

4 Inequality and Social Organisation in the City

Social inequality is inherent within capitalist societies. In this chapter we will examine how capitalist inequalities based on social class relate to other inequalities – notably those of gender and ethnicity – and how these inequalities affect urban form, and how they are themselves shaped by urban processes. Traditional approaches to urban inequality were primarily interested in segregation, the spatial expression of inequality. This chapter begins, in section 4.1, by briefly considering this research, documenting entrenched patterns of segregation as exemplified by studies of Britain and North America.

General analyses of segregation have increasingly given way to analyses of specific urban developments in terms of the cultural ramifications of social concentration. The ghetto, suburb and the gentrified enclave are all expressions, through segregation, of inequality. In such areas, groups visibly display some distinctive cultural characteristics in their daily activities which constitute the reproduction of social identity and, to a variable degree, social solidarity. In section 4.2 we consider ways in which material inequality arises through unequal access to housing. We show that processes of economic production and restructuring, whilst not determining patterns of segregation, exercise a powerful mediating role.

The interplay of inequality, group identity and organisation is the subject-matter of the later sections of the chapter (and is further developed in parts of Chapter 5). In section 4.3 we show how the social character of particular urban spaces – suburbs and gentrified inner-city areas – emerges out of structured inequality and appears as a type of (sub)cultural expressiveness. Drawing upon both Marxist and Weberian views, we show that

suburbanisation and gentrification cannot be explained purely in terms of economic production, but nevertheless both are closely related to social divisions of class, gender and ethnicity. Indeed, we argue that in the last two decades we have witnessed the suburbanisation of British and North American city centres (Crawford, 1992). We show how the creation of these new social zones in cities brings about new cultures, and are themselves partly the product of cultural change.

In section 4.4 we move on to consider whether some of the trends we have discussed indicate that cities are becoming more polarised. In order to address this question we examine the role that the analysis of households is coming to have in urban studies – in some respects a return to the British tradition of urban research based on Le Play's trilogy of 'Place, Work and Folk'. We look in detail at one study of a specific local environment in the context of arguments about increasing social polarisation occurring between households.

4.1 Urban space and segregation

Segregation of urban space occurs because land is limited. In capitalist cities land is mostly privately owned, each parcel of land having a different value depending upon its size, its location and its current and potential uses. Property in land has many uses: some of it will be devoted to industrial purposes (increasingly those of service industries); some will be residential; and some will be devoted to urban infrastructure like roads and parks, most of which are publicly owned and accessible to anyone. Much land is already built on, and built-form contains historic residues and new opportunities, which affect its value.

In these propertied spaces different kinds of human activity are sited. What happens on any given site is partly a result of a history of struggle, competition, planning and regulation. It is also partly the result of the ways in which people currently use the space. As we pointed out in Chapter 3, usage of the urban fabric is partially constrained by the original purposes for which it was designed, but it may also be adapted to new purposes, as is instanced by the innovative uses in most large cities of old factories and warehouses (for housing, museums, offices, and so forth). The

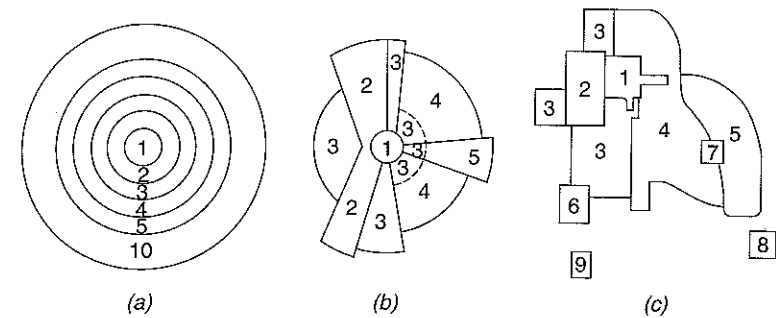
resulting patterns on the ground are complex; there is much flux; hence the difficulties of explaining the spatial distribution of activities.

More important for urban sociology than segregation of land use is the segregation of social groups. Social inequality is expressed spatially. It is rare indeed to find millionaires living alongside unskilled labourers. One can also detect a spatial separation of family types: nuclear families tend to live in suburban areas, whilst single people tend to live in more central urban areas. As a result, the analysis of the segregation of cities tells us much about the nature of social differentiation, about how different forms of inequality are related, and trends in urban segregation can be read as evidence of social changes.

Early interest in examining segregation took the form of detailed studies of individual cities: Booth's study of London in the 1880s classified every street according to its social grading. One of the most publicised achievements of the Chicago School was their attempt to systematise a general model of segregation in the modern city. In this concentric-ring model (see Chapter 2) Burgess identified a number of typical zones that tended to radiate from the centre of the city. These included the Central Business District in the middle, surrounded by a 'zone of transition' – an area which was being 'invaded' by light industry and commerce, but into which the most marginal groups of city dwellers were also forced. This area contained ghettos, and what Burgess described as a 'black band'. Outside this was a working-class ring and, on the urban periphery, middle-class suburbs.

This model was largely based on impressionistic research, and hence since the 1920s there have been attempts to gain precision by quantifying the incidence of households with different social characteristics in defined small areas within cities. Beginning with that of Burgess, a variety of techniques for measurement and mapping were developed: land-use modelling, social-area analysis, factorial analysis – all with some affinity to human ecology approaches. This provided a basic, positivist, description of social differentiation within cities (a useful summary of these techniques can be found in Ley, 1983, pp. 60–84).

As a result of these exercises, a variety of models of segregation were advanced, each of which hypothesises a typical pattern for the distribution of major urban activities. The Chicago School



- District
- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Central Business District | 6 Heavy Manufacturing |
| 2 Wholesale Light Manufacturing | 7 Outlying Business District |
| 3 Low-class Residential | 8 Residential Suburb |
| 4 Medium-class Residential | 9 Industrial Suburb |
| 5 High-class Residential | 10 Commuters' Zone |

Figure 4.1 Models of urban land use: (a) Burgess's concentric zone model; (b) Hoyt's sectoral model; (c) Harris and Ullman's multiple nuclei model.

Source: C. D. Harris and E. Ullman, 'The Nature of Cities', *Annals, American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 242(1945): 7–17, fig.5.

model (a (see Figure 4.1) identified zones, radiating out from the centre of cities, each with its own specialised activities. Another model (b) suggests a sectoral pattern, with concentrations of activities in wedge-shaped corridors emanating from the middle. The third model (c) accepts that there are concentrations of activities in particular spatial areas, but that there is no regular pattern, with clusters of specialised activity spread around the city. According to Herbert and Johnston (1978, p. 20), testing the two main competing models – Burgess's concentric rings and Hoyt's (1939) sectors – indicated that

the geography of socio-economic status (i.e. social class) was largely sectoral; that of family status was largely zonal (with young families in the outer suburbs and the apartment renters close to the city centre), whereas that for ethnic status indicated significant clusters in both zones and sectors.

The original Chicago interest in spatial analysis of urban life continued to flourish in the USA until the 1970s, and in many

ways it remains a starting-point for geographical studies of the city. Subsequently, though, British and American geographers and sociologists lost interest in segregation. One reason for this among geographers was the reaction of the discipline to positivist and statistical techniques which came out of the growing influence of Marxism in the late 1970s, which had little use for that kind of empirical data, and an increasing recognition that statistical description was often wanting in providing explanations of social process or giving the feel for the texture of everyday life (see Ley, 1983, for an attempt at the latter). In particular, analyses of changes in urban segregation became more preoccupied with cultural processes that could not be examined simply by statistical methods (see section 4.3). Nevertheless, mapping social segregation in cities remains an important descriptive exercise and older methods of estimating levels of social segregation do play an indispensable role in the explanation of the processes involved in the production of social space.

4.2 Ghettoisation

Nowhere is the importance of segregation more apparent than in studies of the processes of ghettoisation. The term was initially coined to describe the areas of cities wherein Jews were contained in early modern Europe, densely packed residential tracts of land to which they were restricted by law. The ghettos of the contemporary western world most remarked upon by urban sociologists are in the cities of the USA, where black African Americans are disproportionately concentrated.

In America the process of segregation is severe and has been addressed in terms of ghettoisation and the emergence of an 'underclass'. Thus Massey and Denton (1993) talk about an American 'apartheid', so significant is the spatial concentration of, particularly, African Americans, but also Puerto Ricans, while Davis (1990) talks of a 'spatial apartheid', in referring to how the city is divided up, and the processes through which these divisions are maintained and enforced. As Massey and Denton (1993) show, ghettos emerged in the early twentieth century. In 1900 the typical black urban dweller lived in a predominantly white neighbourhood. The black ghetto emerged not as a reflection of

the wishes of African Americans but 'through a series of well-defined institutional practices, private behaviors, and public policies by which whites sought to contain growing urban black populations' (p. 10). Other substantial immigrant groups to the US – Italians, Poles and Jews – had initially concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, but they had never been locally in a majority and they had gradually left those areas as they became more prosperous. African Americans, by contrast, have remained in urban locations which are very homogeneous. For example, in 1950, 80 per cent of the black population of Chicago were living in areas where 90 per cent or more of the total population was black. Levels of segregation approaching this proportion have continued to characterise especially the deindustrialised metropolitan areas of the north-east and mid-west – Buffalo, Cleveland, Newark, New York and Philadelphia.

Massey and Denton go on to show how residential segregation itself concentrates poverty and creates the social characteristics which have come to be attributed in political debate to an underclass. As they argue:

Deleterious neighborhood conditions are built into the structure of the black community. They occur because segregation concentrates poverty to build a set of mutually reinforcing and self-feeding spirals of decline into black neighborhoods. When economic dislocations deprive a segregated group of employment and increase its rate of poverty, socioeconomic deprivation inevitably becomes more concentrated in neighborhoods where that group lives. The damaging social consequences that follow from increased poverty are spatially concentrated as well, creating uniquely disadvantaged environments that become progressively isolated – geographically, socially and economically – from the rest of society.

The effect of segregation on black well-being is structural, not individual. Residential segregation lies beyond the ability of any individual to change; it contrains black life chances irrespective of personal traits, individual motivations, or private achievements. (Massey and Denton, 1993, pp. 2–3)

For Massey and Denton, it is the combination of very poor economic opportunities for employment, and political powerlessness – both of which conditions are magnified by isolation in

areas of residence which are homogeneously black – that results in the concentration of social deprivation which is manifested as crime, violence and family breakdown.

How the social conditions that characterise the ghettos affect life experience is powerfully captured by Wacquant who has contributed much recently to the understanding of the life of ethnic groups situated in the inner-cities. Wacquant graphically describes aspects of a black American ghetto in offering an account, based on interviews, of the experience of a professional hustler in central Chicago. The skills of the hustler include ‘the ability to manipulate others, to inveigle and deceive them, if need be by joining violence to chicanery and charm, in the pursuit of immediate pecuniary gain’ (1999b, p. 142). In an account of how ‘Rickey’ gets by, Wacquant describes a distinctive social world which is precarious and dangerous, and from which there is little hope of escape for any of its members. Street fights, shootings, drug trafficking and prostitution are commonplace. ‘Born in Chicago the seventh and last son of a family of eleven children, Rickey has lived all his life in a large South Side project notorious across the country as a high-risk area.’ His high school, ‘with all the charm of a barracks (reinforced steel doors, barred windows, and beat-up sports facilities), ... attended exclusively by poor African-American children in the vicinity’, provided no adequate education (1999b, p. 147). ‘At 29, he has never had a steady job; his subsistence has always depended on hustling and mandated participation in a broad spectrum of more or less illegal activities’ (1999b, p. 148). This is a story of misery, lost opportunity, contextual constraints, habituation to degraded social environments and social relationships, and damage caused by the inadequate distribution of resources. Rickey, and others like him, are experts in their own daily lives, who at a practical level know exactly what they are doing and what they must do in order to look out for themselves and make the best of their circumstances. As Wacquant concludes, ‘Rickey is neither a social anomaly nor the representative of a deviant micro-society: rather he is the *product of the exacerbation of a logic of economic and racist exclusion* that imposes itself ever more stringently on all residents of the ghetto’ (1999b, p. 151).

In a polemical analytic essay, Wacquant (1997) argues that much discussion of the American ghetto is mistaken and

misleading. He insists that the phenomenon is not just a concentration of poor people, but rather that those people are poor because of the structural features of ‘ethnoracial closure and control’ (1997, p. 343). ‘The ghetto is an ethnoracial formation that combines and inscribes in the objectivity of space and group-specific institutions all four “elementary forms” of racial domination, namely, categorization, discrimination, segregation and exclusionary violence’ (1997, p. 343). He reminds us that the ghetto has a social organisation of its own which can be revealed through ethnographic investigation and which shows that it ‘is *organized according to different principles*, in response to a *unique set of structural and strategic constraints* that bear on the racialized enclaves of the city as on no other segment of America’s territory’ (p. 346). Wacquant goes on to describe the constraints as including:

- (1) the unrelenting press of economic necessity and widespread material deprivation caused by the withering away of the wage-labor economy, translating into outright deproletarianization for growing segments of the urban poor;
- (2) pervasive physical and social insecurity, fuelled by the glaring failings of public sector institutions and the correlative debilitation of local organizations, fostering in turn irregular socio-cultural patterns;
- (3) virulent racial antipathy conjoined with acute class prejudice resulting in a severe and systematic truncation of life chances and conduits of opportunity;
- (4) symbolic taint and territorial stigmatization, contaminating every area of social endeavor, from friendship and housing to schooling and jobs, reinforced by
- (5) bureaucratic apathy and administrative ineptness made possible by the electoral expendability of the black poor in a political field thoroughly dominated by corporate lobbies and moneyed interests. (Wacquant, 1997, pp. 346–7)

In another essay, Wacquant (1993) compares conditions in the Black Belts of America with those of the poorest suburbs of Paris, the Red Belt. Towns in the outer ring of Paris, previously the stronghold of working-class French communism, thrown onto bad times by the collapse of manual jobs in manufacturing industry, and more recently a major source of housing accommodation for immigrant populations, show some similarities with the

American situation. Respondents feel that their neighbourhoods are stigmatised, and they often accept these negative images of their own locations, though they are more likely to attribute this to their neighbours' behaviour rather than their own. This leads to a lack of trust and collapse of local solidarity. However, French traditions, which militate against ethnic mobilisation, together with greater diversity of ethnic groups in any one location, mean that this does not lead to the same type of stigmatisation as in the USA.

Life in the ghetto is one of habituation to extreme circumstances which, as Wacquant (1999a) points out, are largely a function of neglect at the level of state policy. While the situation in the French housing projects in working-class suburbs, *les banlieus*, is substantially different from the situation in the USA, he warns that if the French government begins to copy American policies it is in danger of introducing similarly degraded and dangerous conditions.

Britain scarcely has ghettos, according to Peach (1996), who used the 1991 Census, which asked about ethnic group identification for some minorities, to examine trends in the UK. He points out that the ethnic minority population is concentrated in England, in the major metropolitan county areas (London, Birmingham, Manchester and West Yorkshire), and living in the inner-city rather than the suburbs. He shows not only concentration in a relatively small number of urban areas, but also that some groups form very high percentages of the population in small areas. At ward level, for instance, 61 per cent of the population of Spitalfields, in Tower Hamlets, London, is Bangladeshi, and 53 per cent of the population of University ward in Bradford is Pakistani. Nevertheless this is highly unusual: 'these populations, either individually or collectively, rarely achieve a majority of the population of urban wards and relatively low proportions of the ethnic populations are found at such high concentration' (1996, p. 232). Peach uses what he refers to as 'the dual definition of the ghetto – that all the inhabitants of the area are of that group and that all members of that group are in such areas', by which criteria Britain does not exhibit the hyper-segregation typical of African Americans in the USA. Against such criteria Bangladeshis are most segregated, followed by Pakistanis and Indians. Black groups, of which Afro-Caribbeans

comprise the vast majority, are much less segregated than South Asians, and the level is decreasing.

The American pattern of segregation thus indicates the important intersection of class and ethnicity as it is expressed through residential location. Urban black people are deprived of economic opportunity, a situation which is explained and exploited through racialised practices, and this is stamped upon the urban environment through spatially restricted access to housing. Similar processes, with much less sharp social consequences, can be observed in many other circumstances. Generally, research has shown that ethnic segregation is more pronounced than class segregation (Badcock, 1984, p. 205). In general, European cities are less segregated than those of the USA: ethnic minorities live in very high concentrations in micro-areas of cities but because they are relatively few in numbers they make less of an impact on overall patterns. Hence one should be wary of assuming that the patterns of segregation identified in America apply to Europe.

Segregation in European cities is more likely to be along class lines, though religious affiliation is also sometimes important. But while we can see patterns, it is rare to find class-homogeneous social areas. Such homogeneity is greater in recently built housing, since any new residential development will tend to attract people in similar material circumstances (Young and Willmott, 1975, p. 193). In Britain in particular, the focus has been more on the relationship between class and housing tenure, identifying privileged access of middle-class households to owner-occupied property.

There has always been a practical, reformist interest in housing among urban researchers, as expressed in concern about housing shortages, overcrowding, sanitary facilities, level of rents, ease of access, and so forth. It was only from the 1960s, however, that it began to be a subject of theoretical attention. It was the work of Rex and Moore (1967) on the role of housing in race relations in Birmingham, England, that triggered debate. They were concerned with the way in which access to housing disadvantaged immigrant households, pushing them into inner-city 'zones of transition' where they rented or bought old and often dilapidated houses. The causes included various forms of discrimination, the city council's policies for the allocation of public housing among them. In Britain, increasing attention was paid to understanding

what difference housing *tenure* made to people's life chances, a particularly interesting issue in the UK where there was a dramatic shift from private renting to owner-occupation and council-tenancy after the Second World War. Another outcome was that much more attention was paid to the buying and selling of domestic property – in other words, to housing markets.

Although there are now many working-class owner-occupiers, entry into owner-occupation is powerfully affected by one's class situation, and it remains much easier for middle-class individuals to become owner-occupiers than for working-class individuals. Table 4.1 shows that the middle classes in Britain remain more likely to be owner-occupiers, while semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers disproportionately rent from the state. Savage *et al.* (1992a) carried out a survey of the housing destinations of the children of council tenants in Surrey, England. Around 85 per cent of children in middle-class jobs had moved into owner-occupation, but only 42 per cent of those children who were unskilled workers had done so. Second, Saunders' (1990) survey of the housing histories of a sample of owner-occupiers in Burnley, Derby and Slough showed that because middle-class people have, by and large, been in owner-occupation longer than working-class people, they have accrued more money from the housing market with which to improve their housing position. This is because they were more likely to buy their houses when they were extremely cheap, and have therefore gained more as their house prices have increased. Saunders's figures suggest that the average professional or managerial household accrued £30,523 in capital gains, compared with only £6,734 for the average working-class household (Saunders, 1990, p. 171). Third, inheritance of housing is becoming more significant, but it is predominantly middle-class people who benefit because the generation currently dying, and leaving their houses to kin, tend to have been owner-occupiers a long time. Since working-class households have only moved into owner-occupation on a large scale since 1960 they are, on average, younger and usually still alive. Finally, middle-class employees are often entitled to occupation-related benefits – mortgage subsidies and so forth – and hence are often able to have their housing costs paid by their employers (see the discussion of these points in Savage *et al.*, 1992b, ch. 5).

Table 4.1 Socio-economic group* of head of household: by tenure, 1998–9 (UK, %)

<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>Percentages</i>				
	<i>Owned outright</i>	<i>Owned with mortgage</i>	<i>Rented from social sector</i>	<i>Rented privately*</i>	<i>All tenures</i>
Economically active					
Professional	16	74	..	10	100
Employers and managers	14	75	4	6	100
Intermediate non-manual	14	66	6	13	100
Junior non-manual	14	59	17	10	100
Skilled manual	15	62	16	8	100
Semi-skilled manual	14	42	32	13	100
Unskilled manual	16	36	41	7	100
All economically active	15	63	13	9	100
Economically inactive					
Retired	62	8	26	4	100
Other	20	17	51	11	100
All economically inactive	50	11	33	6	100
All socio-economic groups	29	42	21	8	100

*Excludes members of the armed forces, economically active full-time students and those who were unemployed and had never worked.

+ Includes rent-free accommodation.

Source: *Social Trends*, 30(2000) Table 10.6.

Perhaps the best theoretical formulation of the way housing and employment processes work together to generate urban

inequalities is Badcock's (1984) book, *Unfairly Structured Cities*. Badcock conceives the city as a mechanism that redistributes real income between social groups. He argues that the demand for housing is primarily the result of the structure of employment. Position in the labour market is the principal determinant of household financial resources which is, in turn, the main factor constraining access to housing. City institutions, such as the transport system, educational provision, public amenities, etc., act as a secondary mechanism in the distribution of resources. Living in a 'good area' means easy access to a supply of high-quality facilities and services that are unevenly spread geographically. He argues that the urban land and housing markets operate to reinforce and compound the inequalities initially arising from the labour market. Local and central states intervene sometimes to moderate the tendency for privileges to concentrate through redistributive policies in favour of the initially disadvantaged. Moreover, groups of people unprepared to accept the existing allocation of benefits organise to improve their own circumstances – though then the more powerful the group the more likely it is to succeed. The ultimate outcome of these mechanisms determines important dimensions of the quality of life.

4.3 Suburbanisation and gentrification

We have maintained that processes of social segregation in the city should not be seen as operating independently from those in the sphere of employment, but that they combine together to produce distinct forms of urban inequality. This section will elaborate this argument by considering how important recent developments in urban segregation are linked to wider forms of social and spatial inequality. Particular built forms, with their associated social tone, are linked to the operation of wider social inequalities, and are not the simple product of economic processes.

Furthermore, we also want to show that the urban form is not simply the result of the housing preferences of preconstituted social groups. Although structural inequalities are not themselves affected by urban residential patterns, the wider formation of people into social groups is very strongly affected by the existence of a suitable habitat. Hence the production of specific types of

urban environment is itself a vital factor in the formation of groups with shared cultural values and outlooks. The rise of suburbia went hand in hand with the hegemony of the middle-class nuclear family; and the more recent development of gentrification is a new form of cultural expression of those middle classes seeking to find alternatives to the nuclear family.

4.3.1 Suburbanisation

Most residential areas, especially those of the working class, lay in close proximity to places of work during the nineteenth century. In the absence of quick means of private or public transport, people's place of work was likely to be within walking distance of home. This 'employment linkage' was broken with the onset of suburbanisation, a process that occurred from the later nineteenth century in Britain and the USA. In some countries, but not all, new means of transport coincided with the building of new houses on the outer edges of cities, much as the Chicago School concentric ring model described. First trams and railways, then the automobile, made relatively longer journeys to work possible.

Suburbanisation, defined as the decentralisation of population from the cities, happened in class waves. First the bourgeoisie, then sections of the middle classes and eventually the working class, began to live away from the city centre. The rate of growth of suburbs varied from decade to decade and from country to country. The USA has the most extensive suburban development, and mass suburbanisation occurred after the Second World War. The effect has been a shift in land-use from relatively concentrated cities to sprawling metropolitan regions. Such spreading of housing has often been opposed by planners, city authorities worried about losing revenue, conservation interests, and so on, but without much overall success, and the US remains, at heart, a staunchly anti-urban society. The UK is somewhat different, partly because despite its prevalent anti-urban sentiment, it has maintained comparatively compact cities, with London still bounded by its Green Belt designed precisely to preclude urban sprawl.

The development of large tracts of land as new suburbs, the typical form of new private housing development in the USA and Australia, has the effect of creating new settlements that initially attract a fairly homogeneous population – nuclear families with

children, each with similar financial means, are typical new residents. This probably was one basis of the notion that the suburban location produces particular styles of life. Such uniformity usually declines as the housing ages and is sold as requirements change. In the US and more recently in the UK, the last two decades have seen the creation of purpose-built 'gated communities', where access is restricted through high-level security, as suburbanites seek to protect their way of life from others.

Not all housing on the peripheries of cities can be seen as suburban. In Britain, Swenarton and Taylor (1985) identified the tendency for the new inter-war suburban areas to be owner-occupied. But policy changed thereafter, many council estates being built on the periphery of large cities, as in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and London. Initially these had a fairly wide mix of social classes – indeed the early estates were deliberately designed for the lower middle class and respectable working class – though like all British public-sector housing, they have increasingly become the homes of the least skilled manual workers, the unemployed and the retired. Shifts in industrial location (since manufacturing industry has also decentralised from central urban locations) significantly expanded employment in suburban workplaces from the 1960s onwards in Britain. In the USA that process began earlier, from the turn of century when, as Gordon (1984) argued, it was seen as one way of dealing with heightening class struggle in industrial cities.

Descriptions of the process of suburbanisation are fairly well agreed but explanations are contested. There are disputes between neoclassical economists, Marxists and feminists, among others. The orthodox accounts tend to assume that the growth of suburbs represents the meeting of supply and demand for a particular type of housing and residential environment. More specifically it is held that land is cheaper and more plentiful on the fringes of cities and that people prefer to live in reasonably priced, spacious houses with gardens providing they can conveniently get to work. Such an explanation does not explain why the suburban solution emerges in particular times and places.

This is the starting-point of Marxist accounts (Walker, 1981). Distinctive to these is the idea of the second circuit of capital and the building of urban infrastructure as a way to solve problems of over-accumulation (see the discussion in section 3.2). The building of the suburbs allowed capital to be invested in the built

environment, so resolving the problem of over-accumulation. This explains the precise period when suburbanisation developed on a mass scale, in the period immediately after the Second World War, since this was a period of economic growth, when the tendency for over-accumulation reached particular heights, and a period when the state provided specific inducements for suburban building. The Marxist account also stressed that suburbs tended to be class-exclusive and, in the USA, were influential in class formation, both increasing the solidarity of the middle classes and creating fragmentation within the working class. As Walker put it: 'The suburbs are not middle class because the middle class lives there; the middle class lives there because the suburbs could be made middle class' (Walker, 1981, p. 397).

Weberian accounts, while accepting many of the economic factors just described (though not subscribing to their theoretical premises) usually emphasise more the market for housing. Suburbs were originally built largely for owner-occupation – single-family houses, detached in Australia and USA, more likely semi-detached in the UK. They developed a particular image – as containing the nuclear households of the middle classes, often with a particular life-style (see e.g. Fox, 1985, for strong claims about the homogeneity of the American suburbs in the 1950s as middle-class and privatised). To the extent that such a portrayal is true – and there are strong arguments advanced by Gans that we can no more talk of a suburban way of life than we can of an urban one – it is more a function of the way in which houses are financed, built and initially populated. New housing estates tend to be occupied by people in similar income brackets who are at similar life-cycle stages. But it is doubtful whether the explanatory factor is the suburb itself.

Feminist accounts offer yet another explanatory perspective on the suburbs. Davidoff and Hall (1983) document the coincidence in Birmingham, England, of moves by bourgeois households to suburban locations and the intensification of domestic life for women in the Victorian era. Wives became household managers, directing servants, but lost any public or business roles they previously occupied. For the middle classes in both the UK and the USA, the disappearance of the domestic servant, which began round the time of the First World War, altered some of the constraints on suburban living. This partly reflected the unpopularity of the job, and partly the growth of average wages, which made

servants comparatively more expensive to their employers. Thus, whereas many middle-class women had been effectively domestic managers, overseeing the work of sometimes quite a number of servants who tended to do the most labour-intensive, dirty and monotonous jobs, they now became housewives, working alone to complete the many tasks that comprise housework. The position of women living in the suburbs was perhaps even less envious than those in more dense urban areas since there were fewer services available. One response to this new situation was the adoption of new domestic technology; the purchase of mass-produced consumer durables increased sharply in the inter-war years, with advertisements typically showing the suburban housewife as the user of such machines. The advertising clichés, linking housewives, nuclear families and assorted industrial products, are legendary (see Glucksmann, 1990).

Cowan's book *More Work for Mother* (1983) examines the changing content and technological context of domestic labour in the USA. It shows how housework alters over time, and differs between groups (richer and poorer) at the same period, but never reduces in quantity. One might have thought that with more services available for purchase and new domestic technology it would become less onerous. However, it continues to be said that a woman's work is never done; and there is little perceptible difference in women's response to their labours. The reasons are many, but one is that some new technologies create extra tasks; this was the case with the automobile in inter-war years in America where increased suburban living meant that housewives then had to travel to shops and ferry children around – a new set of jobs. Other technologies encourage standards of living to rise: new laundering techniques, a more readily available water supply and washing machines, not to mention more clothes, also make more work for mother.

Suburbanisation, then, emerged from and reinforced social inequality. The building of the suburbs made profits for builders and landowners. It left the poorest sections of the population in the central areas of cities. Residence in a smart middle-class suburb reduced some of the negative consequences of the experience of modernity and, because the housing market effectively excluded the less affluent, helped to create solidarity among the middle classes. However, quality of life varied from one suburb to another, with the ones furthest from the urban cores housing the

working classes and providing limited amenities. In addition, suburbanisation reproduced gender inequalities, for location in the suburbs restricted job opportunities for married women and further entrenched the division of labour within the household. It was in the suburbs that the nuclear family reached its mid-twentieth-century prominence. Here the husband went out to work, often in the city centre, whilst the wife stayed at home, carrying out domestic tasks, without help from servants.

In the recent past, revisionist accounts of the suburb have argued that the meaning of the suburban space has shifted from its association with nuclear middle-class families (Silverstone, 1997). It has been suggested that the increasing individual freedom possible in low-density suburban developments allows individual non-conformity to be nurtured. The suburban roots of British popular culture have been commented on by Firth (1997) and Medhurst (1997). However, whilst some aspects of cultural diversity may be nourished by suburban space, this seems to be most common amongst those bought up in the suburbs but who have subsequently moved elsewhere. Baumgartner's (1988) powerful account of privatised suburban lifestyles in the United States, in which residents morally withdraw from each other's actions, seems a more telling account of contemporary suburbia. This explains why urban living is attractive to those rejecting middle-class suburban values.

4.3.2 *Gentrification*

Since the beginning of the 1970s there has been a lot of scholarly debate about gentrification, which in its loosest definition means the movement of middle classes back into city centres. Ruth Glass apparently coined the term in the 1950s to refer to changes in the housing stock of London. Gentrification is identifiable as the coincidence of four processes:

1. resettlement and social concentration entailing the displacement of one group of residents with another of higher social status;
2. transformation in the built environment exhibiting some distinctive aesthetic features and the emergence of new local services;
3. the gathering together of persons with a putatively shared culture and lifestyle, or at least with shared, class-related, consumer preferences;
4. economic reordering of property values, a commercial opportunity for the construction industry, and often an extension of

the system of the private ownership of domestic property (Warde, 1991).

This process has occurred in most of the larger Western cities.

A classic description of gentrification was described in Sharon Zukin's *Loft Living* (1988). She describes change in an area of Manhattan, New York, which shifted from being an area of garment industry sweatshops, through deindustrialisation, to an area where Bohemian artists took over factory-floor spaces and turned them into domestic 'lofts'. This was an expression of a certain aesthetic taste for restored industrial premises and was a cheap way of obtaining an inner-city place of residence. It made the area 'interesting', and as it encouraged the opening of art galleries and some specialist shops, the place became relatively habitable and carried some radical chic. This, in turn, attracted the attention of property developers who began to see opportunities for profit in further expanding desirable residential accommodation. At that point much wealthier middle-class people began to buy lofts and effectively priced Bohemian artists out of the local housing market. As a result the New York City Council pronounced the area an artists' quarter, actually protecting the artistic community to some extent, in order to retain what had become a tourist attraction. With the social upgrading of the resident population went also the opening of assorted specialist boutiques and service facilities, which completely transformed the area over a period of less than twenty years. It amounted to the revitalisation of an inner-city area and it made vast fortunes for firms in the property and building trades who bought up and converted lofts for upper-middle-class use. What this shows, among other things, is the link between capital accumulation and aesthetic taste or lifestyle and the process whereby social areas in cities change their functions over time. Zukin frames her explanation in concepts derived from Harvey, but gives considerable weight to cultural factors shaping living spaces.

Much of the academic debate has concerned the relative importance of economic and cultural factors, often presented as supply-side versus demand-side explanations. It is now agreed that explanation requires sustained consideration of both. On the supply-side, the nature of the inherited built environment and changes in the value of land and property are the basis for economic opportunities for large and small capital investors.

Financial considerations of ground rent and accumulation from property determined that real-estate development in certain areas of cities becomes a profitable use of capital. An early and coherent account was formulated in terms of the logic of the 'rent gap'.

The 'rent-gap' explanation, developed by Neil Smith and drawing on Harvey's work, offered a theoretically concise account of why gentrification occurs. It explains why some areas become ripe for gentrification. It is a matter of the financial returns to landowners on their property. If in a particular district the rent obtainable from letting houses falls, because of deterioration of properties, for example, the value of the land declines with respect to current usage. Hence existing landlords often allow properties to deteriorate even further because they will never get returns on investment in maintenance. At a certain point in this cycle of decline, though, it becomes profitable to change the use of the land. Land, and the buildings on it which have effectively been abandoned, can be bought up very cheaply and houses attractive to middle-class tenants or owners can be erected at a profit. This account probably applies most forcefully to the USA where some areas of cities tended to become largely derelict before housing was renovated by big property developers. The sociology of 'real estate business' is of major importance in America. Dereliction occurs less frequently in the UK, where gentrification often initially resembles more an informal social movement as individual purchasers renovate their newly bought Victorian working-class cottages in an approved style: Williams (1986, p. 57) claimed to be able to spot gentrification by 'brass door knockers, pastel colours, paper lanterns, bamboo blinds and light, open interiors, now supplemented by iron bars, security screens and alarm systems'. However there are intra- and international variations in approved aesthetic styles of gentrification: what is considered worthy of restoration varies between Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, for example. There are also international differences in the proportions of restorations of old houses (prominent in Australia and the UK), as against demolition and new construction (more prevalent in USA and Canada). Further, there comes a time when some of the housing gentrified in one round gets redeveloped in a further wave of investment and restructuring. Thus Lees (2000) notes how the very rich personnel employed in financial services property have bought

housing near the financial cores of New York and London, raising prices to levels which people like the first-generation of gentrifiers cannot afford. The process of the sequential reutilisation of land for different purposes creates cycles of redevelopment that vary from place to place, partly indeed as a result of public policy. Many urban authorities now see encouragement of gentrification processes as means to revitalise their city infrastructure and increase revenue from local taxation.

Hence, urban sociologists have identified commercial and production interests lying behind a process that is often thought of as a matter of individual taste. However, rent-gap theory does not, of itself, explain shared taste. Its critics concede that it might identify one precondition of gentrification, but that it offers no purchase on the cultural aspects of the preference for living in the city. In particular, as Zukin emphasises, it ignores the fact that an essential prerequisite for gentrification is also a process whereby a cultural vanguard initially move to an area to give it cultural legitimacy.

Gentrification, it is widely agreed, is primarily a class phenomenon; the upgrading of the class composition of an area is a defining feature of the process. However, compared with suburbanisation and the movement of the middle classes to rural locations, it is not a very popular choice of the middle classes. It is the trend of a middle-class minority. The role of 'the new middle class' has often been considered central (Ley, 1996; Smith, 1996). Explaining what are the key characteristics of that minority of gentrifiers has, however, proved difficult because they come from several different sections of the middle class (Bondi, 1999). The middle classes of the first wave, following the bohemian artists, were typically college-educated professional households, not necessarily with very high incomes, whose social values were influenced by the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s. However, the employment characteristics of gentrifiers do not differentiate them from the middle classes who live elsewhere.

This can be illustrated from Butler's (1995, 1997) study of Hackney, London. His account shows that the well-established middle classes are also present in inner urban locations. In a study in 1988–9 of two newly gentrifying enclaves in Hackney, one of the poorest boroughs in inner London, Butler showed that the residents typically held cosmopolitan values, with positive images of city-living based on a deep dislike of suburban environments,

an attachment to the area in which they were living, and strong political aversions to the Conservative Party and reductions in public expenditure. Leisure activities tended to involve sociability, with quite extensive usage of the cultural facilities of central London. These features distinguished the interviewees, who were predominantly professional and administrative workers, from the average members of their occupational groups; indeed the gentrifiers had higher incomes, longer education and came from higher social classes than the average. If not living alone, they were overwhelmingly (88 per cent) in dual-earner households. They represented, thus, a fraction of the British middle class, distinctive in economic, cultural and political dispositions.

Subsequent research by Butler (2002) indicates that very specific fractions of the middle class can be found in different kinds of gentrified areas within London. Battersea has been transformed by the deregulation of City of London financial services and appeals to affluent city workers looking for a congenial space to raise their families. Gentrification in Brixton by contrast, draws on the alternative culture of its black residents and is presented as an alternative to mainstream white middle-class culture. This suggests that gentrification is a differentiated process whereby various social groups are being sorted according to increasingly specific and particular criteria. Rather than seeing the emergence of urban spaces that lose specificity as suggested by Eade *et al.* (1997), this indicates the growing importance of urban specificity (see also Savage *et al.*, 2002).

The class dimension of the process can perhaps be appreciated more clearly from consideration of the relationships between classes than from the socio-demographic characteristics of gentrifiers. As authors like Jacobs (1996), Marcuse (1986) and Smith (1996) have emphasised, the process is often, though certainly not always, a process of displacement which benefits the incoming middle class at the expense of working-class local inhabitants, as witnessed by overt social conflict. The development of housing for executives employed in the City in Docklands in the East End of London provides examples of conflict that involves both class and ethnic antagonism. As Foster (1997) shows, construction of walled private estates for the rich in an area that contains poor white working-class households and a substantial group of Bangladeshi households too, generated considerable social tension and political friction.

Such research disabuses us of the notion that gentrification is an unambiguously beneficial process of inner-city revitalisation. For a start, it often means displacement for indigenous, poorer groups who usually become more marginalised as they move on to other areas within the city. Improved services and renovated exteriors are only beneficial to part of the population. Concentration of wealthier, better-educated citizens in particular districts merely deepens residential segregation. According to Smith (1996), gentrification is the re-taking of the central city by the middle class from the poor and marginal people who had inhabited it in previous decades. Through what he calls *urban revanchism* – meaning in French ‘revenge’ – he contends that the centres of cities are being suburbanised. Christopherson (1994) in her work on the North American city points to this process and argues that we have witnessed the downtown (or the city centre) being recreated in the image of the mall – as a theme park (Crawford, 1992; Sorkin, 1992).

Careful empirical studies of gentrifying areas indicate that class processes are strongly inflected by gender, sexuality and life-course stage. One sociologically important precipitating factor in the growth of gentrification has been the rate of new household formation. Demand for houses increased sharply in the mid-1960s as the children in the baby boom of the immediate post-war years began to set up their own homes. There was not sufficient new suburban building to meet the demand and anyway suburban housing was often too expensive for young couples; hence, the search for ‘improving neighbourhoods’ within the city. Subsequently, housing demand was maintained as a result of more people living alone. The effects on Western cities of changing household composition, size and organisation, is much underestimated. In Britain by 2001, 29 per cent of households contained only one person, and another 35 per cent only two people. In big cities households containing one or two adults make up a very large majority of the total. Large family households are a decreasing proportion of all households and are relatively rare in big cities. They are especially rare in gentrifying areas where, by comparison, single people, male and female, have a disproportionate presence. To some extent, then, gentrification reflects a change in Western household types.

One distinctive element of gentrifying households is the extent of the participation of career-oriented women in professional and managerial labour markets. The distinctive social attributes of populations of these areas include: an unusually high proportion of young and single women; very high proportions of women in professional and technical occupations; high levels of academic credentials; a high proportion of dual-earner households, but few children; presence of young single professional women; and the postponement of marriage and child-bearing (Beauregard, 1986; Smith, 1987; Mills, 1988; Rose, 1988; Bondi, 1991 and 1999). Reasons for this include increasing numbers of women in highest income jobs, with associated housing opportunities and constraints; minimising journey-to-work costs for households containing more than one earner; facilitating the substitution of marketed services for domestic ones; diversifying ‘ways of carrying out reproductive work’, partly because there is a ‘concentration of supportive services’ and ‘a “tolerant” ambience’ (Rose, 1988, p. 131). The living arrangements of the central city permit women to reorient their behaviour in the housing market to meet domestic and labour-market pressures. Gentrification is thus related to changes in women’s career patterns, and has accelerated in parallel with the gradual extension of educational opportunities for women since the 1960s, wider employment prospects for married women in particular, and revised calculations regarding the integration of the activities of income generation and child-rearing. Among single households generally, access to commercial alternatives to services typically provided by women in family households can be readily obtained. For dual-earner households, living in the inner city is a solution to problems of access to work and home and of combining paid and unpaid labour. Thus, for utilitarian reasons, the life-course stage reached and the gender division of labour within households support the demand for inner-city residence.

Besides the use-value of inner-city location there are also cultural reasons for gentrification. The social marginality of first-stage gentrifiers has often been noted (e.g. Zukin, 1988) and their challenge to the model of cultural orthodoxy presented by suburban life was symbolic of a set of contested social values. Knopp (1998), among others, points to a connection between gentrification and expression of gay sexual identity, another instance of spatial

preferences being associated with cultural alternatives to dominant norms of heterosexual family household formation. For example, the gentrification of some parts of the centre of Manchester in the 1990s went hand-in-hand with a growth in what is known as the 'gay village' and a strong assertion of sexual identity by the city's male and female gay community.

Gentrification, like other forms of segregation, is an expression of inequality and social closure. Its form varies from city to city, influenced by the differential histories of local economic and cultural development. It is governed as much by forms of household organisation as by capitalist logic. The rise of gentrification is also the story of the emergence of new forms of organisation of sections of the middle class, and thus shows how the formation of particular urban spaces is intimately tied up with the development of social groups themselves.

4.3.3 *Negotiating the newly gentrified city*

Of course, urban sociologists have long argued that the condition of, and the structure of, the city and the suburb are closely related. And as such, it should be no surprise that the processes of suburbanisation and gentrification are closely intertwined, with what happens in the outskirts of the city having an effect on the way the city centre is organised.

As some elements of the middle classes have returned to British and US cities as part of the gentrification, the way the centre – or in the US, the downtown – is experienced by those who live in it, or work in it, has changed. Urban managers have been under pressure on two fronts. First, as suburban shopping malls have rolled-out across North America and Western Europe, so the place of the city centre as the dominant area where people buy goods and services has come under threat. Despite still being largely an urban society, an increasingly number of the consumption needs of the British population were beginning to be met in the 1980s through visiting the new malls, in Sheffield (Meadow Hall), Birmingham (Merry Hill) and North London (Brent Cross). Although planning restrictions were tightened in the 1990s, the opening up of the Bluewater Centre in Kent and the Trafford Centre in Greater Manchester reaffirmed that suburban 'cathedrals of consumption' are here to stay, at least in the short

term. In turn, as people began to spend more time and more money in visiting the new purpose-built shopping centres, so urban economies began to suffer. Shops and leisure facilities such as cinemas were closed down and public spaces became under-used. The movement of retailers to out-of-town malls also reflected the growth in the number of cars per household, and the increasing mobility that accompanies this, alongside other changes in society around patterns of consumption and expenditure.

Second, as part of the movement back to the centres of cities, residents and consumers have begun to make new demands on the urban economic and social infrastructure. Now accustomed to secure and sanitised places to shop and to carefully maintained open spaces, the experience of the mall has been recreated in the contemporary centres of British and American cities. Newly designed streets, well-lit arcades and comfortable seating have been introduced to improve the quality of the 'shopping experience' in Britain's cities. According to work in the US by Crawford (1992), Sorkin (1992) and Christopherson (1994), what we are witnessing is the emergence of 'the city as theme park'. An accompaniment to gentrification, the restructuring of urban space and of the social relations that dominate in these places is not restricted to either the suburban or urban mall. As Crawford (1992, p. 28) argues:

The spread of malls around the world has accustomed large numbers of people to behaviour patterns that inextricably link shopping with diversion and pleasure. The transformation of shopping into an experience that can occur in any setting has led to the next stage in mall redevelopment: 'spontaneous malling', a process by which urban spaces are transformed into malls without new buildings or developers ... Today, hotels, office buildings, cultural centers, and museums virtually duplicate the layouts and formats of shopping malls.

As the middle classes have returned to the city, bringing with them their cultural values and consumption patterns, so the social fabric of the city has changed. New café bars and restaurants have opened up, to meet the needs of the new residents. And in order to ensure that people can shop safely – and mirroring the tight security regimes in place in shopping malls – cameras have become

regular fixtures on street corners, and on the entrances of restaurants and shops. The seminal work of Davis (1990, 1992) points to how this increasing emphasis on security and surveillance can lead to what he calls the 'destruction of public space'. In his rather dystopic account of the contemporary restructuring of the built environment and the socio-spatial relations in Los Angeles, Davis argues that the recreation of the city centre as shopping mall requires the 'militarization of city life'. By this he means the 'increasing arsenal of security systems and ... obsession with the policing of social boundaries through architecture' (Davis, 1992, pp. 154–5). And as is made clear, the emergence of a new urban built environment has serious implications for social inequalities:

[In LA] the new Downtown is designed to ensure a seamless continuum of middle-class work, consumption, and recreation, insulated from the city's 'unsavoury' streets. Ramparts and battlements, reflective glass and elevated pedways, are tropes in an architectural language warning off the underclass Other. (1992, p. 159)

Although most extreme in the North American cities, such as LA and New York, the same patterns of social-spatial restructuring can be observed in the UK. Redevelopment in cities such as Glasgow, Manchester and Bristol has included the growth in new city-centre shopping malls, designer-strewn pedestrianised streets, and the introduction of CCTV and private security guards, connected to each other and the police through walkie-talkies. Those viewed as undesirable – what Davis refers emotively to as 'the underclass Other' – when not excluded are closely monitored.

4.4 Changing inequalities? Polarisation, exclusion and survival strategies

Segregation *per se* is not necessarily pernicious. If one section of the middle class prefers to live in suburbia while another selects a gentrified urban location there may be no apparent injustice. If, however, middle-class households systematically dispossess poorer ones, by fuelling house price inflation or, through neglect, causing the closure of shops and services that previously served local working-class people (a process which also occurs in the British

countryside), then there are grounds for concern. For what will become of the displaced people? Because in general there is competition between individuals and social groups for access to urban spaces of different quality, such displaced people are in danger of being expelled into areas characterised by an inferior environment and poorer facilities. Such transitions are matters of social and political importance, and may become sources of social conflict if perceived as increasing absolute or relative deprivation.

4.4.1 Social polarisation

There is, thus, considerable debate about the changing urban map of poverty and privilege. The patterns of ethnic segregation which constitute the ghetto in the USA (see above) have remained fairly constant since the early twentieth century. More recently, since 1980 there has been a general tendency in Britain and the USA for income and wealth to become more unequal. The extent to which this takes a spatial form, such that it can be seen on the ground in the city, and through what mechanisms it might transpire, has been examined through concepts of social polarisation and social exclusion.

As Mohan (2000) points out, the concept of polarisation is often used loosely and it has associated measurement difficulties. Polarisation implies increasing inequalities between social groups and the existence or potential for tension or conflict between groups. There is a complex mix of processes which might determine the nature and extent of polarisation, from changes in job opportunities to adjustment to welfare regimes. Available evidence suggests that processes of polarisation can be detected in recent decades in countries including Britain, the USA and Canada (e.g. Massey and Denton, 1993; Dorling and Woodward, 1996; Hamnett, 1996; Walks, 2001).

The diagnosis of the social polarisation of the city was adumbrated with particular reference to the 'world city' (see section 3.1). Sassen's hypotheses, based on studies of New York and Los Angeles, have been particularly influential. She argued that the internationalisation of the world economy, the greater mobility of both capital and people, and the concentration of the headquarters of financial and business services in a few major cities across the globe had significant impact upon their social

structures. In particular she noted the decline of manufacturing activity, along with its associated manual workforce, and their replacement with, on the one hand, an élite core of very highly paid professional and managerial workers and, on the other, a myriad of poorly paid workers, who were often immigrants, employed in the provision of routine services. Income inequalities in world cities thus became especially polarised, as middle-income jobs disappeared – though there is evidence of similar, if less pronounced, trends in other geographical locations too.

One empirical study providing support for Sassen's thesis, and also examining its detailed consequences for the spatial aspects of polarisation, is reported by Walks (2001). In this study of Toronto, Canada, a second-rank world city, the distribution of population, occupation and income in 1971 was compared with that in 1991. The comparison over time was argued to be particularly appropriate because this period experienced economic restructuring which constituted transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy. In those years the Toronto urban region grew in population by 48 per cent, becoming 'the most important city in Canada'; manufacturing employment fell from 14 to 10 per cent; professional occupations increased from 30 to 42 per cent; and the percentage of its population foreign-born increased from 34 per cent to 38 per cent. Walks shows that several forms of polarisation occurred as a result. Whereas in 1971 the primary spatial line of division in the city was between the predominantly poor inner-city area and more affluent suburbs, the pattern was more complex by 1991. The central inner-city region was more sharply differentiated as a result of an influx of professional and managerial workers, with ex-manual-workers, low-level service workers and the unemployed shifting to peripheral inner-area locations and into the more mature inner suburbs. The inner city thus revealed high levels of income disparity within and between census tracts. The mature suburbs, built in the period after 1945, characterised by the largest increases in inequality and disparity between areas, were beginning to resemble a zone of transition, colonised, except for a few grander parts, by areas where the poor, including immigrants, were being located. The newer suburbs, which had scarcely existed in 1971, were more homogeneous in income levels though they housed people from a wide range of occupations. The most distant parts

of the urban region had been home to agricultural and manufacturing workers but by 1991 professionals were the dominant occupational class. The overall pattern was, then, more highly differentiated, but with a perceptible polarisation, with occupational bifurcation, more segregation by occupational and immigrant groups, and more unequal income distributions among both households and local areas (Walks, 2001, p. 439). Those with fewest resources were, in other words, relatively poorer than before and highly concentrated on the edges of the inner city and in parts of the older inner suburbs.

When she first diagnosed polarisation in the world city, Sassen anticipated that one effect would be the emergence of a 'urban underclass' of people permanently excluded from good housing and secure employment. The term 'underclass' has most frequently been used to depict the condition of the inhabitants of the American ghetto (see section 4.2 above). Though the concept can be traced back to Victorian times, the current conservative version (e.g. Murray, 1990) sparked off political controversy by suggesting that there is a substantial minority of the population who share a common culture characterised by a lack of motivation to gain employment and who willingly depend upon the state for subsistence. It was argued that the emergent culture encouraged dependence, permitted avoidance of employment and sanctioned single parenthood – three primary features of an underclass. Portraying people in this manner suggests that they are personally responsible for their own unemployment, poverty and exclusion, rather than the unfortunate victims of structural economic change and inadequate institutional provision, and that they have become a very distinct and irredeemable section of the population by virtue of their values and behaviour.

The balance of argument militates against accepting the idea that there is an underclass in Britain (for a summary of the evidence in USA and UK, see Devine, 1997). Empirical studies tend to show that the unemployed are not significantly different in relevant respects from the rest of the working class and exhibit no sign of a culture of dependency. Moreover, there is considerable movement in and out of employment, as there is for poverty which affects a substantial proportion of the working class intermittently. Indeed, Berthoud and Gershuny (2000, p. 117) using panel data for the 1990s show that 46 per cent of people

who were poor last year were no longer poor this year'. In this sense the concept makes a misleading appeal to the concept of 'class', because the condition is relatively unstable. The same is true for single parenthood, which in three-quarters of cases arises from divorce and separation, and is typically ended by a subsequent marriage. Thus, analysis suggests that the 'underclass' is not, conceptually speaking, a type of class at all. Marshall *et al.* (1996, p. 40) report from analysis of representative social surveys of the populations of Britain and the USA in 1991 that, like other researchers, they could not identify a stratum of people at the bottom of the social hierarchy with 'particular attitudes to work, job search behaviour, degree of social marginalization or participation'.

To deny the existence of an underclass in no way contradicts the observation that there is increasing concentration of deprivation among some groups in some parts of most cities. In contemporary European political debate it is more likely that concern for inequality will be expressed in terms of the more neutral but nebulous concept of social exclusion. Again, there is dispute about the nature and causes of exclusion (Silver, 1994; Levitas, 1998). The debates concern the restructuring of welfare states, and whichever diagnosis of the problem is preferred determines the relevant policy remedy. Significantly, however, this way of addressing the issue avoids use of the term 'class'. As Silver (1994, p. 572) points out, the notion of exclusion may 'distract attention from the overall rise in inequality, general unemployment and family breakdown that is affecting all social classes'. Then, if by separating out categories of risk, focus is placed on the 'more spectacular forms of poverty requiring emergency aid, policies to combat exclusion may make it easier to target money on smaller social categories, like the homeless or the long-term unemployed'.

One other topic of importance in assessing claims about the creation of an underclass concerns the extent of an informal economy. What is crucial here is whether it is possible for those excluded from secure formal employment to rely on informal work and household resources as compensation, or whether, by contrast, it is those who are already advantaged in the labour market who stand to benefit most (Williams and Windebank, 1998).

4.4.2 *Getting by: households and their work strategies*

While revenue from property and occupation is the most basic source of inequalities between individuals in capitalist societies, there are other kinds of resources that can be mobilised in pursuit of social survival. Urban sociology has always shown an interest in the contribution of reciprocal relations within communities and, more recently, has investigated the nature of the informal economy as a source of supplementary or alternative resources for those involved in appropriate social networks. The informal economy in some accounts (e.g. Pahl, 1984) refers only to communal economic arrangements – sometimes legal, sometimes not – which are beyond the scope of formal or state regulation. In other accounts (e.g. Harding and Jenkins, 1989) it also includes work done within households. We prefer the first usage, since the familial social relations typically involved in domestic work are significantly different from those of the communal exchange of labour and goods. Both work done at home and that exchanged with friends, neighbours and associates contribute to household standards of living and thus can affect the nature of inequalities. Many authors have seen these processes as particularly critical in the advanced societies in recent years as increased unemployment and cut-backs in welfare provision tend to reduce the resources of the poorer sections of the population.

This concern with the nature of the informal economy and household relations overlaps with the sociology of the family and there are some close connections between literatures on the family in industrial society and those on urbanism, as we suggested in Chapter 2. For instance, in the UK the studies of Willmott and Young in Bethnal Green and Woodford are much quoted as part of our understanding of social relations in neighbourhoods in the city. Community studies have also usually taken detailed note of behaviour inside households. One aspect of what we know about mining communities is that they are patriarchal, characterised by disparities of power between husbands and wives (e.g. Dennis *et al.*, 1956). Another key feature about family sociology is the exploration of levels of contact between members of different households, sometimes with other kin but equally often with neighbours, members of interest groups and associations, etc. Debates about privatisation of the family, the loss of community

and the political consequences of owner-occupation hang on these inter-household relationships.

Feminist scholars in particular have insisted that we should use the concept of household rather than family partly in order properly to appreciate gender inequalities in heterosexual relationships and partly to register changing domestic arrangements. Indeed, concentration on households has produced a lot of new insights into change in the city and in everyday life, as well as throwing more light on gender relations.

Margaret Nelson and Joan Smith's (1999) *Working Hard and Making Do: surviving in small town America* is conceived as a study of the effect of deindustrialisation, and restructuring in manufacturing industry, on the lives and lifestyles of manual workers in north-east America. The research involved a survey and many in-depth interviews in 1991–2. Much is made of a contrast between the old and the new economy. The semi-rural area of Vermont (Coolidge County) saw the downsizing of the main industrial employer which had provided secure and reasonably well-paid jobs for several decades. The firm (Sterling Products) laid many people off. Replacement jobs were from new firms who offered poorer-quality contracts and less-skilled jobs. The argument hangs around the difference between households where at least one person still had a 'good' job, and those where there were only 'bad' jobs. Good jobs were defined as those which had five of the following six features: all year round, full time, permanent, had some benefits attached (health insurance and paid holidays), where layoffs were infrequent, and where there was some level of bureaucratisation (some number of employees). About half the households had at least one person in a good job, about half did not.

An important aspect of the study was its emphasis on the household as a unit. It depended not so much on an individual's location (if they lived in couple households – which was the basis of the study) as on the entire household. However, among the features was that having one person within the household in a good job often meant that the second earner was also in a good job. That is to say, there was a tendency for relative privilege to accumulate – for reasons as simple as that the security of one partner meant that other could spend more time looking for a job, or perhaps do some training, or start up some private business venture. One of the differences which was stressed was the kind of moonlighting jobs that

these different households had. Those with good jobs had better second jobs – motor mechanics, cutting grass, etc. – because they could afford the necessary equipment and were able to reinvest what they made. Those with poor jobs had more broken patterns of employment, and were not able to obtain enough to invest, and indeed 'investment' would often be at the expense of basic subsistence. And the consequences of this difference were clearly demonstrated in terms of self-esteem, for although both groups had rather similar aspirations to being self-sufficient, standing on their own two feet, and being independent, this was simply more achievable by the better-off group and they derived more satisfaction from their lives as a whole than did their counterparts in households with only bad jobs.

Pahl's (1984) study of the Isle of Sheppey drew very similar conclusions about the effects of deindustrialisation on household strategies in the UK. He discovered an enormous amount of work being done in the domestic mode of provision. Moreover, the more people in a household that were in formal, paid employment, the more work they did at home. It was this which suggested to Pahl that a process of social polarisation was occurring. Households with more than one earner had relatively high incomes but also produced more services for themselves – house improvements, home cooking, etc. As a result their standard of living was substantially higher than those households with little or no paid employment. What Pahl perceived was not so much a post-industrial, but rather a self-service, economy emerging, a trend illustrated by the explosion of expenditure in Britain on do-it-yourself products and domestic machines of all kinds.

Restructuring in America, as reported by Nelson and Smith, also produced different senses of masculinity – there being some interesting gendered effects demonstrated by the general change in the nature of the local labour market. There was a shift from the male breadwinner model, where men had a sense of the worth of their contribution to the household through their greater earning power, to a new situation where almost all people worked such that worth had to be demonstrated in other ways.

The informal economy is important to economic life in many cities, including in Italy and some of the American world cities (Redclift and Mingione, 1985; Mingione, 1987; Sassen-Koob, 1987). Its importance is even greater in the developing world and

in the ex-communist states of Eastern Europe where the sudden transition to capitalism has led many people to adopt what Burawoy et al (2000b) describes as 'defensive' household strategies which involve increased dependence on extended kin relationships and much self-provisioning from family resources. But it is rarely a sufficient source of income or sustenance on its own, and makes rather more of a contribution to those households which also have 'good jobs' rather than to the unemployed and the poor.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined recent literature on social inequality in cities, much of which has been inspired by Weberian theorising about how cities act as a distributor of benefits. Urban sociology has for a long time considered such matters in terms of segregation, and one of the main spatial patterns, on the ground, has been the segregation of different categories of people in different areas of the city. Processes like gentrification, suburbanisation and ghettoisation remind us that patterns of segregation are dynamic and that urban development continuously reorders the socio-spatial mosaic of residential inequality. We are thus sceptical about whether there are any universal or necessary patterns of inequalities within cities.

The wing of the Chicago School using ecological analysis had long realised and described the extent of such segregation but had done little to explain the process. The more ethnographic wing of the School had been relatively little interested in inequality as such, being more concerned to give accounts of subcultural differences among groups rather than dwell on material inequalities. Marxist and Weberian scholars were prominent in bringing matters of explanation onto the agenda for urban studies and identifying the class and ethnic processes involved. In addition, feminists highlighted the gendered aspects of such inequalities. Savage *et al.* (2002) argue that it is important to retain the concept of social class as an explanatory tool. However, it is essential to recognise two constraints: that gender relations cannot easily be abstracted from social class and hence that classes are gendered (Savage 1992); and also that class relations are not only structured by the division between capital and labour, but also by cultural and organisational factors. Once this is done, changing

forms of social inequality can be explored using the concept of class in the present period as in earlier historical periods.

Heuristically, it seems beneficial to see the generation of material inequalities primarily in terms of capitalist-market mechanisms for the distribution of rewards, regulated and coordinated through state policies for land-use, employment and welfare. Accounts of inequalities within cities have begun to make some progress in linking economic production to patterns of segregation. Emphasis on the role of capital in property development and its effect on urban form and the development of theories of the housing market, which consider both house construction and patterns of purchase and rent, have improved our understanding of processes within cities. But as yet, the theoretical connections to the more general theories of uneven development remain relatively weak. The ways in which cross-cutting social divisions of class, gender and ethnicity mediate the logic of capital accumulation are complex.

We still know insufficient about the texture and experience of the daily life of different groups of people in the city. Despite work like that of Wacquant, for example, information about the distribution of inequality remains greater than our knowledge of the varied experiences of urban living. There is still a need for repeated ethnographic studies that can tease out changes in everyday life, and that can place observations in a wider political economy framework. It is one of our main arguments that it is necessary to appreciate the dialectical relations between the mechanisms of capitalist production and the experience of modernity. The growing focus on the household is useful in this regard for it is, simultaneously, a unit of material resources, a site of work, a locus of the reproduction of labour power and a hub of everyday life. Survival strategies that encompass cooperation with other households as well as competition through impersonal market channels entail a complex embedding of households in their external environments. The patterns of sociation – reciprocity, conviviality, solidarity, competition and conflict – that routinely arise in and between neighbourhoods and subcultural groups remain critical to the experience of city life. Such matters have too often been addressed in terms of urban culture, divorced from questions of inequality. However, social inequality remains a foundation of the experience of everyday life in cities, and the recently renewed intellectual interest in urban culture should not be allowed to diminish its importance.