

5 Community

Introduction

This chapter and the next one should be read in conjunction with one another, since they both consider sociologically another key aspect of social work practice: community care. Community care social workers work in area teams, GP practices, hospitals and hospices with a wide range of service-users and their carers – older people, people with disabilities (both physical disabilities and learning disabilities), and people with mental health problems. Each user-group has its own individual issues that require specialist skills and knowledge, knowledge which is likely to draw on psychological and medical as well as sociological understanding. What brings these groups together, however, is the context in which they come to the attention of social work and social workers, that is, the context of community care. Chapters 5 and 6 are about that context: about the ways in which ideas of ‘community’ and ‘caring’ have influenced (and continue to influence) social work practice with older people, sick people, those with mental health problems and those with disabilities and their care-givers.

I have deliberately separated out the concepts of ‘community’ and ‘caring’ into two chapters so that each can be considered in its own right. This is necessary because so often literature about community care assumes that the two inevitably go together, as if we cannot have one without the other. I believe that community and caring are not essentially either indivisible or even the same entity, and that by always conceptualising them as one thing, we lose sight of the individual meanings of each and the possible contradictions between the two. It is vital for the development of sensitive, anti-discriminatory policy and practice in social work that we take a step back from community care as a ‘catch-all’ phenomenon, and instead forefront the

views and experiences of care-recipients and care-givers in the planning and provision of services.

This chapter examines the concept of community, investigating the historical and sociological bases of community as the term exists in everyday usage and as it permeates social work policy and practice.

Definitions of community

In common with the notion of ‘the family’, the word ‘community’ carries with it a host of ideas and assumptions that are largely taken for granted. Most of the time, when we think of ‘community’, we do so in positive terms: it is something (again, like the family) which acts as a barrier to, or defence against, the stresses and ills of modern living. It is ‘a good thing’, something that we value and something that is frequently perceived as having declined in the shift to a modern, industrial, urban society. In order to make an objective assessment of this, we need to ask: what is community?

Sociologists have come up with very many different ways of describing community. In 1955, Hillery attempted to define community by examining its usage in sociological literature. He identified no fewer than ninety-four definitions, with little consensus between writers about what the concept meant. He claimed that ‘beyond the recognition that “people are involved in community” there is little agreement on the use of the term’ (1955: 117). More recent investigations have confirmed this conceptual confusion, with more than 200 identified definitions (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Although definitions vary in emphasis, they also share certain common features. There are broadly three ways of characterising community:

- Community as locality: community is defined as a physical–spatial entity; it is based on geographical location such as neighbourhood, village, town or place.
- Community as social network: a community is said to exist when a network of interrelationships is established between people who live in the same locality.
- Community as relationship (or ‘communion’): community is defined as a shared sense of identity between individuals, irrespective of any local focus or physical proximity.

As we will discover, some sociologists in writing about communities have collapsed the three definitions into one, assuming that locality, social networks and shared identity are necessarily contingent on each

other. Others have focused on one aspect, such as social networks, rejecting the usefulness of notions of locality or identity. In reality, communities are highly variable and complex, as this chapter will demonstrate. Physical localities may be places characterised by racism and exclusion of individuals and groups rather than networks of caring relationships or shared identities. Social networks may thrive across large geographical distances and may even be world-wide, facilitated by modern communication systems such as telephone, email and the Internet. In addition, shared identity may have little to do with location or even with local social networks. The sense of belonging which people feel may derive from their connectedness to a totally different country or culture to that of their local neighbourhood. As patterns of occupational mobility and migration increase, so this is likely to become more common. Bell and Newby (1976: 197) point out that there is a paradox here. As localism has declined as a structural principle – we no longer live, work and play in the same locality all our lives – so the idea of community (and our yearning for it) has grown.

Community discourses

It is clear from the discussion so far that when we think about community, we enter the realms of discourses and ideologies, that is, the ideas, beliefs, values and practices that characterise community, rather than any objective 'facts' about community. Symonds (1998) suggests that the concept of community occupies two parallel realities. The first is the 'social lived reality' in which people work and live, a reality that recognises conflicts and difference, and is aware that social networks are not always supportive and friendly. The second is the 'dream' world of community:

This community 'in the mind' is always warm, supportive, safe and secure. This picture has been transmitted culturally through literature, certain historical 'readings', sociology, and in television soap operas. Interestingly the place of this dream community tends to be a small area inhabited by people who share the same culture, characteristics, history, language and understanding of their world.

(1998: 12)

The 'community in the mind' may seem cosy and comfortable. In reality, it is a far from comfortable place for those who do not seem to fit this ideal 'dream'. Politicians and intellectuals in the United States

and in the UK have used the idea of community to promote particular (and essentially conservative) views about family form and community life. Community in the sense of 'communitarianism' may seem, on the one hand, to be giving value to ideas of locality, neighbourliness and sharing. Seen in a different light, it may stigmatise some kinds of living arrangement, and lead to unrealistic expectations of community support that do not take sufficient account of structural inequalities in society (see Etzioni 1994, McIntosh 1996, Murray 1990).

Implications for practice

The discussion of definitions is important for policy and practice for two principal reasons. First, because the term is used very widely, it is not at all clear just what 'community' means in a given usage. We have community service, community homes, community workers, community development, community action, community programmes, community teams, and of course community care, and all may mean something quite different. The confusion and contradiction inherent in this must be acknowledged, because it can pull social work in totally opposite directions. This is evident in the tension between the urge to deprofessionalise social work, to make it a neighbourhood-based, co-operative activity (that is, community social work as envisaged by the 1982 Barclay Report) and the drive to assert social work's professional status through care management and the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act.

Second, social workers must be able to distinguish between community as 'normative prescription' (what the writer believes it should be) and 'empirical description' (what it actually is) (Allan 1991: 108). Hence it is always political, used by those on the Left to emphasise collective identity control/government at a localised level; and by those on the Right to symbolise freedom from dependence on the state, and individual choice and family responsibility.

In order to understand the impact of the 'dream' world of community on social work practice, we must first examine the historical and sociological writing on the concept of community.

Historical accounts

Conventional sociological perspectives are premised by the assumption that communities in the past were more vibrant, more secure and more caring than in the present. Certainly there have been huge social, economic and demographic changes over the past 200 years or so. Mills (1996) outlines the scale of changes that have taken place in Britain. The Industrial Revolution, conventionally defined as the period 1760 to 1830, led to the concentration of industrial activity on the coalfields and at the ports. Rural domestic industries declined rapidly, as did local self-sufficiency. The population of England and Wales doubled between 1700 and 1800, again between 1801 and 1851, and yet again between 1851 and 1911. Because much of the increased population was migrating to the towns in the nineteenth century, the population of most rural areas declined. As the rural population declined, so did agricultural employment. The massive growth in towns and cities provides the other side of the coin. The concentration of large populations in small areas led to many environmental and social problems. But, Mills argues, Victorian cities were more prosperous than any that had come before and were able to pay for amenities such as lighting, water sewerage, transport, dispensaries and universal schooling. New forms of transport within and outside the cities and towns encouraged the movement of people to and from the countryside, so that it became possible for rural workers to live in villages and travel to towns to work, just as town-dwellers moved out to live in new suburbs and villages on the edge of towns. Mills reports that the inversion of the social composition of a rural population took no more than fifty years, as middle-class town-dwellers replaced farm labourers or village craftsmen in the countryside. Alongside this shift, amenities and community welfare have declined in inner-city areas, although in some cities this trend has been halted by the upgrading ('gentrification') of some run-down areas to provide housing for single professional people. Mills concludes that community at the beginning of this period might be largely defined in terms of territory; today people live, shop, work and socialise in different territories and, he argues, in different communities (1996: 272–5).

This brief pen picture of social, economic and demographic change demonstrates that there has been a transformation in community as territory in Britain. But what can this tell us about the less tangible definitions of community, that is, about community as social networks or relationship? Dennis and Daniels (1996) indicate that because no agreement has been reached on indices of community life, it is difficult

to assess if and how community life has changed over time. The relative value placed on the notion of social mix in a community illustrates this point. Some writers assume that a degree of social mixing is a prerequisite of community, so that community life declines as segregation intensifies. Others believe that because community is based on class, it is more likely to develop as segregation increases. In reviewing the evidence from historical documents, Dennis and Daniels point out that nineteenth-century sources can tell us where people lived and near whom, how often they moved, where they worked, to whom they were related and whom they married. 'But', they ask critically, 'do these findings have any value as evidence of community life?' (1996: 203).

Oral histories and autobiographies give us further insight into community life in the past. Many of these accounts stress the quality of relationships between people, as poverty and hardship forced people to rely on each other for support. Many are also touched by the soft, rosy hues of nostalgia:

In those days, too, there was real neighbourliness. You see, you might be four or five families in that house, and perhaps the one at the bottom would make some tea and she'd shout up the stairs 'I've just made a cup of tea – coming down?' And they'd more or less take it in turn each day, and if there was anyone in real dire straits, and couldn't pay their way, I've known a neighbour take their own sheets off the bed, wash 'em and pawn 'em to help them out. That's how it was in those days – real good neighbours. I mean they'd never let anyone starve. We never used to lock our front doors – not a bit of string or nothing, the house was open day and night ... There were real criminals of course – but never against their own.

(White 1988: 26)

Community life was not always remembered so fondly. Dennis and Daniels report that 'close propinquity, together with cultural poverty, led as much to enmity as it did to friendship'.¹ They assert that communities 'may be characterised as much by antagonism, jealousy, fear, and suspicion as by more neighbourly attitudes and relationships' (1996: 222). Bornat (1997) agrees. She points out that lack of privacy and physical space meant that community could be an oppressive experience, especially from the perspective of its more junior members who had less power and control over their lives. Community also brought with it discrimination and exclusion for some people, as demonstrated in the growing numbers of accounts of the experiences of minority

ethnic groups in Britain. Bornat observes that in the memory of white working-class people, issues of 'race' and ethnicity are in the main absent. In contrast, the experience of members of minority ethnic groups was framed by 'the constraining force of an opposing community whose identity is delineated as other' (1997: 27). It is not only minority ethnic accounts that have been largely missing from community history: the voices of disabled children and adults, and stories of gay and lesbian life have also only emerged in recent years (1997: 28).

Traditional sociological approaches

Functionalist approaches

Functionalist perspectives, as we will see, stress the importance of community for the well-being of society as a whole. It is argued that industrialisation and urbanisation damaged the ties that bind communities together, and that new ways needed to be found to help communities to regain their former sense of shared identity and collaborative concern.

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

The nineteenth-century German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies has had an enduring influence on sociological and everyday ideas about community, past and present. Writing in *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, first published in 1877, Tonnies set out to make sense of the changes that he saw taking place in Europe as it was developing from a pre-industrial to an industrial society. Tonnies conceptualised the changes primarily as changes in social relationships, from 'Gemeinschaft' to 'Gesellschaft' (roughly translated as 'community' and 'association'). He argued that the quality and nature of social relationships were being transformed by industrialisation, from small-scale, personal, intimate and enduring 'gemeinschaftlich' relationships to individualistic, large-scale, impersonal, calculative and contractual 'gesellschaftlich' relationships. He writes:

All intimate, private and exclusive living together ... is ... life is Gemeinschaft. Gesellschaft is public life – it is the world itself. In Gemeinschaft with one's family, one lives from birth on, bound to it in weal and woe. One goes into Gesellschaft as one goes into a strange country ... Gemeinschaft is old; Gesellschaft is new ... all praise of rural life has pointed out that the Gemeinschaft among

people is stronger there and more alive; it is the lasting and genuine form of living together. In contrast to Gemeinschaft, Gesellschaft is transitory and superficial. Accordingly, Gemeinschaft should be understood as a living organism, Gesellschaft as a mechanical aggregate and artefact.

(1955: 37–9)

The quotation makes it abundantly clear that Tonnies regretted what he saw as the passing of Gemeinschaftlich relationships. In Gemeinschaft, people knew who they were; they knew their place in life; beliefs and values were clear and well-internalised; and there was a strong value placed on kinship, territory, and solidarity. Industrialisation was changing all this, Tonnies believed, and was bringing about the decline of community in the modern world. Significantly, Tonnies asserts that there are elements of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in all social relationships and in all societies; they should not be understood as exclusive categories, but rather as tendencies or influences that pervade different societies in varying degrees. But he also admits that he saw a greater tendency towards Gemeinschaft in rural areas. This has led some sociologists, as we shall see, to equate Gemeinschaft with the countryside and Gesellschaft with the city – the city becomes the symbol of the breakdown of community in the modern world.

Tonnies' work can be compared with Durkheim's classic essay, 'The Division of Labour in Society', first published in 1893, in which he distinguishes between the 'mechanical' solidarity of pre-industrial societies (that is, societies characterised by likeness and shared morality) and the 'organic' solidarity typical of industrial society (with its complex division of labour, specialisation and difference between people). Durkheim argued, like Tonnies, that modern industrial society was becoming more diverse and more complex, and that the changes were leading to individual unhappiness and social disorganisation. (This issue is discussed further in Chapter 7.)

Community as locality: urban studies

The first person to relate the ideas of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft to specific localities was Georg Simmel (1858–1917), a German contemporary of Tonnies. Writing in 1903, Simmel characterised urban life as a constantly changing series of encounters (Simmel 1971); this 'rapid crowding of changing images' encouraged people to deal with social situations at a rational, 'head' level, rather than at a more intuitive, or

habitual 'heart' level. At the same time, because the city was the centre of the money economy, social relationships were becoming impersonalised and standardised, untouched by the complications and involvement that personal relationships bring. The modern, urban mind was, for Simmel, more calculating; the world a mere arithmetical problem to be solved. Simmel concludes that people were becoming 'blasé' in outlook, reserved and estranged from one another, frantically searching for self-identity and individuality. (There are strong connections here with Durkheim's notion of 'anomie', see pp.171–3.)

Simmel's approach to urbanism was picked up and developed by Louis Wirth, who worked at the University of Chicago's School of Sociology (see Chapter 7 for a fuller discussion of the work of the Chicago School). Wirth believed that urbanisation had had more impact on society than either industrialisation or capitalism, changing social relationships for ever, and displacing human beings from their 'natural' state: 'Nowhere has mankind been further removed from organic nature than under the conditions of life characteristic of great cities ... [the city] wipes out completely the previously dominant modes of human association' (1938: 1–3). Wirth presents the city and the countryside as two opposite poles: when we leave the countryside, we leave not only the physical environment of the countryside but a rural way of life, taking on instead the values and behaviour of urbanism as a way of life. Urbanism is thus a cultural, rather than a physical phenomenon. It controls all economic, political and cultural life, drawing 'even the most remote parts of the world into its orbit' (1938: 2).

Wirth identifies the defining characteristics of the city as:

- 1 The large size of its population – the increased population results in a high division of labour – people perform specialised roles. As a consequence, we cannot know each other as whole, rounded individuals; our relationships tend to be segmental and 'secondary', related to a person's role such as shop assistant, employer, etc. We have many of these superficial contacts with people and we protect ourselves from the needs and claims of others by appearing reserved or indifferent to them. Urbanism is summed up by Wirth in two different scenarios – first, the experience of loneliness in a crowd, and second, the relationship between the taxi-driver and his fare – a 'brief encounter' which demonstrates all these features.
- 2 Its high population density – the increased concentration of people in a limited space leads to a range of environmental and sociological problems. Overcrowding and pollution are accompanied by

a rise in social and interpersonal conflict in the ghettos, as well as a greater awareness of the gap between rich and poor in society.

- 3 Its social diversity – the more diverse and specialised population may allow for more personal freedom and greater choice; it may also contribute to a sense of insecurity and instability. According to Wirth, people living in cities are more likely than those in rural areas to suffer from mental breakdowns, commit suicide or become victims of crime. The individual feels powerless to do anything to improve the patterns of urban life, and so joins groups of like-minded people in an attempt to recreate some sense of order and control.

Community as locality: rural studies

While Wirth was investigating the defining characteristics of urban life in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, an anthropologist called Robert Redfield was studying rural communities in Mexico, seeking to identify the qualities of rural life. Redfield described the way of life here as 'folk society':

Such a society is small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity ... Behaviour is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical and personal: there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relations and institutions, are the type categories of experience and the familial group is the unit of action.

(1947: 293)

Redfield's 'folk society' has strong connections with Tonnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft*. It is also very closely related to Wirth's belief that where we live has a profound impact on how we live: that locality determines lifestyle.

Interpretive studies – challenges to the urban/rural polarity

Interpretive studies take as their starting-point the meaning of community, seeking to discover what living in the city and the countryside actually means to people themselves. Gans (1980) rejects Wirth's notion of a distinctively urban way of life, arguing that different ways of life can be distinguished in the city. He points out that the majority of the American city population lived in quite stable, secure communities which protected them from the worst consequences

of urban living (Fulcher and Scott 1999: 404). Even those who lived in the inner city were a mixed population, some of whom lived there by choice. Gans discerns five different groups living in the inner city (1968, reprinted in Bocock *et al.* 1980: 400–2):

- The 'cosmopolites': students, writers, artists, intellectuals who live in the inner city to be close to educational and cultural facilities. Many are unmarried or childless. They have no wish to be integrated and have no connections with the neighbourhood in which they live.
- The unmarried or childless: Gans distinguishes two groups here – those who are temporarily childless and living in the inner city and those who will permanently live there. They are geographically mobile workers who again have no interest in their local neighbourhood, and do not suffer from social isolation. (We might call them 'yuppies' today, living in gentrified flats in run-down parts of inner cities.)
- The 'ethnic villagers': groups from a common ethnic background, living in a neighbourhood with strong family and kinship ties, but with little involvement in secondary relationships in the neighbourhood. They are suspicious of others outside their group.
- The 'deprived': 'the very poor, emotionally disturbed or otherwise handicapped', single parent families, and those experiencing racial discrimination, living in the cheapest housing and suffering from social isolation.
- The 'trapped' and downward mobile: those who have no choice about where they live – they stay 'when a neighbourhood is invaded by non-residential land uses or lower status immigrants' or are old people on low incomes who have lost their social ties and experience social isolation.

This is a very different picture to Wirth's pessimistic presentation of urban life. Gans asserts that ways of life have more to do with social class and family cycle stage than with urban or rural location; that there is no such thing as an urban way of life. He observes that some people are protected from the social consequences of living in a city by social class – the higher the income, the greater degree of choice people have over where they live. In addition, stage in the family cycle determines the area of choice within a social class, so that families with young children may only be able to afford to buy a new house on a modern estate. Any similarities between people living in the same area

are not, he argues, to do with locality, but are instead the outcome of a series of constrained choices.

As urban studies have come under sustained criticism, so studies of village life have been attacked for their romantic portrayal of a rural idyll. Bell and Newby (1971) discuss the work of anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1949), who published a very different account of life in a Mexican village. Studying the same village (Tepotzlan) as Redfield, Lewis came up with very different results, finding individualism, lack of co-operation, tension, schisms, fear, envy and distrust amongst the inhabitants. Later studies of village life have stressed that there is a high degree of fluidity in relationships in country areas; that they were not necessarily as stable as presented. Others draw attention to the contractual employer–employee nature of rural relationships, which were much more characteristic of *Gesellschaft* than *Gemeinschaft* concepts.

Two additional kinds of studies have exploded some of the myths and polarities inherent in urban and rural sociology. Studies of postwar working-class communities have discovered that industrialisation and urbanisation did not bring about a decline in community life as envisaged by the nineteenth-century theorists and their followers (Fulcher and Scott 1999: 415). Instead, features of working-class life actively encouraged the growth of strong communities: workers lived and worked in one area, often for one employer; trade unions encouraged social solidarity, as did the need to rely on one another for support in times of deprivation (1999: 415). Once established, these communities were self-sustaining and able, to a degree, to resist external changes. (See Young and Willmott's 1957 study of Bethnal Green in the East End of London. The authors expected to find evidence that postwar changes had led to a breakdown of community, but instead discovered that Bethnal Green was surprisingly homogeneous and stable, with strong kinship patterns still very much in evidence.)

The growth of the suburbs has also been of great interest to sociologists. There have been many studies of suburbs, some emphasising their homogeneous nature, others their heterogeneity. These studies have pointed out the falsity of the *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesellschaft* dichotomy or even seeing it as a continuum. Instead, they argue that both types of relationship can be found in one locality. In addition, the studies have demonstrated that social relationships do not need to be located in one geographical place in order to survive. Bell's (1968) research into a middle-class housing estate in Swansea demonstrates that kinship ties and social networks can be maintained over long distances. Bulmer suggests that this is no longer just a middle-class

phenomenon. Increasingly, working-class people live at some distance from their extended family and may only see their relatives at week-

Implications for practice

Community care policies resonate with nostalgic historical and sociological ideas of community: community as a rural *Gemeinschaft* and community as a tight-knit, postwar working-class neighbourhood. Bulmer argues that this creates a major problem for practice because the notions and the worlds on which the policies are built simply do not exist in the late twentieth century, if they ever did. Community care social workers must be aware that we cannot rely on either the existence or the continuing survival of reciprocal, supportive relationships between family and neighbours. People's social networks are today more widely spread geographically and at the same time more privatised in the nuclear family. Hence an attempt to foster local attachment is not in any way 'natural': it is not about drawing out attachment which is already there waiting to be used, but Bulmer argues, must be created through new mediating structures (1987: 70).²

ends; meanwhile friendship groups become more important on a day-to-day basis (1987: 55).

Critical developments

There have been growing criticisms of the idea that *where* people live determines *how* they live, that locality determines lifestyle, and criticisms too of the romanticism implicit in the earlier studies. Did pre-industrial, feudal society represent a place of contentment and 'communion' with others? Or was it, rather, a society characterised by a struggle for subsistence, in which individuals were tied to their locality by economic interdependence and by legal constraints which forbade them to leave? The 'social lived reality' (Symonds 1998) of community was in practice the total powerlessness of large numbers of people.

There has been criticism too of the representation of working-class communities. What did the closeness and sharing actually mean to those living in, for example, Bethnal Green? Was it really so cosy to

have to share washing facilities and toilets? And was the caring community something which everyone participated equally in, or was it rather, largely care by kin, and in this case, women in the family? Again, the 'social lived reality' may have been poverty, lack of transport and lack of alternative housing, not community spirit (Allan 1991: 110).

An alternative approach argues that the community is not about the city, or about the rural-urban dichotomy, or about locality and where we live, or even about social networks as such. Instead it is about wider structural issues such as class, 'race', gender, age, disability. If we are working-class and poor, or old, sick and disabled, or children or women with young children, our community is likely to be restricted to our locality. And because many others in the locality are not oriented to the community in the same way, the traditional support or mutual aid which may have been available in the past cannot be drawn on to the same extent. If we are middle-class, working-class in work, young, mobile, car-owning, our community will be much wider. Jordan (1996) makes the distinction between 'communities of choice' (among mainstream households) and 'communities of fate' (among the poor and excluded). He argues that this polarisation has high social costs, not least in social problems associated with concentrations of deprivation and the expenditure on social control considered necessary to counter these problems (1996: 188).

Class and community

One of the best-known studies of class and community is Rex and Moore's (1967) study of Sparkbrook, a district on the south-east side of Birmingham. Rex and Moore chart the distribution of housing use within Sparkbrook, describing the various movements in and out of the district from the 1930s onwards, as well as describing the area's inhabitants themselves. They notice that different types of housing are used by different groups of people. For example, the large houses in the 'zone of transition',³ vacated by the middle-classes on their progress out to the more desirable suburbs, had been turned into lodging-houses and occupied by incoming immigrants: first Irish, then European and increasingly in the early 1960s, 'coloured' (sic) immigrants. Rex and Moore distinguish six different housing situations, also referred to as 'housing classes' (1967: 274):

- 1 that of the outright owner-occupier of a whole house;
- 2 that of the owner of a mortgaged whole house;

- 3 that of the council tenant: (a) in a house with a long life; (b) in a house awaiting demolition;
- 4 that of the tenant of a whole house owned by a private landlord;
- 5 that of the owner of a house bought with short-term loans who is compelled to let rooms in order to meet his repayment obligations;
- 6 that of the tenant of rooms in a lodging-house.

Rex and Moore make an important observation. Not only do different groups of people inhabit different types of housing, this demarcation is not accidental. It is caused, in part, by local authority housing policies. Criteria such as the residence rule (which stated that applicants for council housing must have lived in the area for five years) effectively excluded minority ethnic people from council housing. This 'left them to the mercy of the free market' (1967: 260), forcing them into lodging houses and poor quality accommodation in run-down areas. Rex and Moore assert that the consequences are damaging for race relations and for the city itself (1967: 265). Rex and Moore's study is significant in that it makes it clear that structured inequality determines an individual's housing and neighbourhood, not personal choice or lifestyle. Their work has been criticised, however, for being too geographically and historically specific, and for misunderstanding some of the issues for black people, most crucially that Indian and Pakistani immigrants actually chose to buy larger property in the city centre because it suited their requirements, rather than because they were passive victims of housing policy.

Marxist writers develop the structural analysis, arguing that lifestyle and community must be explained in terms of class and factors relating to class in a capitalist society. Harvey writes: 'Urbanism has to be regarded as a set of social relationships which reflect relationships established throughout society as a whole. Further, these relationships have to express the laws whereby urban phenomena are structured, regulated and constructed' (1973: 304). Because of this, problems such as poverty, housing and crime are not urban problems at all; they are societal problems revealed in an urban context, their causes related to capitalism and social and economic inequalities rather than to urbanisation. Giddens (1982) agrees, asserting that capitalism has transformed both urban and rural life; that it is wage labour, not where people live, that shapes their lives.

Sennett (1977) picks up this theme. He argues importantly that people have been diverted from the realities of power by an emphasis on community. He is concerned that, by always looking inward, and

by placing all our faith on our personal, intimate relationships in the family (what he calls 'destructive gemeinschaft'⁴), we fail to give attention to the large-scale forces in society. He expresses this powerfully:

Localism and local autonomy are becoming widespread political creeds, as though the experience of power relations will have more human meaning the more intimate the scale – even though the actual structures of power grow ever more into an international system. Community becomes a weapon against society, whose great vice is now seen to be its impersonality. But a community of power can only be an illusion in a society like that of the industrial West, one in which stability has been achieved by the progressive extension of the international scale of structures of economic control. In sum, the belief in direct human relations on an intimate scale has seduced us from converting our understanding of the realities of power into guides for our own political behaviour. The result is that the forces of domination or inequity remain unchallenged.

(1977: 339)

'Race' ethnicity and community

Fulcher and Scott (1999: 430) assert that ethnicity as well as class has provided a basis for city communities. As already mentioned, Gans as early as 1968 had written about ethnic villages with a distinctive way of life based on strongly integrated communities. Rex and Moore (1967) had also explored different ethnic populations living in the 'zone of transition'. Fulcher and Scott suggest that various aspects of the situation of ethnic minorities facilitate community formation: they tend to be geographically concentrated in one area; they have distinctive cultural, linguistic and religious traditions that bind them together; and, crucially, racism plays a key role in determining collective identity. They write:

Ethnic communities are not just the product of shared customs and beliefs. They are also the result of common experiences of exclusion and discrimination, and the creation of organizations for mutual support and protection.

(1999: 430)

It is not only black communities for whom ethnic identity and ethnicity has provided a sense of community. Fulcher and Scott

describe the emergence of 'defended communities' amongst white people in the East End of London and in the Beaumont Leys estate in Leicester, as a result of competition for local jobs and housing. Foster (1996) tells the story of the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands, where the white working-class residents united against the predominantly Bengali population who had been forced to move into the area because of changes in local authority housing allocation. Foster records that her sympathies initially lay with the indigenous population, but that she had changed her mind: 'The positive sense of "belonging", community and traditional attachment to a way of life valued by some of the indigenous residents had to be weighed against the negativity of a culture which by definition stigmatised, marginalised and was hostile to those who did not "belong"' (1996: 151).

Fulcher and Scott suggest that recent attempts to reduce ethnic and racial conflict have been successful by fostering interdependence between groups, through an organised initiative such as a sporting activity or improvements in a housing estate (1999: 431). What these initiatives have sought to do is to establish communities on a residential rather than an ethnic basis – taking us directly back to the idea of community as locality.

Gender and community

In investigating community, sociologists and geographers have identified that men and women have very different understandings and experiences of community, in terms of location, social relationships and a sense of identity. While other factors such as class, age, 'race' and ethnicity, and disability inevitably have an impact on men's mobility and resources, men's communities have nevertheless been found to be much broader and more diverse than those of women. Men are more likely to work and live in different areas, and may choose to socialise and take part in leisure and sport activities across community boundaries. Women are more likely to make more use of their local communities, as Cornwell's (1984) study in East London demonstrates. Women here occupied a much wider range of communal spaces than men – 'the shops, the street, the school gates, their relatives' houses' – and they had a much wider variety of contacts, 'not only with shopkeepers and other mothers, but also in the schools, pubs and blocks of flats where many of them are employed as cleaners' (1984: 50).

Williams (1997) considers how far women's centredness in their locality actually represents an exclusion from the outside world. She points out that factors such as poverty, lack of time and independent

transport, the identification of leisure facilities as men's spaces (pubs, clubs and playing fields) and fear of violence or racial or sexual assault can confine women to their local neighbourhoods. Yet women have also been able to turn this confinement to their own ends, developing supportive relationships or getting involved in community action to fight for safer roads, for nursery provision, etc. Williams suggests that community has particular significance for many women: 'It is the point of negotiation over public provision; it is a site of organisation and struggle over welfare issues; and it is the arena of paid, unpaid and low-paid work' (1997: 34). It marks the overlap for women between private and public issues, between the personal and the political. Women as a result have a contradictory relationship with community: community as the 'space that women struggle to define as theirs', and community as the 'place to which women are confined' (1997: 42–3).

Evans and Fraser (1996) are also interested in the gendered nature of communities, this time focusing on the use of public space in two English cities, Manchester and Sheffield. They highlight four very different populations who make use of the town centres, shopping malls and major thoroughfares in these cities during the daytime and in the evenings: youth, gay men, shoppers and women. Of the four groups, only two (youth and gay men) have been able to develop their own spaces within the public arena, creating their own safe areas. For example, a gay village has developed in Manchester, with its own gay bars, clubs and shops: 'rather than being seen as a "gay ghetto", it is seen as a gay developed space, a place of ownership, a place of which to be proud' (1996: 117). Although used by some lesbian women, this area has developed mainly as a space for gay men. The other two groups (shoppers and women) have not been able to create their own spaces in the same way. The shoppers are split between those who can afford to shop at the up-market, American-style malls and those who are forced to use the declining city centres. Women's use of public space varies considerably according to the time of day. While almost half of those using the public spaces during the daytime are women, they constitute less than one-third of those using these areas in the evenings.

What Evans and Fraser's research demonstrates is the continuing control and dominance of men on public spaces in cities. Campbell (1993) also highlights the importance of gender differences in an analysis of community in her account of the riots in the early 1990s in the working-class housing estates on the outskirts of Newcastle, Oxford and Cardiff. She writes:

The angry young men victimised the women, the neighbours, the community ... The unruly women ... had babies, made relationships, put food on the table, they had cooperated and organised and created community politics.

(1993: 244–5)

Campbell conceptualises the destructiveness and brutality of young men as an attempt to reassert the power and privilege that had been lost along with the 'respectable' working-class neighbourhood, with its community facilities, clubs and employment.

Nation and community

We cannot consider community without giving attention to community in its larger sense: community and nation, or rather, nation as community. Anderson (1991) defines the nation as an 'imagined community': 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (1991: 6). Anderson argues that all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined; what distinguishes one community from another is the style in which they are imagined (ibid.). He continues:

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them ... has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations ... It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm ... nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so ... Finally, it is imagined as a *community* because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

(1991: 7)

This, then, is the main focus of Anderson's enquiry: to reflect on why so many people have been willing to make the sacrifice of dying for their 'imagined community'. McCrone's (1992) study of Scotland provides further insight. McCrone calls Scotland a nation without a

state, or a 'stateless nation'; it lacks the political and economic control over its own affairs that is normally associated with nationhood. But Scotland as a country, he argues, is more than simply a geographical place. It is 'a landscape of the mind, a place of the imagination' (1992: 17). As Scotland lost its identity politically, culturally and economically, so it appropriated another vision, 'the Gaelic vision', further appropriated and incorporated into the twentieth-century tourist vision of Scotland (1992: 18). McCrone argues that the inventing of traditions and the creation of myths is not peculiar only to Scotland: 'myth-history' is a vital part of the story-telling of any country, and traditions themselves serve a positive function in legitimising institutions, symbolising group cohesion and socialising others into values and beliefs. Similarly, McCrone rejects the idea that nationalism is always reactionary or atavistic (1992: 206). He argues that there is no 'single' explanation of nationalism, nor one single type. Above all, he writes, 'nationalism, or national identity, is not a characteristic, but imputes a relationship between different identities. To be Scottish, for example, is to be not English' (1992: 207). This reminds us of one of the key points in the discussion of community, that is, that community is about creating and maintaining the boundary between 'us' and 'them', as much as about a specific quality or sentiment shared by 'us'. Territory and boundaries are not real in themselves but are socially created and recreated in our encounters with those on the other side of the divide.

Globalisation and community

Fulcher and Scott (1999: 457–8) outline the main forms taken by globalisation as follows:

- Global organisation (seen initially in the context of the overseas empires of nation-states, but today encompassing transnational corporations and international organisations, both of which challenge the nation-state's control of national economies);
- Global interdependence (the growth of the world economy is one of the main aspects of the globalisation process);
- Global communication (telecommunications and information technology allow different parts of the world to be closely connected with one another, so that people, money and information can move rapidly around the world, raising the question of whether states can any longer control their boundaries);

- Global awareness (advances in technology mean that people are now more aware of the world as a whole; they therefore see themselves more as human beings and less as members of this community or that country).

Some sociologists argue that globalisation has led to the decline of the nation-state, with its separate territory, citizens and administration. Others disagree, arguing that global organisations will continue to be dependent on nation-states for their functioning (Fulcher and Scott 1999: 459). It seems likely that both statements may be true: that while the world gets smaller daily, and the power of multi-national

Implications for practice

It has been argued that an individual's experience of community is shaped by structural factors such as class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender. The idea of community is itself created by exclusion and separateness as much as by shared identity and culture. This has important implications for practice. In attempting to build community solidarity, we need to be aware of the dangers within this, since it is the perceived differences between 'us' and 'them' that strengthen our sense of 'us'. Communities may be very intolerant of differences between community members, just as they are likely to amplify the differences between those 'inside' and those 'outside' the community. This means that racism, sexism and heterosexism might be as much a part of community identity as togetherness and generosity of spirit.

Patel (1990) argues that community imagery is largely Eurocentric, taking little account of the differing needs of black people, or of the pre-existing supportive and defensive networks operating within ethnic minority groups. It is also largely heterosexist, giving little attention to other supportive arrangements, for example those that exist in the gay community. These ideas will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

companies grows, so people will wish to look for meaning in their lives through the very myths and traditions that are the heart of imagined community. This means that in the future, while seeing ourselves as

part of a world-wide social network (a 'global village') we may at the same time develop stronger ties with those around us; our sense of shared identity may be consolidated on a more local basis.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that, while it is easy to be in favour of the idea of community, in practice community is a highly problematic concept. Community is as much about social polarisation and exclusion as it is about mutuality and neighbourliness; the flip side of community may be racism, insularity, sexism, coercion, or simply nosiness, lack of privacy, disruption and interference. Whether we understand community as a geographical locality, social network or sense of identity, it has the capacity to be used both positively and negatively. As Jordan writes, 'community can serve to integrate membership groups with antagonistic interests, and to mobilize them for conflict, rather than sustain programmes for harmonization and inclusion' (1996: 164).

Recommended reading

- Bornat, J., Johnson, J., Pereira, C., Pilgrim, D. and Williams, F. (1997) *Community Care: A Reader*, Second edition, Basingstoke: Macmillan, in association with the Open University (this is a collection of readings that covers the whole field of community and caring well).
- Bulmer, M. (1987) *The Social Basis of Community Care*, London: Allen and Unwin (a readable account).
- Patel, N. (1990) *'Race' against Time: Social Services Provision to Black Elders*, London: Runnymede Trust (a good antidote to the Eurocentric literature on community care).