. Geographical location, length of time in owner occupation, access to finance, the value of properties purchased and the timing within the property cycle are important factors to housing success.

All the informants I spoke to used the strategy of ‘trading up’ to create petty property wealth, and although they may not have ‘fully understood property’, the strategy appeared to work successfully for them. Housing here was not just about utility, but was also viewed as an entrepreneurial activity. A Harrington Park informant explained her experience of trading up from poor beginnings, in south-west Sydney over the past 30 years.

The first home we had had two bedrooms, and a laundry and toilet out the back. We had no TV, no radio. [Where was that?] Cabramatta. And from there, before my first child was born, I said to my husband we’re going to need a bath or something when the baby is born, and again he said fine, you go out and have a look; you know what we can afford. So that’s what I did. I saw the agent in Liverpool and we found the house... And yeh, so we sold Cabramatta and bought Liverpool – Edward Street; a weatherboard because we couldn’t afford brick, three bedroom, it had no garage. It wasn’t sewered. But that’s all we could afford. (HP10: 8)

All but two of the informants⁵ were second or third home buyers. Most of the newer estates in Camden are positioned as second and third home buying areas by real estate agents, thus alluding to larger more glamorous homes, and an anticipated greater financial return on the ‘housing escalator’. In other words they suggest a more secure investment and social environment.

Security through Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood is where the home’s *use*, *psychic* and *exchange* values are most capable of being exploited. Neighbourhoods are competitive, comparative social markers of status and lifestyle. Even more than this, the neighbourhood “can either influence one’s social position or have it determined for one, according to the type of

neighbourhood one inhabits and creates” (Kearns and Parkinson 2001: 2107). The neighbourhood is both a source of opportunity and constraint. It is through the neighbourhood that housing “enhances cultural distinctiveness” (Savage et. al 1992). The informants of Harrington Park and Garden Gates understood the relationship between housing and neighbourhood well, although some came to this knowledge via the misfortune of over capitalising on their first home. Logan and Molotch (1987) reflect the attitude and practice of Harrington Park and Garden Gates residents, when they argue that, those that can afford to, choose to live

where the character of fellow residents is assured by the costs of living there and the presumed reputability of people so heavily rewarded by society. They oppose public housing, dense residential development, or any other land-use change that might lower the ‘tone’ of the area (Logan and Molotch 1987: 120).

On cue, when Claudia Taranto (2002), of Radio National’s *Encounter* program asked residents of Harrington Park what they liked most about their estate a typical response was:

There are a lot of private houses. We’ve found that where there are a lot of private houses, there’s a better standard of people. That’s why I live here. [CT: What do you mean a better standard of people?] Ah.. There’s no housing commission houses. Like you go around here and there’s no wrecks in people’s gardens, most people here are just trying to make a living, trying to own their own houses, there’s no vandalism or graffiti around or anything like that. (R4 cited Taranto 2002)

This response mirrored those of the residents I interviewed; for instance this explanation from a newly retired couple, who had recently moved into Harrington Park after spending 35 years in Engadine:

M: The children here are very polite. They talk to you. You know? [Why do you think they are like that?] M: Because of the quality of the people. See the houses as you drove in. People take pride in their house. If you take pride in the house, you will take pride in your children. F: I think people may be a middle class type of person in this estate, and you know, that’s the way they bring their children up. They can obviously afford to live in here. A lot of them send their children to private schools. (HP3: 4)

⁵ Both of these informants were first home buyers in the newer section of Garden Gates, which was

'Quality' was a notion frequently referred to by Harrington Park informants. It was a term that implied a 'pecuniary aesthetic', and a particular social status derived from the accrual of social and cultural capital. In turn these attributes were expected to protect their petty property investment. Social and cultural capital within the master planned community in particular, derives from the expectations of residents, that other residents will behave in a similar manner to themselves in terms of sociability (friendliness and consideration), abiding by the restrictive covenants, maintaining gardens, supervising their children's activities and other such behaviour that goes towards maintaining the impression of being a great community in which to live. Being part of a 'great community' not only has social benefits, but translates into the protection of property values.

The 'security' offered by the master planned community can become a reality, although a somewhat 'sheltered' reality, disconnected, even disengaged to some extent, from the wider social environment. This aspect, however, is the essence of the 'community' formed by the master planned community.

In summary, the neighbourhood is a significant site of socio, cultural and economic reproduction. It is a site of educating and socialising of children, of socially differentiating cultural mores and behaviour, and a signifier of social prestige and status. It is a place for the development of inter-family social networks.

Neighbourhood and ontological security

'Family values of a by-gone era' is a common theme amongst greenfield planner-developers in western Sydney. These developers know their market well. Most of the residents I interviewed in Harrington Park and Garden Gates were motivated to some degree to find a neighbourhood that was reminiscent of either their own childhood experience; or an earlier mythical, more secure time which denoted a more traditional set of family and community values (even if at the end of the day many could not actually practice the values). Halter (1998) clarifies the connection between contemporary lifestyles and the phenomenon of 'looking back'.

Today, all people, including children, are facing more and more demands that pull them away from home. Yet many consumers, especially the aging boomers, clearly want life the way it used to be. They are searching for a place

to come home to that offers not just shelter, but a true sense of belonging. For many, this desire to belong is not filled by the country club, the health club, or the neighbourhood clubhouse. Instead, this is a broader desire to feel good about a place, and more important to feel a part of it (Halter 1998: 5).

Reflecting Halter's observation, one Harrington Park resident reminisced:

Where I grew up in Marrickville, you'd get home from school, run inside, get your gear off, change and be out the front playing cricket and eating iceblocks with your friends. And do'in all that sort of stuff. To have that for my son now, 25 years on, it's just fantastic. (HP6: 2-3)

And from another Garden Gates resident who grew up in Lakemba in the 1950s:

I feel part of the place. It's a bit like, as I say, when I was growing up you felt part of the neighbourhood. (GG3: 12: F1)

Interestingly, both Marrickville and Lakemba have undergone dramatic socio-cultural changes since these informants lived there. According to Giddens (1975), ontological security originates with the trust relationships *developed in early childhood*, and is maintained by a framework of continuity of self-identity, routines and the constancy of social and material environments. Hence there is a direct link here between a the desire to feel good about a place and to feel a part of it, and maintaining a framework of ontological security

CONCLUSION

Residents of the master planned community of Harrington Park, more so perhaps than those in the planned 'infill' estate of Garden Gates, were very conscious of delineating the area from other areas of western Sydney. This delineation incorporated social and physical aspects. The social delineation revolved around the 'quality' of home-owning, 'hardworking', considerate residents. Physical aspects included the style of housing and estate design, the semi-rural atmosphere (as opposed for instance to the over developed, "smelly" Liverpool) and, interestingly, the M5 freeway. Buying on 'the other side of the freeway' (from Liverpool and Campbelltown) was a common refrain in both Harrington Park and Garden Gates.

The following informants explained their perception of Harrington Park in social space:

[How do you feel about living in the western suburbs of Sydney?] I wouldn't call this the western suburbs. It's more rural. I wouldn't live in the western suburbs.

[Why not?] Well they're a different type of person. (HP5: F: 7 This couple migrated from the St George area to live near their grandchildren who also lived in Harrington Park.)

[Do you feel part of western Sydney living in Harrington Park?] No. I always think of it as country. Camden is very country. I just love Camden. It's just so boutique, the restaurants. Everybody walks slower and the shops shut at 12. And it's just very country. (HP7: 8 A long time resident of western Sydney)

The 'utopia' which the informants were seeking was a community 'for itself'; a power community (Harvey 2000: 240). Harvey describes such communities as inevitably exclusionary and fragmentary of the wider society, and there appears to be some truth in this. However, given the broader economic and socio-political structure within which residents live and which they have little if any control over, the planned estates of Harrington Park and Garden Gates currently offer residents a sense of coherence and social order and a degree of control over their physical and social environment; that is, a sense of active engagement, rules of belonging and a code of behaviour that provided an anchor for communal and consequently individual identity, and the feeling of predictability from which residents could plan their life.

Appendix

Tables 1 and 2 highlight the extent of these changes in the established, middle-ring suburbs of Liverpool, Auburn and Bankstown, compared to the outlying SLAs of Camden, Campbelltown and Blue Mountains.

Table 1: Percentage change in Australian born people between 1991 and 2001

Statistical Local Area	% of people born in Australia 1991 Census	% of people born in Australia 2001 Census	Change %
Camden	80.5	79.8	-0.7
Campbelltown	73.4	68.5	-4.9
Liverpool*	66.3	55.6	-10.7
Auburn*	49.7	40.1	-9.6
Bankstown*	67.5	58.7	-8.8
Blue Mountains	79.9	78.5	-1.4
SYDNEY SD	67.2	62.2	-5.0

Source: ABS 2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot

* Established inner ring suburbs of western Sydney

Table 2: Percentage change in people speaking only English at home, between 1991 and 2001.

Statistical Local Area	% of people who spoke only English at home 1991 Census	% of people who spoke only English at home 2001 Census	Change %
Camden	88.7	87.9	-0.8
Campbelltown	82.1	74.8	-7.3
Liverpool*	65.8	50.7	-15.1
Auburn*	39.8	25.0	-14.8
Bankstown*	63.1	48.4	-14.7
Blue Mountains	93.1	91.8	-1.4
SYDNEY SD	72.3	66.5	-5.8

Source: ABS 2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot

* Established inner ring suburbs of western Sydney

Table 3: Previous residential location (LGA) of Survey Respondents

Local Government Area	Garden Gates (%)	Harrington Park (%)
Bankstown * *	3.2	5.5
Camden	28.6	23.3
Campbelltown *	36.5	26.0
Fairfield *	0.0	2.7
Liverpool * *	12.7	16.4
Southern Highlands	3.2	1.4
Sutherland Shire	1.6	4.1
Wollondilly	1.6	5.5
Other western suburbs LGA	3.2	2.8
Other	9.4	12.3

Source: Resident Survey 2002

* indicates LGAs which have experienced a high influx of refugee and family reunion NESB migration from 1973 onwards – mainly from Chile, Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Bosnia. (Burnley 2000)

+ indicates LGAs which contain 'high' levels of public housing (Randolph and McPherson 2002)

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