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**The relevance of social class, communications, and general location, in
contemporary British Labour Party politics, with a focus on North-West
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STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

This Ph.D. thesis has been made possible through the support of the following people:

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Dr Gail Mulvey (Research Fellow) – Main Supervisor: *years active (2013-2018);*

Dr Ian Chapman (Senior Lecturer) – Second Supervisor: *years active (2013-2018);*

Dr Tom Grimwood (Senior Lecturer) – Third Supervisor: *years active (2013-2017).*

&

Interview Participants:

15 Allerdale/Carlisle Labour Party political representatives: *years active (2015-2016).*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the relevance of social class in relation to general support for the Labour Party both within a national and localised context, with a specific focus placed upon the area of North-West Cumbria. This is achieved by following the research hypothesis that states that the party since the emergence of New Labour, is with their classless brand, more effective on a political level than their collectivist Old Labour predecessor. Such analysis, using a mixture of primary and secondary methods, is framed within a three-themed research phenomenon. The phenomenon begins via the first theme 'Class/Identity' which defined the extensive atomised shift in perceived class categorisation in contemporary Britain. The analysis of the latter then links to the second theme '(Labour) Party' which evaluates such shifts to that of Labour support, ranging from the historic 'Old' and 'New' eras to the present 'Post New' incarnation. This primarily states how the rise of the New Right inspired New Labour to modernise their core political message to accommodate the new atomised class culture, so as to gain broader levels of support. The research phenomenon concludes with the third theme 'Geography (North-West Cumbria)' which explores how such class atomisation affected Labour support on a broad locational basis, particularly within North-West Cumbria. The thesis findings generally concur with the research hypothesis since the New Labour brand was somewhat successful in rural areas which hitherto had been deemed unattainable by Old Labour. Such findings, be it nationally and/or locally, are a symptom of contemporary class times where political allegiance has become less ideologically centred, and more brand-orientated and homogeneous. This thesis structure also makes a contribution to qualitative methods research as it provides a template of how such a research hypothesis and phenomenon can be theoretically and practically integrated.

Kieran J. Steuart, M.A., M.Sc./M.Res.; 'Ph.D., Applied Social Sciences'; April 2018; *The relevance of social class, communications, and general location, in contemporary British Labour Party politics, with a focus on North-West Cumbria.*

DEDICATION

Primarily, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother, Janice E. Steuart (2nd November, 1949 - 14th October, 2008).

On a personal level, I dedicate this thesis to my extended circle of family and friends; all of whom have given me their fullest encouragement and support in both undertaking and completing this research study.

On an academic level, I dedicate this thesis to my three excellent academic supervisors whose professional guidance was invaluable in guiding me through such a challenging, but ultimately fulfilling and rewarding process. I also dedicate this thesis to all the Lancaster University academic research students and staff that, day-in and day-out, perform critical academic and professional (work-based) research activities that improve, revolutionise, and advance academic thinking, theories, processes, and best-practices across a range of professional disciplines.

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CONTENTS

	Page (s)
Table & Figure Index	9
Relevant Terminology	10 - 11
Chapter I: Introduction	12 - 20
Chapter II: Theoretical Background: Class-The Producer/Consumer	21 - 36
Chapter III: Theoretical Background: The Labour Party	37 - 84
Chapter IV: Methodology	85 - 112
Chapter V: Hypothesis & Findings	113 - 171
Chapter VI: Discussion	172 - 185
Chapter VII: Conclusions	186 - 196
Bibliography	197 - 230
Appendices	231 - 256
Postscript	257 - 263

TABLE & FIGURE INDEX

		Page
Table I	Relevant Terminology	11
Table II	Theoretical Framework	18
Table III	British General Elections (North-West Cumbria)	116
Table IV	Research Participants' Geographic Background	118
Figure I	Conservative Party General Election Poster 1987	57
Figure II	Cumbria County	235
Figure III	Cumbria: Urban and Rural Demographics	236
Figure IV	Income Deprivation	241
Figure V	Employment	242
Figure VI	Education, Skills, and Training	243
Figure VII	Living Environment	244

RELEVANT TERMINOLOGY

This thesis analyses the relevance of the shift in class discourse from a broad ‘communal’ perspective towards a more complex, atomised ethos in regards support for the British Labour Party, with a specific localised focus on North-West Cumbria. The two types of socio-political categorisation that are commonly referred to in this study, be it ‘traditional’ ‘communal’ or ‘classless’ ‘atomised’, are defined at the outset, so as to emphasise the appropriate context in which such terms are commonly referred to during the thesis. Both respective terms are for the purposes of this study naturally connected and therefore are generally interchangeable. There is still though a clear distinctive meaning for each word in its respective term, as ‘traditional’ and ‘atomised’ describes the general class structure of their respective historical time-periods, whilst, ‘communal’ and ‘classless’ state the relevance of such a class structure in relation to support for the Labour Party. The prominence of each term in relation to the thesis’ three-themed phenomenon is outlined in the table below.

Table I: Relevant Terminology

Theme	Traditional/Communal	Atomised/Classless
Class/Identity pp.21-36 (Chapter II) pp.120-128 (Chapter V) pp.172-174 (Chapter VI) pp.246-248 (Appendix II)	The term refers to the works of Karl Marx and his two-tier class categorisation theory – the proletariat and bourgeoisie, and Max Weber and his three-tier categorisation theory - workers, managers, and owners.	The term refers to the modern consumer-driven atomised class ethos purported by Edward Bernays and latterly through a more refined cultural perspective stated by Pierre Bourdieu, and Mike Savage.
(Labour) Party pp.37-66 (Chapter III) pp.128-149 (Chapter V) pp.175-179 (Chapter VI) pp.248-253 (Appendix II)	The term refers to Old Labour's class perspective, that being promoting the interests of the working-classes over the middle-classes. It consequently represents the collectivised class outlook where the party branded itself to please their broad working-class electoral supporter base.	The term refers to how the atomised perspective was developed by Anthony Giddens into a classless Third Way political ethos, which enabled the promotion of the New Labour brand. It consequently evaluates how such a brand culture has affected class discourse both in general political terms, and specifically in regards contemporary affinity for the Labour Party since the rise of the New Right.
Geography (North-West Cumbria) pp.66-71 (Chapter III) pp.149-171 (Chapter V) pp.179-185 (Chapter VI) pp.253-256 (Appendix II)	The term refers to the Marxist 'spatial' ethos promoted in the works of Louis Althusser, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey which emphasises that class and political perception are defined via Marxist interpretations of social space and specific locale.	The term refers to the network theory advanced by Manuel Castells which states that traditional class groupings, where political affinity was defined by geographic space and locale, have been replaced by atomised networks that have homogenised such variables.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a brief introduction of this thesis as it will contextualise the content and explain the analytical approach to be found in the succeeding chapters. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the relevance that social class has played in regards affinity for the Labour Party in Britain, since the development of the New Labour brand, with an explicit localised focus on North-West Cumbria, analysing the districts of Allerdale and Carlisle. The study will focus on Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) and not the United Kingdom (which also includes Northern Ireland), as Labour traditionally consider themselves in electoral terms at least, to be a British, and not a United Kingdom, based party.

The chapter is structured in five parts, the first is to state a broad overview of the aims and objectives of the study. The second is to outline the significance of, and motivations for undertaking this type of research. The third is to outline why the subject of the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria at this time was particularly conducive for such research. The fourth focusses on the theoretical structure which links to the fifth which gives a brief description of the impending chapters, and how they relate to each other so as to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the research phenomenon being explored.

Overview

On a theoretical level, the thesis endeavours to determine, what effect shifts in sociological and political outlooks within modern British society, have had on Labour's contemporary support. Such analysis is framed from a range of socio-political theorists holding a variety of broad left-of-centre perspectives. On a practical level, this thesis through the adoption of secondary Conceptual Analysis research and primary Interview research, makes a contribution to the development of qualitative methods research by providing a template of how such approaches can be integrated and connected to explore a pertinent research hypothesis. The analytical structure, devised through both descriptive and evaluative dialogue, from a range of relevant class theorists and Labour political representatives in North-West Cumbria, largely

questions the relevance of class and location in regards political party affiliation for the Labour Party and its respective Old, New, and Post New brands.

The study though more explicitly is designed to address the following aims: the first being to create a wide range of Conceptual Analysis output, the intention of which is to strongly identify relationships between the contemporary complex social class structure and its relevance with modern-day support for the Labour Party. In addition to such inquiry, the role of such affiliation will be dissected through an understanding of the relevance of the rise to prominence of the New Labour brand which came into being in the mid-1990s with the election of Tony Blair as party leader in 1994. This coincided with the sentiments promoted by the atomised, consumerist class revolution undertaken by the New Right who were themselves influenced through revolutionary propaganda practices denoted by Edward Bernays, two decades earlier, which brought into sharp focus the role of political marketing, branding, and advertising in modern British politics. By focussing upon the relevance of such a class shift within the context of the Labour Party and correlating it to a particular localised setting like North-West Cumbria is a distinctive research void which this study aims to fill. Finally, the third general aim of the research is to produce a rich description of the subject in question through the Conceptual Analysis and the Interview method techniques. This chapter will thus give a brief outline of the broad methodological frameworks which will be drawn upon. Discussion here, as noted below, will also concentrate on the structural basis of the research study, which includes a brief precis of the research question, objective, scope, theoretical motivations, and relevant literary contributions.

The aim is to identify the relevance of social class both in a conventional British sense and within the confines of the Labour Party from both an historical and contemporary perspective. This leads secondly on to an examination of how such a relationship has been affected since the emergence of the atomised class-political culture in the late 1970s. This stimulated the rise to prominence of the classless New Labour brand twenty years later under the guidance of Tony Blair, which delivered the party an unprecedented three consecutive general election victories. There will then be an investigation in relation to the extent to which these norms and practices are implicated to North-West Cumbria, specifically within geographically contrasting

rural and urban landscapes in both Allerdale and Carlisle, the concise definition of which is outlined (see Appendix I). The research in conclusion offers a way of developing a means of using the findings to inform possible future Class-Labour Party relations in other counties, areas and/or districts within the rest of Britain.

A theoretical framework of this kind is evaluated through three stages, all of which are interlinked. The first is to probe into the typical patterns of discourse and literature that are used by a range of theorists and participants taking part within the study. Following on from this, the second element endeavours to define how such content and discourse contributes to the participants' construction and understanding of the subject in question. This research analysis concludes by using the knowledge garnered from such findings to suggest appropriate ways that the findings can be used to improve any similar future research for the subject in question. It would appear that to answer these three elements, it is necessary first to have a core thematic focus which in the main, ties such research objectives to relevant primary and secondary research content. The three core research themes of 'Class/Identity', '(Labour) Party', and 'Geography (North-West Cumbria)', which make-up the research phenomenon, are three distinct constituents whose analytical connection is complex and intricate. The clear purpose of this study is accordingly to compare, contrast, and evaluate such themes.

Significance of, and motivations for this Research Study

Over the last four decades the connection between the issue of social class and political ideological attachment has become a mainstream issue in the field of political science (Giddens (1991); Scase (1992)). Such a research structure has been used extensively to examine the theoretical relationships between a wide-range of political perspectives to both historical and contemporary sociological class categorisations. After reviewing related literature, problems or gaps were observed (see Chapters II, III, IV, V, and VI) which provided motivation to undertake a thesis of this kind. Although accepting that more qualitative research is always needed to provide an evaluation of the relationship among different thematic components, it must be stated that this study attempts to build a fluent dialogue between the three core themes which inform each other, be it either obviously or subtly, in a multitude of ways.

The atomisation of class in Britain since the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s, that is the shift from the broad collectivised class groupings espoused by Marx and Weber towards the more fragmented and cultured ethos of Bernays and Bourdieu, has had notable political effects. In regards Labour, it has in a general sense led to the party adapting its class focus away from communal structures towards the individual as consumer. This has encouraged a merging in political party ideology and with it a greater level of flexibility in regards contemporary political party affinity. This thesis, accepting such modern shifts, can contribute to the existing literature and knowledge by outlining both an historical and contemporary outlook. The former will be achieved by stating how both Old and New Labour support was shaped by the shift towards such atomised brand politics, the latter by offering ways as to how the party could possibly develop its Post New brand to continue to adapt such an evolving consumerist structure. This will also give a practical example of how primary and secondary qualitative approaches can be combined and integrated to investigate both the said historical and contemporary relevance that such a research phenomenon plays in a localised setting of North-West Cumbria. This thesis will accordingly be a fully integrated study, in which the qualitative findings, be they primary or secondary, will be mutually informative both from a national and localised Labour Party perspective.

Why Labour?, Why North-West Cumbria?, and Why Now?

The Labour Party was seen as most appropriate for this study, because being a study that investigates the relevance of contemporary class structure, and its subsequent changes to political party affinity, Labour are the party which has most altered their perspective in relation to such sociological movements. This is symbolically demonstrated with the adoption of the Old and New brands, both constructs defined not just by the relationship with each other, but via the different class connotations which each were deemed to promote and represent.

North-West Cumbria and the two districts which comprise it, Allerdale and Carlisle, were chosen for two pragmatic reasons, the first being in practical terms, that they are two districts which have been starved of any such research in this academic field. The second is that the two districts in general, are largely geographically and politically similar. They are geographically similar as they are both comprised of a mixture of urban and rural areas, thus meaning that any major differences that might arise be it

through the meaning of class and its effect on Labour's image both on a national and localised context will arise from an intra-district divide, rather than a comparison between the two. This dichotomy is vital as it inevitably places focus on the rural/urban split and the specific effect it has on both districts as complex geographic entities in their own right, which by emphasising both district as well as locale, provides a greater degree of research focus to the research phenomenon being undertaken. The two districts are also politically similar, that being that they traditionally are both Labour supporting districts, with a sizable amount of non-Labour voters as well, who potentially could have been attracted to the New Labour's classless agenda. Such distinctive geographic and political characteristics therein make the area ideal for social science research of this kind.

This is a particularly propitious time to be studying the relevance of class, particularly in relation to Labour politics, as both the Old and New Labour eras are finished, they are now historical constructs which thus enables them and their relationship with class, communications, and locale, to be fully analysed, evaluated, and compared from a retrospective context. This analysis is further supplemented with the party in its current guise, that being termed Post New Labour, which is still in the process of defining its distinctive class outlook. This position became particularly relevant in 2015 and 2016, the time when the interview research was being undertaken, with the surprise election of left-winger Jeremy Corbyn as leader, and the subsequent internal turmoil, and general interest which the party generated, particularly over its class objectives both within a broad national and specific localised context.

Theoretical Structure

The thesis thus through a linked thematic structure, endeavours to use a range of primary and secondary theorists' perspectives to inform the interview participant research, with the aim being to give a distinctive evaluation. Anything else would substantially weaken the analytical framework and accordingly any subsequent conclusions. This research study for that reason is centred through the first and second-hand perspectives of representatives and theorists who typically are associated with socialistic political outlooks. Such discourse though encompasses a wide-ranging ideological left-of-centre standpoint, spanning from radical left-wing Marxist to moderate left-wing social democracy. This allows for the use of such key content

to be dissected from a broad theoretical perspective, hence the general content is not based on any kind of theological supposition but on the core arguments of the stated primary and secondary theorists themselves.

The thesis structure in view of that, is consequently framed and examined through a wide-ranging ‘left-of-centre’ exploration of the New Right atomisation ethos developed by Bernaysian theory and its ensuing effects on Labour support and its brand perception, both nationally and locally. Despite their ideological differences, the entirety of the theorists being ideologically left-of-centre have an affinity for socialistic Labour values if not the Labour Party itself. This ranges from Ralph Miliband the Marxist to Anthony Giddens the Social Democrat, both of whom were, and are, Labour supporters. This correlates with the content stated by the research participants, who by the fact of being Labour representatives, all gave such comprehensive ‘left-of-centre’ perspectives to the interview questions. It could be argued that it could have been structured in an opposite fashion, i.e. initially set the clear theoretical framework (e.g. Marxist) and then outline the required theorists (who would logically have had to have been almost entirely Marxist) to justify such a framework. At first glance that appears logical, but in the long-term the opposite is true, because then the researcher would be constraining him or herself to a narrow theoretical perspective which would inevitably weaken the overall thesis argument.

Thesis Chapter Outline

The context of the study has been outlined in this opening chapter; below is a brief table of the ‘Theoretical Framework’ and then a summary of the role and relevance of the remaining six chapters.

Table II: Theoretical Framework

Introduction (Chapter I)

Conceptual Analysis (of key themes and theorists):

(Chapters II & III)

Theme I: Class/Identity

Aim: Define the Meaning of Class - Communal to the Atomised

Main Theorists: Communal: Marx, Weber; Atomised: Bourdieu, Savage

Theme II: (Labour) Party

Aim: Define the Relevance of the Atomised Class Shift on Labour Politics

Main Theorists: Old Labour: Miliband, Thompson; New Labour: Bernays, Giddens

Theme III: Geography (North-West Cumbria)

Aim: Define the meaning of class to Labour support on a locational basis

Main Theorists: Spatial: Althusser, Lefebvre, Harvey; Network: Castells

Interviews (of 15 North-West Cumbria Labour research participants):

(Chapter IV)

Aim: Define the general relevance of the Interviews to the Conceptual Analysis research via its broad structures and reflexivity

Theme I: Class/Identity - Interview Question 1;

Theme II: (Labour) Party - Interview Questions 2-5;

Theme III: Geography (North-West Cumbria) - Interview Questions 6-8

Conceptual Analysis (themes/theorists) of the Interviews (research participants):

(Chapters V & VI)

Theme I: Class/Identity

Analyse: Class Perceptions in Contemporary Britain

Theme II: (Labour) Party

Analyse: Old Labour & Class; The Impact of Thatcher/New Right; New Labour & Class

Theme III: Geography (North-West Cumbria)

Analyse: Urban/Rural Dynamic; The New Labour Effect on Locale (North-West Cumbria)

Conclusions (Chapter VII)

Appendices (I & II)

Postscript: Post New Labour - The Corbyn Effect

Chapter II entitled 'Theoretical Background: Class – The Producer/Consumer', and Chapter III entitled 'Theoretical Background: The Labour Party' both provide a comprehensive review of related literature on the three-themed phenomenon at the heart of the research. The former though, discusses the relevance of class in British

politics, how it became more complex, atomised, and harder to discern, and the effect that had on political allegiance. The latter, following on from such discourse, questions how such political atomisation, has affected the specific class perspective of the Labour Party. The intent behind these two chapters is not to provide an exhaustive summary of every item of recent, or for that matter, distant opinion, on the three-themed subjects as entities within themselves. It is rather, to provide an overview of the relevant literature relating to such themes within the specialised research context of this particular study. This strategy needs to be followed for basic practical reasons if nothing else, as given the voluminous amounts of literature related to these core themes, it is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all available literature. The review instead, has been arranged to form a logical flow which by this means will address the key points pertinent to the areas of inquiry. It accordingly presents an extensive evaluation of literature on the research topic being studied.

Chapter IV presents a detailed breakdown of the methodological structure of the thesis. The positioning of the ‘Methodology’ chapter, that being directly inserted between the earlier literature review-styled chapters (II, and III) and the later analysis-styled chapters (V, and VI), offers a clear strategic outlook of how the previous secondary research is methodologically connected to the forthcoming primary data. Chapters V, and VI, entitled ‘Hypothesis & Findings’ and ‘Discussion’, as being analysis focussed, primarily present the results and findings of the study. Continuing the structure identified in the previous ‘Methodology’ chapter, Chapter V asserts how the study’s research themes, supported by relevant quotes, determine the relevance of the research hypothesis to the eventual findings.

Finally, to conclude the analysis section is Chapter VI, which comprehensively evaluates through a reasoned perspective the findings in conjunction with relevant prior research, so as to outline a clear focus to the research question being investigated. The Interview content via headings summarised from such findings offers the broad contours to the general Discussion chapter, but the analysis is primarily structured through correlating such headings to relevant theoretical perspectives. The ‘Hypothesis & Findings’, and ‘Discussion’ chapters, correlate the general research phenomenon to the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Labour brands, and also to a lesser extent, the contemporary ‘Post New’ Labour brand. Such a structure is thus for

the most part, designed from an historical perspective as the Old and New Labour brands are now figures from the past. This is compared to the latter brand being contemporary, which is naturally studied from an element of primary and secondary research supposition in relation to possible future perspectives. The theoretical framework has thus been extended and reviewed, in accordance with the qualitative data, which is intended to encourage a greater understanding of the relevance of class and communications to Labour politics, especially within the localised setting of North-West Cumbria. The agenda on a broad perspective is informed by a growing sense of the emergence of a more reflexive, more modest, and more consciously theory-informed political analysis. The study then comes to a completion in Chapter VII entitled ‘Conclusions’, which in accordance with the knowledge of the research findings and subsequent analysis provided, summarises in detail the many potential implications of the evaluative purpose of the study.

All of these directions have been considered and are outlined in the next chapter which is the first of two that review relevant literature which are broadly associated to this research field. The review in general terms, consolidates and evaluates relevant literature pertinent to the three research themes and analyses how such themes and the literary content within them, link with each other so as to define a clear research phenomenon.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: CLASS – THE PRODUCER/CONSUMER

This chapter explores the general theoretical literary scope of the study, which largely is achieved via a comprehensive analysis of the relevant themes and theorists which support and direct such a detailed review of literature. The chapter is divided into three broad sections, the first outlining the once predominant collectivised class ethos, and the simplistic political allegiances which were associated with them. This narrative leads on to the next two sections which illustrate how with the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s and the enactment of the political philosophies of Reagan in the United States, and Thatcher in Britain, the old communal class certainties were replaced with a ruthless corporate culture that promoted the theory of class atomisation, that being prioritising the interests of the individual citizen. Following such a structure, an initial understanding of the role of social class from a traditional communal perspective needs to be assessed, chiefly through the writings of various notable theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Pierre Bourdieu.

Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu

Social class, as documented by McLellan (1995), and Wheen (2000), is defined by Marxists in relation to the means of production. This ‘though does not explain how classes are constituted as classes, nor how the complex status hierarchies of capitalist societies are articulated and internalised by individuals or how other systems of status subordination are integrated within a class system of domination’ (Blunden (2004)). On closer inspection, as Cannadine (1999) states, ‘the best that could be said of Marx’s two class-conscious classes was that they were ideal types, historical abstractions that grossly oversimplified the way in which the social structure of modern Britain had evolved and developed’. The make-up, identity, and structure of class have changed throughout time, Marx and Engels’ famed text, *The German Ideology* (1932), examined the concept that the societal class structure was divided into two distinct groupings, the ‘bourgeoisie’ and the ‘proletariat’. The power divisions, as remarked by Miliband (1989), and Barnett (2009), between those respective groups were equally as distinct, for the proletariat to economically survive had to sell their labour power to the bourgeoisie class who controlled the means of

production. A social class structure of this ilk encouraged a continuous class subjugation of the proletariat, for they were recurrently forced to follow a productive cycle which persistently solidified the economic power in the hands of the bourgeoisie (Poulantzas (1975); Gardiner (1992)). The solitary viable way that such a dictatorial elitist class system could be overturned is only by the ‘proletariat’ class realising their subjugation status and consequently uniting as one to overthrow their ‘bourgeoisie’ oppressors (Marx & Engels (1975); Grossberg (2010)). There ‘are those Marxist followers’, as remarked by Wright (1985), and quoted by Carchedi (1975), ‘who regard the inherent antagonisms of class relationships to be the vehicles of social change, for them, it is necessary to identify the determinants of class membership’.

One difficulty, as Cannadine (1999) notes with this view, ‘was that the shared class characteristics and clear-cut class boundaries that Marx and his followers had posited had rarely, if ever, existed in fact’. A further problem, as discerned by Dahrendorf (1959), and Newby et al. (1988), and is further quoted by Cannadine (1999), ‘was that within Marx’s two supposedly inclusive class categories, there were many internal divisions. This occurred on numerous levels, between aristocrats and landed gentry, between bankers and businessmen, between industrialists competing for the same markets, and between the many different gradations of skilled and unskilled labour. A third qualification was that during and since Marx’s time, old occupational groups have expanded, and new occupational groups have come into being that do not easily fit into his two-tier model: managers, professionals, and the whole of the lower middle-classes’. Cannadine (1999) continues, that ‘before getting to the historical substance of the matter, it might be helpful to state the conventional post communal class orthodoxy that held sway in Britain from the end of World War II until the late 1970s, and to describe the ways in which it has since then been replaced by a new individualistic consumerist ethos’. This is also the appropriate place to reaffirm the unfashionable belief ‘that social class is still central to a proper understanding of British history and Britain today, provided it is appropriately defined. This categorisation inspired by the works of German sociologist Max Weber, was introduced in the Victorian age as a simplistic way to differentiate people into clear class positions during the Industrial Revolution’. Weberian accounts, as noted by Holton & Turner (2011), and Kalberg (2016), and quoted by Cochrane & Anderson (1989), ‘define people’s class stratification primarily via their occupation. Different

occupations are rated by a society via varying degrees of statuses, and these ratings can be uncovered by survey research and various other measures. Once a hierarchy of diverse occupational rankings has been constructed, similarly ranked occupations can be progressively collapsed into smaller numbers of categories. “Occupational Classes” are just categories boiled down by analysts from the myriads of relative rankings of occupations in the society as a whole’ (Cochrane & Anderson, 1989, p.175).

A further important difference between Marx and Weber over their individual class perspectives is that the role of ‘class’ played a meaningfully smaller part in Weber’s overall sociological workings (Bendix (1978); Anter (2014)). In contrast to Marx, despite clear practical limitations, Weber’s systematic discussion of the concept of class, as noted by Ringer (2004), and Camic (2005), is far more relevant on a contemporary sociological level than Marx. Weber, by approving the rationality of capitalism today and through opposing Marxist socialism, was effectively able to espouse a more realistic theory of contemporary social class thinking. They were, as stated by Stedman Jones (1983, and 2016), and Pakulski & Waters (1996), nothing more than rhetorical constructions, the inner-imagination of every individual citizen, seeking as best they can to explain the broad societal structure to themselves. In short, as Cannadine (1999) states, ‘even though social perception was clearly the product of language, it was not though the only social indicator over such matters, for there were and are, many other factors in which people envision the construct of such social order’.

It was thus a broadly historical approach ‘to the topic of social class, similar to that found in the work of Marx, and Weber, that has been a constant theme in the work of sociologists’ (Crompton, 2008, p.38). In Britain, the work of Bauman (1972), and Webb & Schirato (2002), might be cited as examples. This approach though is originally derived ‘from the 1960s, where there was a continuing dialogue between sociology and history, much of which has been concerned with the concept of “class”’ (Stedman Jones (1976)). Bourdieu, as alluded to by Grenfell (2010), and Gartman (2015), and quoted by Bryant (2015), ‘refers to possession of the dominant culture as cultural capital because with the education system it can be translated into wealth and power. Cultural capital is not evenly distributed throughout the class structure, and

this predominantly accounts for class differences in educational attainment. Bourdieu asserts that people's taste is related both to upbringing and to education. The taste could include art, films, music, food, and hobbies. He shows that there is a very close relationship linking cultural practices primarily to educational capital and secondly, to social origin'. According to Bourdieu, 'the education system attaches the highest value to legitimate taste', and people find it easier in these post-Thatcherite times to succeed in the education system and are likely to stay in it for longer than those brought up in the previous communal centred society.

The old class system in British society differentiated clearly between the collar boundary between middle and working-class, white and blue-collar. In the old model of class, as noted by Symonds (2015), and Browne (2016), people knew their place as they were born into a particular class and consequently the standard individual mind-set would be based on knowing their specific position within that class structure. The upper-classes in such a structure were comprised of a small group of landed aristocrats, and the middle-classes be it the managers and white-collar workers, were well aware of their privileged place within this conventional class paradigm. The same is true for a person who was born into a working-class coal mining family, as they would inevitably be socialised into thinking that this is the class to which they naturally belonged. In the same way, as Savage & Devine claim in *The Great British Class Survey (2013)*, that whilst people still managed to move between social classes, there was a much clearer and stronger sense that a person's class perception during such a time period had been clearly defined through broader, and for that matter, simpler class categories. In regards the contemporary class structure, people are much less likely to feel very proudly working-class because their parents were working-class or at the other extreme, people promoting their ancestral elite class values. People in today's Britain are looking for atomised social markers which depict that they may be privileged or not, markers which can be acquired through a variety of ways such as going to university, obtaining a certain occupation, and buying certain brand products. These are common indicators which people use to demonstrate to both themselves and others the type of social class grouping they currently are categorised towards (Savage (2015)).

Such a structure has changed quite radically; for what is occurring ‘today is that there is an ever-increasing gap between the top and the bottom of the class spectrum. At the top there is a small elite class which encompasses about 6 per cent of the population, who are characterised by having very large salaries, excessive savings, and expensive house values, rewards which have allowed them to pull away from the rest of the “traditional” middle-classes. At the bottom, there is a class called the “Precariat” which is a class characterised by poor income and savings and deprived of social capital, be it friendships, and cultural engagement’ (Savage & Devine (2013)). Between those two aforementioned extremes there is a greater blurring of class groupings as the traditional clear class boundaries have fragmented (Standing (2016); Thatcher (2016)). The result of this is that there are now clusters of people who Savage & Define (2013) brand, ‘as the “Established Middle Class” or the “Technical Middle Class” which is characterised by people with high incomes but not much social capital’. There are strong generational divides in British society now where young people are excluded from moving in to the more middle-class position which leads to questions as to whether there is a link between generational divisions and class divisions. On one level, there is clearly an emergence of a globalised middle-class and yet these classes are also very fixed in place, specifically in particular areas of Britain. The Elite class is disproportionately found within the affluent areas of the South-East, is what Savage & Devine (2013), call the ‘Elite Vortex’. The message which it promotes is that the contemporary class system prevalent in 21st Century Britain is very dynamic, mobile, and fluid. People are no longer attached to a broad communal class group, but such a structure is actually still consistent with the formation of distinctive spatial clusters both socially and economically, of wealth and power (Savage & Devine (2013)).

This structure outlines a more complex class system than the more traditional versions of Marx and later Weber, and as a consequence provides a contemporary perspective in regards to ‘moderating the myriad of struggles between classes in modern capitalist society’ (Blunden (2004)). *The Great British Class Survey (2013)*, founded both on the works of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990, and 1992), and Savage (2000), as Savage & Devine (2013) notes, ‘provided valuable data to help leading sociological experts to understand the key feature behind the contemporary British class structure’. It above all suggests that class perception, and ‘its social relevance has not been diluted from

the British population, in fact the subject of class matters more' in Britain today 'than it did' four decades ago, prior to the atomised revolution. The broad Marxist and Weberian class divisions have, as stated by Holton & Turner (2011), and Murphy & Costa (2015), been usurped by the more refined Bourdieuian cultural ethos. Such accustomed class divisions may not in spite of this, as asserted by Dahrendorf (1959), be relevant in contemporary 21st Century society, although the concept of class may still dominate public affairs and shape political opinion. It used 'to be generally perceived that class was defined by occupational status. In basic industrial compositional class terms, "White-Collar" workers had more prosperous and sophisticated lifestyles than "Blue-Collar" workers' (Savage & Devine (2013)). Rigid Weberian class categories of this sort, as expressed by Schroeder (1998), and Whimster & Lash (2008), are not, according to Savage & Devine (2013), 'deemed appropriate barometers to analyse class stratifications' in present-day society, where class perspectives and categorisations are greatly more complex and atomised. The old communal class categorisations are now, as Cannadine (1999) notes, 'widely dismissed as being deeply and fatally flawed: too teleological, anachronistic, all-encompassing, and simplistic'.

Bernays' Classless Consumerism and the rise of the New Right

This classless virtue, as principally noted by Adam Curtis in his BBC documentary *The Century of the Self* (2002), was founded as a concept in 1939 by Edward Bernays, who was Sigmund Freud's nephew, and also the founder of contemporary Public Relations (PR), where he devised the concept of the 'brand' to promote a new atomised social structure. Freud, as customarily stated by Harre et al. (1985), and Thurschwell (2009), began to write about group interaction, and about how straightforwardly the unconscious aggressive forces in human beings could be activated when they were in crowds. In his work on crowd psychology, Freud described how the startling irrationality inside human beings could appear in such groups, where, what he called 'libidinal forces of desire' which occur and are promoted through the individual identity ethos and not through traditional, communal class categories (Curtis (2002)).

Freud, as commented by Harre & Secord (1972), and Henriques et al. (1984), alleged that he had undervalued the general aggressive nature of human beings, as they were

much more threatening than he had formerly believed. Freud had concocted a technique that he called ‘Psychoanalysis’, which explored the concept of free association, by doing so, he had extracted potent and sensual forces which were the residues of human kind’s animalistic history (Curtis (2002)). This theory, as broadly noted by prominent theorists like Beck et al. (1994), and Thorschwell (2009), goes back to the early part of the 20th Century, to Freud and his notions of the unconscious. He articulated the assumptions that humans are, in terms of our rational minds, constantly endeavouring to satisfy their individualistic hopes, fears, and desires of which, the role of somebody selling something, including a politician, is to appeal to this great swamp of unconscious desire. These contemporary atomised groups were hard to categorise and define as they cut across a range of traditional class groupings and had a range of social interests, employment positions, and past educational attainment. They all though broadly emphasised the importance of the happiness, and wellbeing of the individual, over that of the wider society at large (Curtis (2002)).

At the core of the narrative is not just Freud himself but other members of his family, by and large focusing attention on Bernays, for like his famous uncle, Bernays was assured that human beings, similar to that outlined by Harre & Secord (1972), and Gabay (2015), were motivated by greedy forces. The only way thus to deal with the public was to connect with their unconscious desires and fears. Bernays took Freud’s concepts about human behaviour and used them to control the masses. This was demonstrated on a practical level in the early 1920s when the big New York banks financed firms across America, with the object being to spread such a consumerist message. They were to be the conduits of the mass-produced goods and Bernays’ role was to construct the new type of atomised consumer. By the end of the decade President Hoover was elected president, this was the first shift in the influence of Bernays’ ideas on a political level, as Hoover was the first politician to enunciate the vision that such atomised consumerism had become the indispensable vehicle of American life (De Vaus (2002); Biressi & Nunn (2013)). After his election, he told a group of advertisers and public relations consultants that they had taken over the function of generating desire and had converted people into endlessly moving happiness constructs, constructs which Bernays would later term as ‘brands’ (Curtis (2002)). Above all, what was starting to occur during this time was a new idea of how to run mass democracy. As, argued by Clark et al. (1993), and Marlin (2013), at its

heart was the docile consuming self which not only made the economy progress but also powered a social structure thus creating a stable society. Bernays now became one of the central figures in a business elite which dominated American society and politics in the 1920s.

Bernays began to create many of the techniques of mass consumer persuasion that are now common place in contemporary society. He hired consultants to promote specific brands by outlining that they were good for people's self-worth as they were intrinsic to their natural consumer-driven desires. He uniquely showed American corporations how they could make people want brands that they did not need by linking mass-produced merchandises to their unconscious selfish desires (Curtis (2002)); out of this would come a new individualistic political perspective of how to control the masses (Bernays (1965)). By gratifying such inner-selfish desires, as noted by Qualter (1991), and Curtis (2002), people were made to feel contented and thus obedient; it was the start of the all-consuming atomised self which has come to dominate modern culture. By stimulating people's inner-desires and then connecting them with consumer products, he was creating a new way to manage the irrational force of the masses. Bernays had manipulated the American people because he, like many others at the time, assumed that the corporate interests of business and the selfish desires of the population at large, were undividable (Ewen (1976); Tedlow (1979)). Bernays though was certain that to justify this rationally to the people was not feasible because they were not rational, instead one had to touch upon their inner-desires which would control them and enhance his atomised ethos; this was known as 'The Engineering of Consent' (Bernays (1955); Curtis (2002)).

Since the end of the 19th Century, America had developed into a mass industrial society with millions clustered together in the cities. Bernays was determined to find a way to manage and alter the way that these new crowds thought and felt, so he turned to the writings of Freud, via his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920). The depiction of secreted atomised and consumer-driven influences inside human beings captivated Bernays and would inspire his philosophy. He was about to craft a vision of the paradise that free-market atomised capitalism would build in America if it were unleashed. In 1939, New York held 'The World's Fair', Bernays was a key mentor and he stipulated that the theme be the link between democracy and

the concept of the brand. The Fair, that Bernays named ‘Democracy’ was a remarkable sensation and seized America’s imagination for this new consumerist culture (Curtis (2002)).

In the process, the communal ethos had been transformed, Bernays had become the engineer of a new kind of freedom, by responding to the needs and desires of individuals. The image it rendered was of a new form of atomised democracy in which commerce reacted to people’s inner-desires in a way that the traditional, communal social order could not do. It was a practice of democracy, as generally alluded to by Curtis (2002), which rested on treating people not as dynamic citizens as Roosevelt did, but as impassive consumers because this, Bernays believed, was the key to power in a mass democracy. Bernays (1955) in this manner, used the power of PR within a political context, by crafting a concept of a future age in which the atomised consumer as an entity in itself was to the forefront, replacing the previously prevalent communal class groupings (Ewen (1976); Trentmann (2006)). He was interpreting the atomised will of the people in a way that politicians of the time could not, for they were still entrenched in the outdated all-encompassing style of class discourse which was becoming ever more obsolete for the increasingly complex relationship between social class and political party support within the modern world (Curtis (2002)).

The foundations of such a political, social class, categorisation shift arose in the late 1970s. It was instigated when a group of economists and psychologists at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) decided to find a way to examine, assess and satisfy the aspirations of the phenomenon of new changeable consumers, who place the needs of the individual as an entity in itself over that of a specific, communal social class group. SRI aimed to realise this by turning for help to those who had initiated the emancipation of the power of the concept of the individual, in particular one of the trailblazers of the ‘Human Potential Movement’ was the prominent psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow through this high-minded locality observation method had devised a new classification of psychological classes which he termed the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ and it labelled the distinctive emotional phases that individuals went through as they stated their desires (Curtis (2002)). This was part of the self-actualisation process, this was the point where individuals became wholly self-

directed and unrestricted by society as a social construct. The team at SRI believed that Maslow's (1987) pecking order, might form the foundation for a new way to classify society, away from traditional, broad collectivist social class groupings towards political classification dominated by the needs and ambitions of the individual citizen.

This new model for the purposes of political party classification, was trialled through a mammoth survey which comprised hundreds of questions about how people saw themselves through their inner-ideals. The questions were proposed to see whether people fitted into Maslow's (1987) groupings. The responses were dissected by computer and the data uncovered that there were triggering patterns in the way individuals felt about themselves which matched Maslow's (1987) classifications. The most prominent group at the top of the pyramid was sizeable and growing; and cut through all social classes. The SRI team defined them as atomised individuals, these were citizens who comprehended that they were not characterised by their traditional class grouping but by the specific actions which they determined themselves (Ewen (1976); Tedlow (1979)). What SRI revealed was that these individuals could be demarcated by the different patterns of behaviour, through atomised, consumerist categories or following Bernaysian parlance, 'brands'. It was through the concept of the brand which they wished to convey themselves not just through a new more flexible approach, but to attract new audiences in areas and locales which until then had been stereotypically unrealistic in electoral terms (Curtis (2002)).

Atomised Democracy: Reagan and Thatcher

In addition, there have been major changes in the past forty years, regards class and the relevance it plays in society at large. There, as stated by Park (2014), and Ibrahim (2015), has been a gradual rise of such modern sectionalism with its more intense focus on culture-driven individualism at the expense of dogmatic class-based divisions. This contemporary class dissection illustrated through *The Great British Class Survey (2013)*, was not only orchestrated under, as hitherto noted, the theoretical workings of Savage & Devine (2013); but was also supplemented through the highly refined and widely respected British population consumer classification database 'Acorn' (Acorn (2013)). Acorn was structurally propitious as it illustrated the gradual 'cultural' class

complexities allied to the refinement of social class in modern-day Britain, as social class categories were divided into seven different cultural groups, which were then divided into fifty-nine atomised sub-groups. Meaningful class dissection of this kind has demonstrated that social class perception in late 20th Century and early 21st Century Britain has become far more complex than the traditional two or three-tier class models (Webb & Schirato (2002); Jones (2013)). The issue of social class accordingly became an abstract construct and in practical terms, the idea of classlessness, as asserted by Giddens (2000), and Prideaux (2005), has prevailed where individuals have gone beyond any such traditional structures and developed as atomised individuals free of such traditional, sociological constraints. This has subsequently considerably affected the way that political parties brand themselves to the public, a public which has become almost like a consumer rather than a loyal supporter.

This idea of political democracy, like that described by Benoit (2006), and Aronczyk & Powers (2010), was being taken over by a simplified marketing model of human beings and in the process; freedom was redefined to mean nothing more than the ability of atomised individuals to get whatever they wanted. The idea of self-expression was not restricted to traditional class categorisations. This atomised perspective became categorised into discernible ‘types’ by the SRI team. They had succeeded in categorising the new atomised individualism, they called their new classification, ‘Values and Lifestyles’ (Curtis (2002)). Such an atomised theory followed the atomised economic outlook purported by a range of New Right scholars like Hayek (1944, and 1960), Friedman (1962), and post-modernists such as Baudrillard (1970). It laid the rudiments for the revolution of the New Right in the late 1970s both in the United States through Ronald Reagan promoted by his pollster Richard Wirthlin, and his free-market centred, monetarist ethos, and also in Britain with Margaret Thatcher via the communications guidance of ‘Saatchi & Saatchi’ (Wirthlin & Hall (2004)). They depicted a consumerist democracy which at its core was a society where the wishes and wants of individuals were controlled and satisfied by business within the fiscal framework of the free-market (Lawson (1980)).

This extensive span of new desires fitted seamlessly with wide-ranging shifts, as noted by Bernays (1955), in industrial production; the astronomic rise of the process of

digitalisation now allowed manufacturers to tailor consumer stocks to the atomised individual. The central vision had been that the freeing of the previous held communal restrictions of the concept of the individual would fashion a new kind of atomised individualism. Such philosophical transformations, as noted in general terms by Qualter (1991), and Curtis (2002), have occurred. The corporations had understood that it was in their interests to inspire these new consumers to believe that they were distinctive individuals, and then propose to them novel ways to communicate that individuality. This new world consequently, as broadly remarked by Warner et al. (1949), and Bernays (1965), in which people thought that they were defying orthodoxy, was not a risk to the corporate sector, but instead provided it with greater opportunities for expansion.

It allowed businesses to identify which groups were buying their products and from that, how the goods, as noted by Rutherford (2000), and Jhally (2016), could be marketed so that they became powerful emblems of those groups' inner-values and lifestyles, it was the beginning of lifestyle marketing. If a new product expressed a particular group's values, then it would be bought by them, as it was seen as an essential part of their individual personality and with it their individual happiness. This is what made the values and lifestyles systems so powerful, its ability to predict what new products the atomised consumers would choose, and thus broadly outline that person's individual desires (Curtis (2002)). This power was about to be demonstrated dramatically, as this system would show that they could predict not just what product a person would buy but also the politicians they were going to choose to elect (Berger & Chaffee (1987)). Following such a consumerised perspective, on a political level, when Reagan and Thatcher ran for office in their respective countries, their advisors were convinced that they could win on a programme of a new atomised individualism (Truman (2007); Lees-Marshment et al. (2014)). It would be an attack on thirty years of government interference in people's lives, where through the promotion of the concept of individual liberty, a new form of atomised consumer-driven democracy would dominate social and political discourse for the next generation (Curtis (2002)).

The reason why such an atomised class shift occurred unnoticed was that it was genuinely radical on both a theoretical and practical level, but those who had

constructed the ‘Values and Lifestyles’ system understood why that was. The conventional wisdom, as observed by Lilleker (2005, and 2016), and Pattie & Johnston (2012), is that strong partisans will be less likely to change their political affinity consequent to exposure to a party’s campaign than weaker partisans and nonaligned voters. Such political campaigns similarly, are likely to have a larger impact on those relatively uninterested in politics than on the more interested, since the former are not constrained with the natural traditional social class-political party affinity connection (Tedlow (1979); Trentmann (2006)). The SRI team by testing their system in both the United States and in Britain, were convinced that both Reagan and Thatcher’s atomised class mantra about individual liberty would appeal to a broad swathe of the electorate as it tallied with the way they looked at themselves within the ever-more atomised class structure (Curtis (2002); Wirthlin & Hall (2004)).

An interpretation thus came to prevail that, as maintained by Panebianco (1988), and Stewart (2013), although not always explicitly Thatcherite, certainly shares her assumption that communal class structures, be it ideologically ‘left’ or ‘right’, should be downplayed, disregarded, and denied. The process though of grouping people in confrontational categories is a subversive rhetorical and political device rather than an expression or description of a more complex, integrated, and individualist social reality. The generation who, as noted by Bauman (1998), and Crompton (1998), had once dissented against the conventionality foisted by consumerism, instead now welcomed it.

The conventional pollsters, as broadly alluded to by Heath et al. (1985, and 1991), could see no coherent pattern across class, age, or gender, but those who had designed the ‘Values and Lifestyles’ system believed that they knew why. They were testing their system in both America and Britain because they were convinced that both Reagan’s and Thatcher’s message about individual freedom and class atomisation following the theories largely ascertained by Bernays, would appeal to a wide scope of the electorate (Curtis (2002)). This is because it fitted with the atomised way they saw themselves. The idea that the new self-actualising individuals, of modest financial means, brought up within a communal social and political ethos, would choose a political figure from the ideological right instead of the left, seemed extraordinary (Truman (2007); Skinner et al. (2008)). It was in a sense the triumph of the self, a

notion that all political judgements were primarily viewed through the lens, not of selfless communal collectivism, but instead of personal satisfaction, where a person's atomised desires were seen as paramount (Curtis (2002)). The central climax of such logic, as detailed by Lees-Marshment et al. (2014), and Brands (2015), is indeed that there is no communal-based societal ethos, or certainly not one that is seen as relevant in modern society; the structure is designed through a clear principle that there is only a group of atomised, individual consumers who are making individual choices to facilitate the promotion of their own specific well-being.

Such theory, as a range of theorists like for instance Minkin (1991), and Lane (2012) noted, was a more radical version of Bourdieu's cultural capital thesis. This coincided with such an atomised prospectus, still, both were promoting at its core, a more complex class structure to that stated by the standard Marxist or even the more refined Weberian class theory. Bourdieu's (1984) ideas also contribute to understanding how other deep-seated societal relations, especially age and gender, merge with economic and cultural relations of class in sublimated forms. This outlines how multiple forms of class interpretations can articulate with one another, but more importantly demonstrates how changing social factors interrelate with an atomised ethos enacted a generation earlier. Bernays did not have confidence that any kind of true democracy could ever succeed because individuals were not motivated by judicious habitual class-based collectivised planning, but instead by unsophisticated unconscious desires and thoughts. The temptation of such unadulterated consumerism was a way of giving people the impression of self-control while letting a dependable elite continue to control and foster an atomised political philosophy (Bernays (1955); Curtis (2002)).

By comparison with modern political marketing, the eras of mass propaganda and media campaigning like that stated by Bernays (1955, and 1965), were characterised by a more flexible, diffuse, and consumerist approach to political communication. The advent of television in Britain coincided with a proliferation of advertising communications, both of which had a substantial electoral effect. In his model, 'Wring (1996a) identified the emergence of a marketing management approach to electioneering comparable to the development of what British commentators have termed the "media campaign"'. What Wring (1996a) argued, in broad parlance, similar to Bernays, was that all politicians followed their self-interest because the idea

that they could construe and deduce the marked consciousness of the people was logically impracticable. In view of that, both Labour and the Conservatives began to invest in advertising and marketing so as to cultivate and better target their message or ‘brand’.

This is above all highlighted with the electoral successes of both Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s, but such brand politics that proved so successful for the New Right was far from being such a radical departure on a basic marketing level, for such professional campaigning was primarily a logical extension of earlier practice. This perspective is supported by the leading marketing theorist Philip Kotler who argues (Kotler (1982), cited in Wring (1996a)), ‘that political party campaigning has always had a marketing character, the new “methodology” is not the insertion of promotional methods into politics’, but an intensified refinement and acceleration in their use. It is expedient to see such a process, as noted by Wernick (1992), and Bussey (2011), in a similar vein to that of a strategic change comparable to the development of a company or a brand engaged in conventional business activities, endeavouring to sell its corporate message to the general public. The organisation of party campaigning can be seen to develop greater intricacy ‘through three stages – production, selling, and marketing – orientations’ (Wring (1996a)). In electoral terms, these are the equivalent of what have been labelled the propaganda of marketing in regards contemporary political party affinity.

Bernays likens the conventional model of commercial marketing development, as quoted by Rallings (1996), in a ‘firm to the stages in the evolution of a campaigning political party where three distinctive phases of electioneering can be identified, each directly comparable with the product, sales, and market stages of orientation in business marketing’ (Rallings, 1996, p.106). Wring’s model involved the realisation of the relevance of advertising, branding, and marketing to electioneering practices. In implementing this new approach, as stated in generic terms by Johnson-Cartee & Copeland (2000), and Cosgrove (2007), it is possible to identify moves toward the ‘electoral-professional’ ideal type of party organisation. In this mode, parties became focused on appealing to the atomised consumer rather than their own formerly, communal class, political predilections.

The promoters of this idea of ‘consumerist market democracy’ brought the historic, atomised, free-market ethos of the previous two centuries and merged it with the 20th Century branding ethos, with the aim of revitalising an atomised, consumerist capitalism which would dominate the political mainstream (Kaid & Holtz (2006); Earl & Waddington (2012)). It was hence portrayed as a glorious return to a golden age, a time in the 18th, and 19th centuries when unfettered laissez-faire capitalism and not communal politics, had chiefly ordered society (De Grazia (1981); Trentmann (2006)). This outlook though was a myth as the political philosophers of that time had made a distinction between the atomised self-interest of the market place and other collectivist areas of social and political life, which were just as imperative in the classifying of society (Curtis (2002)).

The next chapter entitled ‘Theoretical Background: The Labour Party’, explores how this atomised political ethos began to dominate class perspectives specifically within the Labour Party, and as a consequence replaced the traditional communal narrative which hitherto had dominated the Party’s perspective. This will be achieved in three parts, firstly by defining the meaning of social class from a communal perspective, and then secondly how such meanings defined Old Labour’s traditional discourse, and finally how with the emergence of the atomisation ethos, New Labour was born and adapted to such changes both nationally and also within a locational or network basis.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE LABOUR PARTY

Analysis in this chapter will centre on how the concept of class in contemporary British society can be comprehended within the context of support for the Labour Party. It will, in this manner, question how the relevance of class-based support for the party may have altered since the rise of the atomised class culture forty years ago, a culture which two decades later, laid the foundations of the New Labour classless brand. This will be achieved via six distinct stages, the first being to state the relevance of the communal class structure to Old Labour, the second illustrates how with its decline in the late 1970s the party had to modernise itself within a more refined atomised framework. The third and fourth states how such an atomised framework came into being with the emergence of Thatcher and her New Right ethos in the 1980s and the subsequent effect it had on Labour politics, particularly notably with the development of the Classless New Labour brand. The analysis concludes with the final two stages, which question the relevance that such an atomisation ethos has played in regards Labour support in specific locales, with a particular focus on North-West Cumbria, and how such factors may provide a broad basis as to the direction such a research phenomenon is heading towards in future.

Old Labour, the Marxist Influence, and the decline of Communal politics

Although Labour's historical core class dynamic is not one of revolutionary radicalism but instead of gradualist socialism, they are in broad theoretical terms, communally Marxist, as the party aimed to defend the interests of the communal working-classes over their exploitative middle-class capitalist employers. This perspective is best noted by the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson (1963), and quoted by McNall & McNall (1991), 'whose deep-rooted interpretation of history allied to a less determinist notion of social class has been adopted by orthodox Marxists, resulting in his work becoming a key influence on the development of the discipline. On an historical basis, Thompson with his social stratification theory is credited with developing Marx's theory of class in the wider context. Thompson's (1963) argument remains crucial as it is a supreme example of the dialectical method in historical analysis of social change and class mobilisations' (McNall & McNall, 1991, p.5). The

British working-class were somewhat effective in evolving as a unique mass entity and defending its communal class interests because it comprised the preponderance of the work force.

Thompson (1963) believed that the ‘prime importance in distinguishing working-class character was through the workers themselves, striving to influence the conditions of their own lives’ (McNally (1993)). It, unlike Giddens (2002), who emphasised that the concept of class in regards future Labour support is erroneous in these more complex atomised class times, and thus persisted not out of sentiment or feelings of historic conventional class solidarity, ‘but only from an expectation that these organisations could deliver better living standards and conditions of work’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.184). Thompson (1968) defines ‘class in the manner of an abstract force which nevertheless has real consequences: By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events...I emphasise that it is a “historical” phenomenon. I do not see class as a “structure”, nor even as a “category”, but as something which in fact happens (Thompson, 1968, p.9). Like Marx, and contrary to Giddens, Thompson sees class as embedded in relations of production, but he is emphatic that social classes cannot be discussed or identified independently of class “consciousness”: Class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms’ (Thompson, 1968, p.10).

Thompson’s ‘emphasis on the importance of experience and consciousness has led to criticisms from other historians that his work is excessively culturalist – that is, it represents a shift away from the investigation of economic structures and relations which, it may be argued, should occupy a central place in any Marxist historical investigation. Thompson has reformulated class analysis as class-struggle analysis’ (Kaye (1984)), ‘but Thompson does not claim that there are no “objective” class relations. Such is explicit that the productive relations which determine class experience have an existence apart from the individual, but he “does” insist that class is a relationship, and not a thing...It does not exist, either to have an ideal interest or consciousness, or to lie as a patient on the Adjustor’s table’ (Thompson, 1968, p.11).

He is stating the ‘Pre-Blair Labour’ or Old Labour political perspective over the issue by illustrating how the working masses were not just worked upon by historical class traditions, but able, by their own political endeavours, to structure themselves as a viable electoral class group (Thompson (1963)). This includes, as Ball (1990), and Woodfin & Zarate (2004) broadly note, the possibility that the Labour Party and its political representatives and/or workers may to some extent in social class terms be immersed by the bourgeoisie benefits of governing; or desiring to govern the capitalist state.

Following on from such theoretical discourse, the thesis aims to investigate to what extent the Labour Party is a communal class political party. It further questions whether the New Labour classless brand, inspired by the Thatcherite atomised revolution, provided a concrete shift in regards the party’s broad relationship with the more refined contemporary class structure. This perspective though is noted by Prideaux (2005), who asked whether it was just the latest version of the continual ‘class’ political divisions of the ideological left of the party, who are more associated with the collectivised ethos, and the ideological right, who promote the merits of the individualistic consumer. This debate, as noted by Goes (2016), and Seymour (2016), is still evident in the Post New Labour era, firstly under the moderate stewardship of Ed Miliband and then under his more radical successor Jeremy Corbyn.

The Labour Party, ‘Old, ‘New’, and ‘Post New’ has had to appeal beyond its core working-class vote. The party in this way has struggled to balance its loyalty to its core communal class support with its eagerness to stretch itself beyond such traditional class parameters so as to achieve electoral success, this was evidently shown during the general election campaign in 2015 under the leadership of Ed Miliband. Post New Labour, as widely referred to by Hasan & Macintyre (2011), and Bale (2015), was with Miliband, and is now with Corbyn, a reaction against Old Labour with their attachment to an obsolete communal class struggle, but it also tries to distance itself from New Labour’s classless vision on a policy level, as this was deemed unpopular in the populist age of anti-austerity politics.

The notion that the class perspective of the Post New Labour brand is thus far not clear and hence is yet to be clarified is a problem which still needs to be solved. Ed

Miliband, the party leader at the beginning of the Post New Labour era in 2010 until the electoral demise five years later, was stuck in a transitional time. Miliband privately, ‘had little sympathy for Blairism and New Labour’s reverence for markets as he felt he was still a man of the centre-left and that he had to retain a healthy scepticism for the private-sector, non-state solutions so beloved of Blair and his acolytes’ (Hasan & Macintyre, 2011, pp.73-74). Post New Labour though is an existing brand in ever complex class structures. This is because even with the relative recent electoral success of Corbyn in June 2017 (see Postscript), the brand is still in its early stages, endeavoring to establish a clear class position, which thus makes it still too early to define in tangible terms, hence any views would be based on first-hand supposition as outlined by the research participants in Chapter V.

A ‘strong explanation for the absence of radical class consciousness’ in a contemporary capitalist society is obsolete because it, as noted by Miliband (1961), and quoted by Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993), ‘is articulated in terms of an alleged ideological domination on the part of capital and its representatives and devotees. The alibi of contemporary Marxists is to account, for the failure of a radical class consciousness to progress in the industrialised democracies, and the failure of a revolutionary political practice to arise’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.190). This has led in broad terms, to the contemporary atomised concept of the political party as a brand in itself. The limits, as a consequence of what can be considered to be legitimate, realistic, and sensible, are defined. In this manner, the concept of the political party as a brand has arisen out of an atomisation of traditional class categories. In response, it is clear that for parties like Labour to stay electorally relevant, they must reflect complex class patterns of interest by catering for a range of policies which go beyond strict traditional Marxist class divisions.

In ‘its post-war heyday, class was the grandest and most masterly narrative available. The only master account’, as alluded to by Kress (1989), and Savage (2015), and quoted by Cannadine (1999), ‘left today, is that there is no master narrative of any kind, only the “chaotic authenticity” of indiscriminate happenings and unforeseeable events. This is a consistent theme in regards the writing and interpretation of contemporary British history, as these recent scholarly developments have coincided with, and have undoubtedly been influenced by wider changes in public affairs in

Britain and elsewhere'. In view of that, for there to be a clearer investigation of Labour's class perspective, particularly in the traditional Old Labour era, an understanding of the relevance of the issue, ranging from the party's foundations at the start of the 20th Century up to, and including the development of the New Labour brand a century later, is required.

Labour 'has been in a state of change and renewal since it was founded at the start of the 20th Century. Labour was always loose in ideology, but its relationship with Marxist thinking is a complicated one and is best elucidated through a brief summary of the party's ideological roots' (Seldon, 2001, p.587). It must be stated that despite Labour being founded in 1900 by Keir Hardie to defend the interests of the communal working-classes, its early political strategy was primarily centred in the traditions of 19th Century Christian radicalism and democracy, that being to promote socialism and collectivised class interests through gaining electoral support instead of via a Marxist revolution. This broad perspective set the foundations for which the party has continually advanced; that being for the most part, a moderate gradualist approach towards any form of societal change on a class level. This position has led to the party being influenced generally by such quintessentially middle-class gradualists, particularly those associated with the Fabian Society, like for instance Sidney Webb, the author of Clause IV (Dell (2000); Rosen (2005)).

The consequence of this predominance of moderate influence in regards Labour's broad class direction was the main factor that encouraged convinced Marxists such as Ralph Miliband in his germinal text, *Parliamentary Socialism – A Study in The Politics of Labour* (1961), to critique the ideological relevance of the party. Following the Marxist works of the Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci, Miliband decided to examine a real class situation in a real historical context that being the Labour Party in its Old Labour guise and its historical social class position. He 'condemned the "Sickness of Labourism", as he professed that the party had no interest in any form of class revolution as the party by its historically rooted nature was conservative. This was because they not only accepted but believed in the capitalist system, a system that he believed led to mass concentrations of inequality of wealth resulting in the continuation of a strict class system that suppresses any kind of general working-class development or progress' (Hasan & Macintyre, 2011, p.12).

Miliband (1961) accepted, despite his noted criticisms of the party, that there was no real alternative to Labour as the most likely major political party in Britain, to defend the interests of the communal working-class. Such optimism conversely was short-lived as Miliband became even more sceptical about the prospect of Labour becoming a vehicle for social change (McKibbin (1991); Blackledge (2011)). In the postscript to the second edition, as Blackledge (2011) notes, ‘Miliband (1972) appealed for a new working-class alternative to Labour, which he mocked as a party who did not want to overthrow the oppressive capitalist system as it was irrevocably rooted within it’. This was demonstrated on a practical level where not many, of the many Old Labour political figures really stood for the social class-war against big corporate business. The Labour Party have historically been an ideological combination of social democracy and democratic socialism (Hay (1999)). This ‘position is emphasised by their dogged commitment to democracy and the parliamentary system’, virtues which are at the heart of ‘British political establishment thinking’ (Hasan & Macintyre, 2011, p.12). In response, Miliband (1961) stated that the party needed to extricate itself from such a hegemonic capitalist mind-set, and by this means, adopt a strictly radical Marxist class perspective in future if it were to remain ideologically relevant (Balibar (1994); Buttigieg (2007)).

Miliband (1961) following on from the hegemonic theory devised by Gramsci, subsequently inferred that the idea of radical class politics had been defeated by a party elite who, moderates by nature, had hegemonised the future policy direction of the party. On a theoretical level, ‘this is valid, but he also made assumptions that the leaders in all Labour governments covering all periods that the party had been in office were on balance, submerged and ideologically manipulated by establishment power. This, by its nature is unreceptive to any form of working-class progression markedly on a political level’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.190). There are, as noted by Resnick & Wolff (1989), and Blackledge (2011), and quoted by Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993), ‘a number of issues with Miliband’s dominant hegemony thesis, the prime limitation being, the ideas prevalent in a capitalist society are inevitably biased in such a fashion, as a society where the prevalent ideas are greatly critical of its central institutions would not be stable and would hardly be likely to survive’. Even ‘the most perfect, just, and undivided society’, as declared by Hamilton &

Hirschowicz (1993), ‘will develop views about itself which are supportive and will tend to make it difficult to promote alternative ideas which, for example, might seek to challenge prevailing conceptions of justice. The ideas which tend to be promoted in any society inexorably reflect underlying assumptions and are the result of a process of selection of elements thought to be relevant and important’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.191).

An egalitarian society, as Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993) continues, ‘will not be well disposed towards, nor will it systematically promote, elitist beliefs and ideas. The contrast should not, then, be between a fair, objective, unbiased system of dissemination of ideas and one which is the reverse, but between different sets of ideas’. Those, ‘who desire change may disagree with and deplore the values and ideas which are prevalent in a society but if they were to succeed in changing society they would simply be producing a situation in which the predominant ideas were those they do support and agree with’. Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993) maintain, ‘it is misleading according to Gramsci to argue the way Miliband (1961) does, that radical class consciousness would automatically exist but for the ideological bias in the prevailing system of ideas because this assumes that it is possible for a society to operate without such bias. The second criticism that might be made of Miliband (1961) comes from contemporary Gramscian perspectives, which is that it overstates the extent of popular acceptance of the allegedly dominant ideology’. Similar to Miliband (1961), Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993) emphasises, in Gramscian fashion, ‘that the value system dominant in the working-classes of most of the industrialised democracies is the subordinate type characterised by such accommodative attitudes’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.191). This, as Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993) concludes, ‘led to the gradual and continual destruction and breakdown of any revolutionary leftist political alternatives, which Miliband (1961) proposed should be enhanced. Radical thinking like that championed by Miliband (1961), was commonly drowned out by ideological and class hegemony, particularly within the Labour movement, of the revisionist’ ‘Labourist’ Weberian-styled agenda (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.190).

This Weberian class stance - Upper (Owners), Middle (Managers), and Working (Workers) - categorised post-war social relations in Britain prior to the rise of the New

Right. Old Labour, following such a structure, as noted by Forrester (1976), and Leonard (1999), believed that the communal working-classes should have their own say, through peaceful democratic discourse. This idea of communal collectivism was the bedrock of the traditional class-conscious nature of Old Labour because they instinctively believed that working together as a collectivised class group would be more productive than acting as atomised individuals, which only weakened the major class interests of the working masses through inflaming such cosmetic divisions (Parkin (1983); Favretto (2003)).

In the early 1960s, as noted by Sampson (2004), ‘Labour was still a “movement” as much as a party, with ideals of socialism which attracted intellectuals as well as workers. Harold Wilson said in opposition in 1962, “this party is a moral crusade or it is nothing,”’. ‘It had’, as Sampson (2004) continues, and broadly supported by Morgan (1997), and Pimlott & Hennessy (2016), ‘experienced only brief periods in government, in awkward coalitions; and it was still reliant on its finance and much of its membership on the trades unions, which had established it in 1900 as their parliamentary wing’. The contradictions between its traditional working-class base and ‘its intellectual leaders were becoming more obvious. It was, as its leading thinker Anthony Crosland noted in 1956, “furiously searching for its lost soul”’ (Sampson, 2004, p.56). Labour ‘could still appear as the “people’s party” when they all gathered at seaside resorts in Blackpool and Scarborough and mingled in the bars and funfairs. In the conference halls, the intellectuals had to justify themselves to the workers in fierce and intimate debates, watched by only a few television cameras at the back of the hall. They meant quite different things when they talked about socialism – from mere tinkering with the economy to comprehensive state ownership, but at the end of the conferences they joined to sing the Red Flag’ (Sampson, 2004, p.57).

Labour in truth, as the New Labour pollster Philip Gould stated, ‘were very far from revolutionary and were more reluctant than their Conservative opponents to adapt to a changing Britain. Labour was born a conservative party. Harold Wilson talked the language’, as Gould (1998) continued, ‘of the “white-hot technological revolution”, and he assured me in 1965 that he had produced ‘the biggest revolution in Whitehall since Lloyd George... The motto of this government is that there are no sacred cows,

unless they've been examined and found to deserve that status.' As Gould remarked, he 'appeared modern, but was in no sense a moderniser, which made him a frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful politician' (Gould, 1998, p.24). This view though is a glib and inaccurate account of Old Labour leaders such as Wilson, who by winning four general elections out of five that he contested as party leader; and implementing in the late 1960s a range of progressive social policies, demonstrated that he was a successful, modernising politician in the Old Labour tradition (Ziegler (1995); Shaw (1996)).

Labour leaders, as cited by Foote (1997), and Seldon & Hickson (2004), played the notable function of traversing between the requirements of the masses and the desires of the capitalist system, endeavouring to use the state as the mediator of social advancement and consent. In the 1950s and 1960s, Old Labour could not ignore the concept of the communal working-classes, which had founded their party through an accepted class structure and on which they still depended on trade union finance. Harold Wilson and his Old Labour prime ministerial successor James Callaghan (Sandbrook (2005, 2006, 2010, and 2012)) consistently conferred with union leaders, while defending the traditions of the traditional class system so prevalent at the time. This communal structure collapsed in the 1978-1979 Winter of Discontent, when the trade unions protested against the Labour government's policies of public sector cuts. Such a revolt indicated the end of communal 'Labourist' hegemony and shepherded in Margaret Thatcher's revolutionary Conservative government (Sayer (2004)). The union barons, the great power in the conventional class landscape 'were losing their influence over their members' (Sampson, 2004, p.58). Many members of the traditional working-classes were now changing their political allegiance, attracted to Thatcher's populist British nationalism and her promises of the opportunities generated through the principle of individualised aspiration (Green (2006); Jackson & Saunders (2012)).

The Conservatives, following the atomised philosophy, extensively elucidated by Hayek (1944), and Bernays (1955, and 1965), reduced the power of the trade unions during the Thatcherite 1980s. Behind this atomised transformation lay the unions loss of societal relevance which heralded a clear and lasting decline in union membership. In 1979 when Thatcher came to power, union membership 'reached a peak: 63 per

cent of men eligible for membership, and 39 per cent of women' (Sampson, 2004, p.61). After 1979, this led to the situation where the unions and their communal outlook were being increasingly threatened against the Thatcherite neoliberal philosophy, which restricted income tax and passed more draconian union and employment laws to restrict such organisations at the behest of the atomised consumer (Shaw (1994); Dutton (1999)).

Advocates to this classless movement, such as Pakulski & Waters (1996) in their *The Death of Class* thesis, where they claim that such an outcome is the logical end point of the New Right revolution, often express their atomised philosophy in simplistic, broad terms. The core premise of this being the promotion of the liberation of the individual atomised citizen in this free consumerised society, where individual choice takes precedence over outdated socialistic ideas of communal class collectivism. This outlook though has been notably critiqued by theorists such as Klein (2007), who state that such contemporary classless promotions of individual liberty is primarily the promotion of a new elite, that being the corporate sector, who use the fragmentation of traditional class ties to ruthlessly exploit for profit, the consumer-driven desires ingrained in such an atomised class hierarchy.

By 1997, such an atomised class hierarchy had prevailed because as Sampson (2004) notes, 'only 32 per cent of working people eligible for membership belonged to trade unions, while the manufacturing industries which had been bastions of militant class collectivism had considerably waned' (Sampson, 2004, p.62). The strikes which had once dominated political discourse were now hardly a relevant factor and with it came the gradual transformation between the historical, collectivised class ethos promoted by Old Labour towards a more contemporary, individualistic culture on which New Labour would thrive (Ludlam & Smith (2000); Daniels & McIlroy (2010)). This occurred because they accepted the pragmatic realism of such a changing class dynamic, that the standard collectivised class categories were erroneous in these new atomised class-conscious times (Green (2006); Geary & Pabst (2015)). It was thus the crushing of traditional Labourism that enabled the classless New Labour brand to be born.

Such a development was so seismic that there can be no reverting to traditional Old Labour politics because the political and social environments that shaped and maintained it, no longer exist. Labourism has in the post-Thatcherite age, become both socially and politically redundant (Dell (2000); Heffernan (2000)). It could be argued that Marx was wrong to assert that the capitalist system would inevitably succumb under the sizeable strains developed through its oppressive structure. Every society, as noted by Lane (2012), and Atkinson (2016), through the process of capitalist institutionalisation could withstand any potential ‘new leftist’ communal structures or conflicts which may arise out of its foundations. This atomised class adaptability for the most part defeated the communal class conflict structure, for as opined by Ruben (1988), and Crompton (1993), it managed to make both capital and labour believe that the capitalist system was generally benefiting their individualistic, atomised cause, which enabled both groups to protect their class interests cooperatively. On a structural level, the power behind such class atomisation was the concept of individual liberty. This concept thus in broad terms, promoted the view that each individual was encouraged to believe in the capitalist system of which they were part. This inexorably gave the system a sense of constancy and solidity and with it shattered any threat of a communal resurgence. Industrial conflict, as Baronian (2015), and Geras (2016) concluded, continued to occur to some extent, even with this fragmented political-class structure. Such a class structure though has continued to demonstrate firstly through the Thatcher and later during the New Labour era that it could control any industrial conflicts and with that showed that numerous ideological interest groups could function within industrial society (Dahrendorf (1959)).

Old to New Labour: The shift from the Communal to the Atomised

The stereotypical proletarian citizen, as professed by Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993), and supported later by Worley (2008), and Heppell & Theakston (2013), during the Old Labour era, ‘supported trade unions. They were part of a collectivised class culture that strongly identified with his fellow workers, adopting an “us” and “them” attitude; workers like this were to be found in principally working-class communities where heavy industry predominated’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.183). A decade before the election of Thatcher, the signs of the decline of traditional Labourism were though becoming evident. Such decline - which is primarily shaped by the sociologist Stefan Zweig who greatly inspired Abrams & Rose’s highly

influential text, *Must Labour Lose?* (1960) - started in Britain in the late 1950s, as the country was coming out of the immediate post-war economic slump, under the Conservative government led by Harold Macmillan. The consequence of this was that the electorate, particularly the stereotypical working-class Labour voter, were beginning to some extent, to move away from such hitherto communal class loyalties and as a consequence, were more likely than ever before to switch to supporting the Conservatives on a regular basis. This potential shift in political allegiance based on individual aspiration, was known as 'embourgeoisement theory' and would set the tone for the atomised perspective later promoted by the New Right and the New Labour classless adaptation stated by both Giddens and Gould.

There clearly was an embourgeoisement process of policy and image renewal and thus a disavowal of the preceding party heritage; a shift from Old to New Labour. New Labour, particularly through its communications advisors such as Gould, emphasised the core differentials between such constructs, primarily that Old Labour broadly promoted an out-dated, archaic communal class-consciousness of advancing the needs of the collectivised working-classes via the development of democratic socialism. This outlook in the post-Thatcher era was made redundant, as society had become both on a political and class level far more atomised, and New Labour was a pragmatic response to cater to a broad number of the electorate, who embraced such class individualism. This perspective though has been challenged by Shaw (2007), as an over-simplification of the party's complex past prior to the assent of Tony Blair as leader in 1994, where any policy or image shift took place on a gradual basis in the 1980s, and thus the historical interpretation of Labour's relationship with class is much more organic than is outlined in the broad contours of Old and New Labour.

This gradual embourgeoisement theory, as alluded to by Devine (1994), ushered in a new type of worker which was becoming increasingly common in contemporary industrialised society, namely the atomised, or as it was then known, the privatised worker (Lockwood (1966); Giddens (1984)). The privatised worker, as generally noted by Goldthorpe et al. (1969), and Rose (2001), and quoted by Hamilton & Hirschowitz (1993), 'tended to be more mobile and to have a highly instrumental attitude to work, to the unions and to the Labour Party. These workers on the whole, were becoming middle-class in their attitudes, values, and behaviour. Support for the

unions and the Labour Party, while it remained as strong as ever, was not unconditional' among such atomised workers, 'it persisted not out of sentiment or feelings of social class solidarity but only from an expectation that these organisations could deliver better living standards and conditions of work'. Their attitudes 'were largely pecuniary and they were orientated towards the home, the family and private consumption within this new individualised context' (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.184), but such a status is hard to generalise on a broad national level as Hamilton & Hirschowicz (1993) further state, 'such communities are relatively insulated from the wider society and its influences. In other areas, and in different rural occupations, such as agriculture and small-scale industry, a deferential attitude tends to prevail. Workers here are more often in a relationship of personal dependence upon their community' (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.183). This is small scale in the sense that most individuals are known to most others and seen and judged as atomised individuals.

This shift from Miliband's 1960s communal radicalism to Blair's 1990s conventional class atomisation, was theoretically enhanced through the workings of the renowned intellectual Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm, according to Seymour (2011), 'known widely as Britain's pre-eminent Marxist historian', became especially influential in regards providing a future framework for the left to adapt to the new atomised class culture, 'for as a former Communist Party intellectual, he provided an ideological rationale and direction for left practice that has been influential well beyond the party itself'. His work in the 1980s, enlightened by a Gramscian perspective, provided the justification for Labour to move to an ideological 'classless' position, with a view to winning over middle-class and affluent working-class voters, and construct a popular front against the dominant atomised, Thatcherite agenda.

This traditional social class position and its inevitable decline within the Labour Party at the start of the Thatcherite hegemony was highlighted by Hobsbawm in his essay, *The Forward March of Labour Halted* (1981). In it, he principally stated that for Labour to realistically progress as a viable political alternative in the future they had to come to terms with the realities that the old communal class divisions were dead and never going to return (Radice (1992)). The old manufacturing industries which supplemented such a class structure were in terminal decline, being replaced by a new

individualism, where the rights of the individual became the new prevalent societal ethos. A year later, such a position was supported by fellow Marxist academic Bob Rowthorn in his paper, *Britain and Western Europe* (1982); both texts ironically being published in the *Marxism Today* journal.

Following on from such contemporary discourse, through his constant requests of ‘being realistic,’ Hobsbawm (1981) was able to present the traditional class critics as ‘unrealistic.’ By dismissing them as extremist class Marxists, he managed to gain ‘support for such views across the Left spectrum be it in *Marxism Today*, as well as with the mainstream daily press, which enabled the more tempered language of “realistic Marxism” to dominate debates over the future of the Labour Party’ (Giddens, 2000, p.43). Callaghan et al. (2003), in a similar manner to Hobsbawm (1981), located Old Labour’s problems in its anachronistic Marxist image as a traditional ‘working-class party that was unattractive to upwardly mobile families, particularly those in the South of England’. The non-manual workforce also had increased, ‘which led to a haemorrhage of Labour supporters among the new skilled working-class. If Labour were ever again to form a secure majority government, they had to pitch camp on the prosperous classless centre-ground’ (Callaghan et al., 2003, p.18). After Labour’s second general election ‘defeat at the hands of Thatcher in 1983 the party elected Neil Kinnock to lead it’ (Sampson, 2004, p.58). Kinnock, as Minkin (1991), and Bower (2016), imply, patiently began reconstructing the party’s machinery as the identity of the communal Old Labour Party was disintegrating.

The Kinnock leadership began the gradual process of shifting the party away from its traditional communal values, and by this means accepting the atomised Thatcherite agenda. This was achieved through two symbolic gestures, the first was the eradication through the expulsion of the Trotskyite ‘Militant Tendency’ which had infiltrated the party in the late 1970s and were threatening to move the party towards a hard-left Marxist ideology. Kinnock, similar to Hobsbawm, realising in this new consumerist age which prioritised the role of the individual, that such collectivised class politics would in the short-term at least, make Labour seem out of touch with the mainstream electorate, and more importantly could potentially in the long-term, destroy the party as being ever seen as any kind of electoral alternative to Thatcherism (Drower (1994)). The removal of Militant in the mid to late 1980s allowed the party

to then conduct a seismic ‘Policy Review’ in the Spring of 1989 which allowed Kinnock and his fellow ‘moderates’ like Roy Hattersley and John Smith to start the modernisation process. This occurred both on policy where they promoted the Thatcherite doctrine of lower taxes, and higher defence spending at the expense of the traditional tax-and-spend ethos, and large-scale nationalisation. In regards their image, with the rise in prominence of sharp communications advisors like the hitherto noted Philip Gould, they softened their political symbolism, replacing the Red Flag logo with that of the patriotic English Red Rose. The party was by undertaking such actions, providing a visible demonstration that they were connecting to the more classless political culture of the 1980s by shedding any vestiges of socialistic class-war symbolism, which were deemed, to some extent, necessary to promote during the Old Labour era (Hughes & Wintour (1990)).

In due course, it laid the ground for Anthony Giddens’ Third Way classless policies of Tony Blair and New Labour. Stuart Hall (1996), the renowned contemporary Marxist theorist, whose work is connected to the methodological bent of this study, speaks facetiously of New Labour’s class hypocrisy as they attempted through their modern classless outlook to reach and connect to the electoral support of ‘Middle England’. This shift which prioritised the recognised middle-classes though did not happen at the expense of Labour’s long-established working-class heartland constituencies, as Hall implies, because its majorities in those locales increased (Davis (2004b)). Hall (1996), though made one of his most important contributions to British politics when he evaluated the escalation of such fragmented class dissection in these terms (Cleaver (1999)). He saw Thatcherism, similar to that of sentiments outlined by contemporary theorists (Green (2006); Goodlad (2015)), as a new hegemonic socio-political project, which intervened in the civil strife of the 1970s. This was a time when the post-war communal structures were on the decline, and for a while no government appeared to be able to solve Britain’s problems. Thatcherism redefined the political terrain and redefined a set of pragmatic ideas about Britain’s political future. This balance of forces, ‘which some studies of advanced capitalism (e.g. Habermas (1973)) have interpreted in terms of a “class compromise” being neither socialist nor capitalist, reached during the period of very rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, found expression in a kind of “consensus politics” which was the hallmark of the Old

Labour era which came to an abrupt end with the emergence of power of Margaret Thatcher in 1979' (Bottomore, 1991, p.108).

Giddens' Third Way ideological perspective, despite its above illustrated core ideological class differences with Thatcher, does relate to an extent to a theoretical perspective which is central to this study, that being the gradual atomisation of contemporary political, class discourse initiated during the 1980s. One element, according to Crompton (2008), 'of the sociological critique of positivism developed during the 1960s and 1970s', as expressed, for example, in Giddens theory of 'Structuralisation', was the assertion that the subject of class be it communal or atomised, 'should be regarded as having explanatory primacy. These arguments meshed with those already developed by some Marxist theoreticians – particularly historians such as Thompson – regarding the indivisibility of "class" from the notion of consciousness on a social and political level' (Crompton, 2008, p.24). 'A number of different factors served to push class analysts in the direction of identifying a "priori", a "class structure"' (Giddens, 2002, p.4), which questioned whether class as a concept still played any material role in contemporary societal discourse. A key element was the established influence of the revival of sociological interest in the concept of a genuine classless society which was purported by Blair and the Third Way ethos. After continual rejection at the polls, Labour or New Labour, as detailed by Giddens (2002), and Brivati & Bale (2005), felt the need to shed itself from traditional outdated class values. This was a view institutionalised by the overbearing class influence of the Trade Unions and Clause IV, which followed communal class principles, that being that the workers should control the means of labour production.

The ideological changes associated with the invention of the term New Labour were a large part of the reason for their electoral success. There were though however, other crucial factors as well, such as the decline of the economic competence of the incumbent Conservative government, most aptly demonstrated by the ERM 'Black Wednesday' crisis of September 1992. New Labour, as generally alluded to by Cannadine (1998), and Atkins (2011), and quoted by Giddens (2010), 'was not an empty soundbite designed to disguise a vacuum where policies should have been'. This diagnosis that the communal values of Old Labour such as solidarity, a commitment to reducing inequality and a belief in the role of active government,

remained intact. The policies designed to pursue these ends though had to shift radically because of the acute changes taking place in the wider world where class and its relationship to political party affinity had become more fragmented and atomised, and accordingly less fixed within historic, collectivised blocks. ‘Such changes included intensifying globalisation, the development of a post-industrial or service economy and, in an information age, the emergence of a more volatile and combative citizenry’ (Giddens (2010)), where the role of the atomised individual surpassed that of traditional class groups.

Beyond these structural matters, the policies of New Labour are harder to classify. Tony Blair preferred to speak of broad ‘values’ with some emphasis on Christian individualism. ““Class struggle” was a phrase eradicated from the New Labour lexicon, most famously by Blair in his speech to the 1996 Labour conference when he insisted that there are no longer bosses and workers: them and us’ in the modern, classless post-Thatcherite Britain. Before the 1997 election John Prescott, then Labour’s deputy leader, supported such sentiments when he said in classless terms that: ‘we are all middle-class now’ (Rees (1997)). In ‘1999 whilst in government, just like in 1996 in opposition, Tony Blair told the Labour Party conference: “The class-war is over”’ (Kirkup & Pierce (2008)). The ‘election result itself was further proof of the centrality of class in British politics and a standing refutation of Blair’s belief that victory was only possible by appealing to middle-class voters’ (Rees (1997)). Labour’s lead, as Rees (1997) continues, ‘cut through a range of class demographics’, it was still greatest among unskilled workers, but they more importantly gained support within skilled workers, and skilled professional employees, two groups which Old Labour in previous communal class times, struggled to attract. The only social group, as remarked by Gould (1998), and Geary & Pabst (2015), who consistently gave the Conservatives a lead during the classless New Labour era, was that which included the wealthiest income earners. This is a position which is long-established under any political class framework, yet, even they, to some extent, albeit slightly, moved towards New Labour.

This view, as noted by Kirkup & Pierce (2008), was rebuked in Marxian terms at the time by a senior cabinet minister Harriet Harman. She appealed to the more traditional, collectivised class instincts of the party prevalent during the Old Labour

era when she said, ‘we have made great progress on tackling inequality but we know that inequality doesn’t just come from your gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability, what overarches all of these is where you live, your family background, your wealth and social class’. Crucially, as outlining a potential glimpse into future class relations of present times, ‘Jeremy Corbyn, then a member of the left-wing Campaign Group, welcomed Harman’s concentration on social class and called on ministers to follow it with more spending on social housing and education in poor areas. He said: “It sounds like at long last they’ve started to read the runes and realise that the biggest fall in support for Labour is among the traditional working-class. We’ve been losing the core Labour vote and we can’t win without them. Maybe this is an attempt to reconnect with them.”’ Theresa May, now Prime Minister, then the Conservative shadow leader of the Commons, strikingly accused Harman and Corbyn of promoting Marxist ‘class-war’ rhetoric (Kirkup & Pierce (2008)). Such classless sentiments were in keeping with the New Labour refined class perspective; May’s views of class were more aligned to the New Labour ethos, than that of Corbyn, the current Labour leader.

The era of the communal Keynesian style of economic demand management, linked to state direction of economic enterprise, was over and never likely to return. A different relationship of government to business and its atomised, consumer-driven ethos hence had to be established, which recognised the vital role of enterprise in wealth creation and the limits of state power (Bernays (1965); Veldman (2015)). The ‘expansion of the service economy went hand in hand with the shrinking of the traditional working-class, once the bastion of Old Labour support. Labour could no longer represent sectional class interests alone’ (Giddens (2010)). In future, as acknowledged by Prideaux (2005), and Coulter (2014), to win elections, a left-of-centre party like Labour or New Labour had to reach a much wider set of voters, including those who had never endorsed its communal strategy in the past. In Tony Blair, as broadly argued by Seyd & Whiteley (2002), and Russell (2005), and quoted by Giddens (2010), ‘the party seemed to have found the perfect leader to help it further this aim’. A move to the political classless centre since Thatcher and the success of her atomisation ethos was accordingly required for the party to have any chance of reclaiming power again. A more refined class perspective, as generally alluded to by White (2001), and Bevir (2005), like that stated by Giddens and his Third Way

mantra, subsequently became a central path for the party to follow. Following such discourse, to fully comprehend the value of the classless ethos in relation to contemporary Labour support, an understanding of the emergence of the consumerist brand culture in its generality and specifically its relationship to modern political culture, is required.

The concept of a political brand, as numerous political scientists, such as Martineau (1957), and McCarthy (1978) state, and that of political party branding at its core is about how a political party is identified by the public in general terms. The perception of the brand is more far-reaching than the specific product; while a product has distinct purposeful parts such as a politician and policy, a brand is subtle and emotional. A political party brand, as articulated by Denton (1991), and Schill et al. (2016), is the all-embracing attitude, impression, fraternity, or persona that the public has concerning a particular politician, political party, or even that of a nation state. Political party branding, as enunciated by Davis (2013), and Kotler (2016), helps the party to modify, vary or conserve status and support, as well as establishing a sense of distinctiveness with the party and its representatives, subsequently building an association of trust between political party leaders and the electorate. It assists such political consumers to recognise more speedily what a party's values are, and thus differentiate it from its competitors.

Thatcher and New Labour

The rise and growing importance of professionalised communication is self-evident in many of the major western democracies. The 'innovative Conservative Party campaign effort of 1979' (Wring (1996a)), and what is broadly referred to by Wring (2002, and 2003), is sometimes referred to as a watershed in the development of the phenomenon in Britain. Victory, as Wring (1996a) further notes, 'heralded the beginning of the three Thatcher governments' and her atomised philosophy, as well as the start of a period of commercial success for the party's brand consultants, 'Saatchi and Saatchi', as they became the most sought-after advertising agency in the world. 'The execution of the 1983 and 1987 general elections consolidated the idea that professional consultants were becoming an indispensable' part of the modern atomised and ever-complex class process (Wring (1996a)). This left the Labour Party massively exposed, being so naïve over adapting to such communication procedures

(Wring (2002, and 2003)). An ‘example of such “leftist” thinking was highlighted during the 1987 general election, when despite running a slick and vibrant campaign, ultimately on policy’ (Junor, 1993, p.129), the party were deemed untrustworthy by the mainstream electorate over a number of key issues such as the economy where they still prioritised tax increases, thus being seen as attacking the aspiration culture which had hitherto been solidified during the Thatcher years.

The party was also vulnerable in regards their unilateral defence policy, where the notion of giving up the nation’s nuclear capability during the Cold War where the Soviet Union was still generally acknowledged as a potential threat to Britain’s security, made Labour open to being criticised by the Conservatives as weak and unsuitable for government office (Hughes & Wintour (1990); Drower (1994)). ‘In an interview with David Frost, Neil Kinnock said that if the Russians invaded a non-nuclear Britain they would be resisted by guerrilla bands who had taken to the hills’ (Junor, 1993, p.129). The Conservatives immediately capitalised on the image with posters in traditional urban Labour areas which were populated with the communal, manual working-classes. This was achieved by showing a soldier with his hands up in surrender, with the simple slogan ‘Labour’s Policy on Arms’ (Junor, 1993, p.130), knowing that it would show Labour even to their own stereotypical supporter base as being out of touch and unpatriotic (see Figure I).

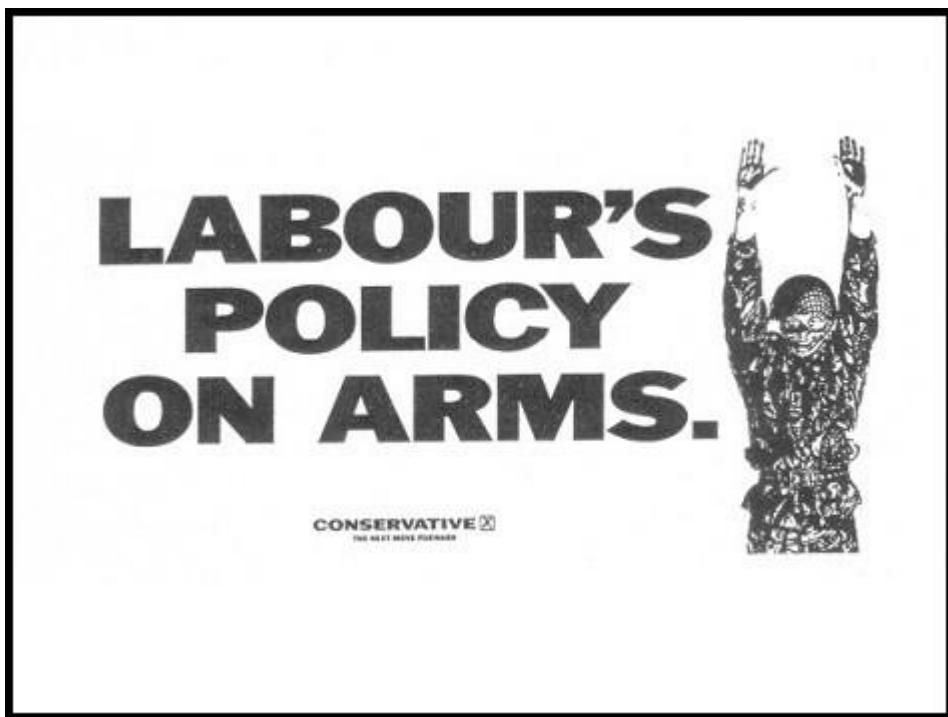


Figure I: Conservative Party General Election Poster 1987 - (Saatchi & Saatchi)
LinkedIn, (2017). 'Labour's Policy on Arms',
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/street-fighting-101-corbyn-v-cameron-bradley-godolphin>.

This was the continuation of the big political trend that was the onward march of Thatcherism, which would inevitably deliver her a one-hundred seat majority in 1987; her third consecutive electoral triumph. In addition, Thatcher's success, as identified by Butler & Kavanagh (1988), and Griffiths & Hickson (2009), helped to reactivate interest in this style of political promotion amongst a previously suspicious traditional Labour leadership. Partly due to the proliferation of such media interest in the concept of the political party as an atomised brand, the subject of political marketing is sometimes accordingly equated with modern, sophisticated advertising. A good deal of election coverage has become increasingly preoccupied with the perceived domination of style over substance and image over issue. Marketing though, as avowed by Delaney (2008), and O'Shaughnessy et al. (2012), following its core ethos, is more than just presentational devices and advertising, for it also is related to product management. The process represented not only a set of techniques, but also an approach to promoting relationships with their target audience (Bernays (1955)).

Out of this market research, the advertisers began to expose a new individualism, in particular among those who prior to the 1979 general election had never voted

Conservative. They no longer desired to be perceived as being part of a traditional social class structure, but rather wished to voice themselves as individual consumers and crucial to this persona were the products which they chose to buy. Individuals, as expressed by Fletcher (1994), and Cleaver (1999), generally were classified because they might drift towards such a Thatcherite mind-set, where people sought to still be part of a social group, although not as a collectivised class, but instead as part of a more atomised set of clusters. They by doing so, still feel they have the freedom to articulate themselves as distinctive individuals, an individualism which places greater importance on their atomised sense of themselves over that of hitherto dominant communal class allegiances. Business, especially advertising agencies, reacted fervently to this powerful new sense of individualism and it rapidly became one of the main influences propelling the new consumerist culture in Britain in the 1980s. Using the data from the focus groups conducted by the SRI team to test the validity of the new consumer, manufacturers produced a new range of products that by and large gave people the opportunity to state their individuality over such a process (Curtis (2002)). Business also, according to Clark et al. (1993), and Hoyland & Wolburg (2010), re-classified people through more complex and intricate clusters, as they were no longer divided by social class, but by their individualistic psychological desires.

This new atomised class culture led to Labour, who were Thatcher's only realistic domestic political opponents, to come to the pragmatic conclusion that for them to ever achieve electoral success, the party had to embrace this new reality (Curtis (2002)). The result was that the brand of New Labour and with it their classless virtues, following the effective social class dealignment ethos of the Thatcherite era, was developed. Relative social class dealignment remained relatively strong throughout the 1980s, taking the form of trendless fluctuations, for that reason Labour's subsequent electoral failures should largely be explained both by political as well as sociological limitations (Joyce (1995); Butler & Kavanagh (1997)). It cannot be denied though, as declared by Crewe et al. (2000), and Seldon (2007), that the decline of the traditional working-class electorate through this notable class dealignment played a part in Labour's electoral decline in the 1980s mainly because they comprised a sizable portion of the party's support. The party, as noted by Crewe (1995), and Heath et al. (2001), also performed poorly not just with the traditional working-classes but with the entire electorate because their policies, particularly on

economic and defence matters were contrary to the opinions of the crucial new consumer-driven swing-voters, who following the ethos promoted by the New Right, in the main, wished to pay lower taxes allied to having a strong defence policy.

Neither of these factors though have emphasised the political cohesiveness or identity of working-class or class interests in general in regards the British political process. There 'has been no transition in the post-industrial society where class divisions have been eroded as they still exist but just under different, more diverse social conditions' (Joyce, 1995, p.63). The Labour Party simply, as professed by Kavanagh (1990), and further cited by Joyce (1995), 'had to find a new modern image which would allow them to be seen as a relevant alternative to the Conservatives. The party had to reach a delicate balance of transcending its long-established class base, as well as staying attractive to its previous loyal support' (Joyce, 1995, p.64). Such class structured individualisation and fragmentation have been associated with a weakening of overtly expressed strong class identities. The 'institutions that once articulated traditional working-class interests at the macro-level (e.g. trade unions and the Labour Party) have themselves been weakened or transformed into New Labour type' atomised constructs as 'the political marketisation of British society has played its part in increasing fragmentation and social polarisation' (Crompton, 2008, p.229). There are a range of political considerations, as pronounced by Lee & Turner (1996), and Cohen (2009), which can be dissected to demonstrate the reasons for Labour's social class dealignment. A prominent reason for instance was 'their desperation for power, which resulted in moving the party towards a more rightwards conservative policy direction' (Butler & Savage, 1995, p.324). Giddens' Third Way contemporary classless dealignment policy of the Labour Party seems far more prevalent today than that of the rigid class-based collectivism purported by Miliband and Thompson.

Despite the eventual, possibly inevitable, cynicism with consumer politics, it must be stated that the generic perception derived from the research data is that such a shift naturally developed with a clear fragmented movement in class structure on a practical societal basis. Since the late 1970s, as commonly referred to by Pearce & Stewart (1992), and Griffiths (2007), and quoted by Cannadine (1999), 'one of the most conspicuous domestic developments has been the defeat of organised labour, in both its professional and its political guises. The final precipitous collapse of the great

Victorian staple industries and of the traditional working-class means that as a consequence their political influence is much diminished'. Support for the Labour Party declined gradually in the twenty years from the mid-1970s, and faced the prospect of permanent opposition, until it re-invented itself, the beginnings of which occurred during the Kinnock years of the 1980s and taken on with the formation of the New Labour brand in the mid-1990s (Hughes & Wintour (1990); Hay (1999)).

The New Right effect on New Labour

This was the model of democracy that both New Labour and the American Democratic Party had bought in to with the intention to regain power. They, as asserted by Heffernan (2000), and Sheingate (2016), in regards the concept of the brand itself, had used practices fostered by the commercial world to interpret the desires of consumers and by doing that they had consented to Bernays' assertion that this was a superior form of democracy. The rise of Tony Blair and New Labour in promoting such an atomised framework in one sense, marked its denouement, with the party setting aside even the aspiration to civilise capitalism, and for the most part accepting not just its general permanence and desirability, but the permanence and desirability of the radical neoliberal form which it took in the 1980s and 1990s (Curtis (2002)). The general strategy of this right-wing administration, as recorded by Wring (1996a, and b), and Atkins (2011), was that by increasing home-ownership it would give the working-classes something to conserve and consequently turn them into Conservatives. New Labour was inspired by such class dealignment as those same weapons that the Conservative administration used in the 1980s and 1990s were continued by them in an attempt to reach out beyond their traditional support. 'Tony Blair was dedicated to the New Labour project of abandoning the politics of the manufacturing age and making Labour attractive to those individualistic, home-owning aspirational voters who had abandoned Labour for Thatcher in the 1980s' (McWhirter, 2013, p.196). They though did not embark on this project with the intention of removing class boundaries, be it communal or atomised. They instead endeavoured to enable individuals to crave aspiration and wealth for themselves as an alternative to promoting the interests of the wider community. This emphatic embrace of Thatcherite free-market capitalism in a much greater sense though marked a decisive break with Old Labour's collectivist, socialistic outlook as their communal values were evidently being superseded by those of the individual (Heffernan (2000)).

New Labour was consequently borne out of the traditional Left's response on both sides of the Atlantic, to the rise of this new more atomised class culture. The party endeavoured to abandon their customary held belief that the way to create a better society was not to treat people as emotional, isolated, atomised individuals but to persuade them to realise that they had common interests with others, to help them rise above their individualistic feelings and fears. They, tired of losing elections, instead embraced the new culture through promoting a more atomised agenda, appealing to the lower middle-classes such as public-sector managers, and the skilled working-class, so as to persuade these vital once traditional class supporters back. This occurred firstly though with the American Democrats who successfully promoted Bill Clinton, their presidential candidate in 1992 and 1996, and his atomised New Democrat brand (Curtis (2002)). This was followed by Labour in Britain or as they became branded New Labour, under Philip Gould's effective marketing guidance, who had shifted from advising Kinnock to now counselling Blair.

Gould's campaign, as established by Gould (1998), and Geary & Pabst (2015), convinced New Labour strategists that by presenting a modern presidential-styled communication agenda, they would inevitably entice back the crucial Thatcherite voters lost in the 1980s as well as generally keeping the old traditional centre-left supporter base. As soon as Blair became Labour leader, Gould then conducted focus groups which pinpointed key swing-voters in the suburbs (Curtis (2002)). This time though, unlike in previous electoral reverses, their individual requests were listened to and acted upon. The needs and the concerns of the new Thatcherite materialistic classes, as noted by Heffernan (2000), and Minkin (2014), became the predominant force for moulding Labour Party policies and with it the New Labour brand.

The participants were encouraged not to communicate lucidly about policies but rather to voice their true underlying sentiments and what Gould ascertained was that there was a vital change in people's traditional correlation to class and politics. They no longer saw themselves as part of any predetermined collectivised social class group but conversely as specific desire fuelled individuals who could command material benefits from politicians (Gould (1998)). Such benefits were seen as a deserved reward for diligently paying taxes, just as the commercial world had schooled them to

do as atomised consumers. The Gould approach, as generally stated by Curtis (2002), and Hinman (2006), at heart considered the voters as purely a collection of individual desires that must be satisfied and pandered to. Labour in Britain like the Democrats in the United States for that reason, were required to shelve any potential programmes or principles like the historic nationalisation ethos outlined in Clause IV for instance, that would not unequivocally be of value to those precious swing-voters, even if it entailed foregoing some long-held deep-seated beliefs (Seldon (1997); Driver & Martell (1998)).

The objective of Clause IV had been to wield together the collective muscle of the working masses to defy the unconstrained greed of the bosses and the corporate sector. Blair though was faced with decisive swing-voters who no longer saw themselves as being oppressed by the free-market capitalist system in the individualist form promoted through Hayek (1944, and 1960), Joseph (1975), and Smith (1982, and 1999). They, ‘in its place, viewed themselves as independent consumers who were designed and satisfied by what business supplied them. At the 1994 Labour Conference, Tony Blair delivered his first, highly praised, speech as Leader. In it, he foreshadowed far-reaching change to the party’s constitution, in so doing ending Labour’s commitment to nationalisation, and further bringing the party into the political centre-ground’ (Seldon, 1997, p.496). The new amended Clause IV vowed not to curb but to accept and if deemed propitious, even encourage the free-market. Gould, who engineered Labour’s landslide election victory in 1997, saw it as a massive promotion of a new style of atomised consumer-driven democracy, following in the footsteps of Bernays and Maslow by grasping and eventually satisfying people’s individual desires through data garnered through modern market research techniques. They were imparting power to the individual as a valued commodity and not regarding them as cogs within impersonal, communal social class groups whose outdated collective needs and desires were dictated to by outdated politicians (Gould (1998); Curtis (2002)).

From the outset, the architects of the New Labour brand consequently offered a compelling diagnosis of why innovation in modern social democratic politics was required, coupled with a clear policy programme that dealt with the needs of the individual citizen. In future to gain political power, the party had to reach a much

wider set of voters, including those who had never endorsed it in the past. Labour could no longer represent in this new complex, atomised structure post-Thatcher, a broad sectional class interest alone, as such a grouping did not for all intense and purposes, any longer exist (Gould (1998, and 2010)). Gould, as hitherto noted, being one of the prominent advocates of pursuing this strategy, thought that Labour's leadership had come to be tainted by an integral denigration and disapproving attitude towards the new more selfish consumer focussed desires of a substantial element of the outmoded working-class electorate. Gould and his New Labour modernisers it appears, aimed to create a packaged classless atomised brand in the image of Bernays, which could reconnect Labour with their lost Thatcherite voters, by shaking off their out-of-date communal perceptions (Halsey & Webb (2000); Curtis (2002)).

Tony Blair and New Labour smarting from such past failures, occupied such a middle-ground that Thatcher had made her own in the 1980s, and consequently received the electoral rewards. He embraced the values of progressive atomised, classless politics while discarding the accumulation of sacred traditional socialist perspectives that had locked his party out of government for nearly two decades. Most politicians of the Old Labour tradition started from a set of traditional political positions; Tony Blair, in contrast being the great classless moderniser, 'started from the values he had imbedded with his Christian faith. His political heroes were the Liberal leaders of 19th Century Britain, rather than the giants of the Labour movement that he now led. The product of a privileged public-school education and the son of a Conservative lawyer, he was always at a distance from his own party; to the discomfort of many of his colleagues he saw himself as a national, rather than a party leader' (Stephens, 2004, p.3). The Conservatives, who were 'the dominant political force in Britain for most of the 20th Century, were exiled to the frozen margins of politics' (Stephens, 2004, p.4).

Within 'the Conservative Party', as Seldon (1997) notes, 'the main creative input during the 1997 general election came from Norman Blackwell, Danny Finkelstein, and Tim Collins', who were well aware that Labour, with their adoption of the New Labour brand image, had changed. Such a shift occurred from the party's four consecutive election defeats (1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992) and the collapse of class collectivism which had convinced Labour that winning the general election must be the priority over hitherto held communal class ideological beliefs. This is where

‘Blair had a single-minded purpose, which was to get rid of the Tories, luckily for him, it was a purpose that was not merely good for him politically, but one the public shared’. His idea ‘was reinforced by the findings of Conservative Central Office polling which showed that Tory supporters thought Labour had indeed changed since the days of Kinnock and Smith’ (Seldon, 1997, p.626). The underlying strategy was spelled out by the then Conservative Party Chairman, Brian Mawhinney: ‘The issue is not whether Labour has changed. It is now clear that it has. The issue is whether Labour is fit to govern’ (Seldon, 1997, p.659). In electoral terms, the Conservatives suffered from the emergence of New Labour, which stole their true secret weapon, not rigid communal centred class loyalty, but flexible classless adaptability. ‘We’ve stolen lots of Labour’s clothes in the past,’ said the former senior Conservative minister James Prior, ‘but now they’ve stolen all our clothes, and as they searched for a new role they saw their ideal leader on the opposite side: Tony Blair’ (Sampson, 2004, p.49). In place of the Labour Party of old, for whom ideological purity supporting the interests of the traditional working-classes, ‘often meant difficulties in adapting to changing voter preference’, the Conservatives ‘faced New Labour, the supreme “flexi-party”’. They ‘were willing to adopt almost any policy and position to appeal to’ post-Thatcherite, atomised voters; Labour ‘was no longer frightening to many Conservative voters’ (Seldon, 1997, p.741), as they had shed the Old Labour traditional class discourse.

This emphasis of difference from the past or re-creation, is nothing new for political parties. For example, as Coates (2005) notes, ‘Harold Wilson’s Old Labour government coined the slogan “The New Britain: Labour’s Plan Outlined”, similarly, one of Tony Blair’s New Labour slogans was; “New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country”’. The party via the scrapping of Clause IV, were recreating themselves as they were adopting and proposing a new set of aims within the ever-changing atomised class, political framework, a position which as a rule was justified as crucial if they were to be seen as electorally relevant. Coates (2005) continues, ‘reinvention of this sort is vitally important to all political parties because it allows them to distance themselves from past mistakes and unpopular policies and gives the electorate hope that they have a new solution which is better than the opposition’s and can fix age-old problems’ (Coates, 2005, p.30). This led them to question core, long-term policy beliefs like the redistribution of wealth and their support for organised

labour (Mumby (1988); Butler & Savage (1995)). New Labour's success was twofold, as it not only shifted 'the party away from not just social democratic political values', but also discarded 'the party's old-fashioned leftist image' (Paxman, 2002, p.62). This provided a strong substantiation for the robust power particularly in regards the post-Thatcherite atomisation era that the traditional conservative service class has had on contemporary British politics in general.

This theory was consistently illustrated during the 1980s when the Labour Party in opposition to the Thatcher government, was commonly seen as a working-class party, fighting solely for traditional working-class interests. It, as Joyce (1995), and Dale (2000) noted, did not appeal to the growing number of white-collar employees. They in the long-term failed to adapt their policy or image to cater for the more atomised social class stratification, which saw people on an economic level gradually move away from outdated historic class loyalties and concerns; a position which it appears took root during the Thatcher era. A powerful subtext in these debates is that the collapse of the Left is also a breakdown of contemporary socialist theory; that Labour supporters have remained burdened by the growing irrelevance of communal-styled class politics, which in the atomised Thatcherite era, needed revision and modernising, so as to stay electorally viable (Baker & Luke (1991); Bennett & Entman (2000)). This is for the most part defined by the decline of mass production, and with it a mass labour force, which has led to the declining relevance of the working-class and of 'class politics' networks as the modern, atomised consumer does not feel such an affinity to such a communal background.

It was, as largely pronounced by Curtis (2002), in a sense, the victory of the atomised political-class ethos over that of once prevalent rigid structures; of a particular self-indulgence, a notion that all moral feelings were fittingly scrutinised through the lens of personal, individualistic fulfilment. In reality, the final culmination of such rationality is that there is no society; there is only a group of desire-fuelled atomised entities who are making individual choices so as to stimulate their own individual good fortune (Bernays (1965)). This thesis in part, outlines how politicians on the traditional centre-left in Britain turned to the atomised methods advanced by business in an attempt to recapture government office; but what they did not grasp was that what had thrived for their conservative opponents, would demoralise the very core of

their political values. They would find themselves imprisoned by the avaricious aspirations of the new individualistic society, which was contradictory to their ideological, communal traditions (Curtis (2002)).

This study along these lines highlights how that concept took over party politics as it states how Labour within their atomised, consumerist new reality of the New Labour brand, turned to these techniques to regain power. They, as identified by King (1997), and Sheingate (2016), imagined that they were coining a more contemporary and effective form of democracy, one that sincerely answered to the inner-desires of the new individualised voter. On the contrary, what the politicians did not comprehend was that the intention of those who had formerly shaped such techniques had not been to release people from the burdens of intrusive governments but actually to advance a new mode of manipulating them in an era of mass democracy (Curtis (2002)). Even so, though, like every political party project, such a vision was motivated by promoting a clear political message through a well-defined image; a message, and an image that gave its brand validity and legitimacy that people could recognise and know what it was, and what it stood for. It is too simple to conclude though that New Labour actually succeeded in creating that classless perspective, although the Old Labour's working-class persona was doubtless being eroded in the more diverse contemporary atomised or possibly even classless class-based society. In regards class pragmatism, New Labour, as observed by Seldon (2001), and Griffiths & Hickson (2009), were ruthless in understanding the ever-complex atomised class complexities and with that its relationship with modern communications culture and specific geographic locales.

Class, Labour, and Communications, within a Localised Context

The old, ostensibly communal class-based politics, 'which gave it coherence and purpose, that being to improve the lives of industrial workers' within urban locales 'by nationalising the means of production, were an inadequate basis on which to build a successful party of the ideological centre-left in the closing decades of the 20th Century' (Cannadine, 1998, p.12). 'Today's Labour politicians', as alluded to by Paxman (2002), and Carr (2014), and further described by Cannadine (1999), 'are less interested than their predecessors were in the history of class consciousness and class conflict, a history which was once such an important prop to the party's ideological

and geographic collective identity and purpose'. They, in accordance with the post-Thatcherite atomised class culture, instead stress a less traditional class perspective of 'brand politics', which aims to sell a message to a greater homogenised group or network, which will relate to all classes in all locales.

The technique of connecting social class and communication networks in specific locations was as hitherto noted, originally developed in the 1920s by Marxist theorists like Gramsci, who articulated such complex nuance ideological theories of class and political affiliation. Althusser's (1970) rethinking of this concept of ideology, as Stewart (2000), and Crang & Thrift (2002) state, and its relationship to the concept of space, though sparked a revival of interest in Marxist theory in western literal and cultural scholarship. Althusser, as Therborn (1999), and Ferretter (2005) note, places emphasis on the core Marxian ethos that communal class distinctions are defined through the social space in which they are geographically positioned, and the occupations of the inhabitants who reside in such spaces. It also has to restructure itself; it has to enforce its position continuously in the face of continually developing new historical environments.

This Althusserian perspective which the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre advances in his text *La production de l'espace* (1974), that urban and rural spaces are cultural entities in their own right, and in this manner notably influence a person's perspective not just over their perceived communal class interests, but also that of their communal political interests, seems therefore influential (Davis (2004a); Pflieger et al. (2008)). Lefebvre (1974), like Althusser (1970), defined this urban-rural political, class structural divide as the 'spatial'. It is, as Dear (2000), and Olsen (2014), broadly allude, the promotion of such a theory which theoretically set the tone for the traditional Old Labour electoral strategy of focussing their priorities towards perceived 'working-class' urban areas so as to satisfy their hitherto simplistic political, class stereotypes.

David Harvey, from a modern-day perspective, similar to the spatial works of Althusser and Lefebvre, places consideration around urban and rural social life in both its traditional economic and symbolic dimensions. This work, as documented by Castree & Gregory (2006), and Whybrow (2010), is imbued with a keen awareness of

the temporality of urban life in the sense of long-term consumerist accumulation. This is where that palpable class structure that being the conception of communal, spatial class struggle which derives out of Marxist theory, comes back into relative perspective. On a political level, Harvey, in his revolutionary text, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (2010), argued that one of the limitations which has begun to become widespread in contemporary class discourse is the myth that people are now not divided by communal, 'spatial' lines. This has led to a mistaken belief that the communal class struggle is seen as irrelevant in the 21st Century, as it has been replaced by the broad perception that modern class categorisation is structured via an atomised, and possibly even classless, network society. Marx's teachings state that the collectivised working-class masses have to have the strength to circumvent the attractions offered by any form of class atomisation and instead, engage in the core structures of the class system which govern the economic structures and consequent power disparities of such a classification (Harvey (2007)).

Althusser, Lefebvre, and Harvey's spatial class analysis, is argued contemporarily by Manuel Castells' three monumental texts, *End of the Millennium* (1998), *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), and *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012). Each text traces the major global changes initiated by the information technology revolution of the late 1970s which arose out of the atomised class, political ethos developed through that period. It appears that to disengage from these international networks is to return to a communal economic and social structure which is redundant in the post-Thatcherite era. Castells (1998, 2000, and 2012) stated that this information propagates instantaneously through atomised computer networks that run the models upon which corporate decisions, so crucial post-Thatcher, are made, and accordingly where social structures are defined. These interwoven atomised networks, like those remarked on by Henderson & Castells (1987), affect social characteristics, as they being generally borne out of the post-Thatcherite ethos, naturally influence political affinity within a pronounced geographic space.

In this new atomised, consumerist structure, the economic framework highlights the traditional great urban-rural spatial divide like that purported by Althusser (1970), Lefebvre (1974), and Harvey (2010), but then takes it on to a greater cultivated degree by correlating it to such atomised and complex contemporary class gradations. This

view, asserted by Susser (2001), and Haffner (2013), that one of the central tensions explored by Castells' text, is that the urban and the rural inhabitants, between their networked flows and individualistic atomised perspectives, have as a rule, separate social objectives which commonly define their political outlook. The urban is a densely populated social space, where, as noted by Middleton (2013), and Butler (2014), the general social structure is condensed through the traditional, spatial group ethos or network, where the working and middle-classes live and work within a confined space. This is in contrast to the sparsely populated rural areas, which on a political parallel are less socially collectivised, and hence are more malleable to such atomised class influences and networks.

In regards such individuals, as noted by Inglehart (1990), and James (2006), the increased complexity of their work and lives has reduced such potential social alienation. In any case, there will forever be some mundane work in any type of industrialised society, be it pre-Thatcherite socialist or post-Thatcherite capitalist. The lesson here appears to be that there is little suggestion of the advancement of radical class consciousness among the traditional working-classes. According to some postmodernists, such as Beech & Lee (2008), and Wallace (2010), for example, class has become an entity in itself, immaterial in many people's lives. New Labour was an attempt to find a new form of political solidarity centred through the idea of Communitarianism within the framework of the classless Third Way. New Labour originally started with a breaking down of that social status via the promotion of the localism agenda. Community empowerment became the core class concept where they broke local authorities down into smaller units with which people could identify. What the party was trying to achieve was to rebuild the social solidarity of traditional working-class communities around a specific locality; the politics of place and community came to the fore (De Chernatony (2001); Geary & Pabst (2015)).

Geographical research into the relevance of political party affinity has been split into two distinct functions. The first, as Scott & Willis (2017) state, being a focus 'on political deliberation and the extent to which citizens are engaged in discussions about shared concerns'. The second explores 'the structures and practices that underpin the operation of representative democracy'. The relevance of locale and geographical territory (constituencies or districts) can determine the framework of electoral

outcomes, and by this means the success or lack of, of specific political parties (Scott & Willis (2017)). In addition, there is a long-standing number of academic studies that focus upon the linkage of social class, political party support, and its relationship with specific locales. It primarily concentrates upon how such factors affect electoral outcomes via the correlation between the votes across a range of areas, be it urban or rural (Agnew (1987, and 1996); Johnston & Pattie (2006, and 2008)).

The relevance of locale to political, class relations though in general terms is dictated via both a communal, and atomised perspective. There is no doubt, particularly demonstrated with the rise of New Labour, and their classless political brand, that they transcended to some extent the relevance of the ‘spatial’ ethos. This shift though was limited as on an historical level, the trend to such movement of political party affinity and class perception to that of locale and territory, is one which by its nature has been fairly modest (Pelling (1967); Dorling & Henning (2015)). This perspective is supported by Johnston & Pattie (2008), who state that ‘a party and its belief systems become part of the local culture … and those areas of strengths become core to its continued quest for votes’ (Johnston & Pattie, 2008, p.365). They argue ‘that neighbours shape each other’s voting preferences through “conversion by conversation” such that people are more likely to support the largest party as it is most likely be associated with the class category in which they consider themselves to be part of’. This research suggests that local ‘social networks, many of which are spatially clustered within households, families and neighbourhoods, are the locales within which there is much discussion of political and related issues and through which, intentionally or serendipitously, some people may be convinced to change their views and the party that they support’ (Johnston & Pattie, 2008, p.366). Any party ‘interested in winning general elections needs to think about ways to: (1) shore up its political heartlands and build from its geo-historical base; (2) appeal more widely in order to win additional seats (targeting marginal seats); and (3) link the work of the local party with developments in the national arena, ensuring that the balance of power within the party works in the interests of winning campaigns’ (Scott & Willis (2017)). A successful political party needs to retain its traditional class base, as well as being flexible enough to be realistically attractive to classes, and by implication, areas, that they would not naturally associate with, being rooted in their core values and beliefs (Taylor (1985); Page & Dittmer (2015)).

The big question is how such a strategy should be implemented, that if there are class struggles based around primitive atomised divisions, those have to be integrated with traditional class struggles in the workplace which the spatial ethos pronounces. This is a difficult course to follow, especially under the current atomised, capitalist financial network structure where there is a great deal of class struggles defined through a range of once immaterial characteristics such as culture, aspiration, and locale. The traditional working-class movement in the post-Thatcherite age is struggling to adapt to this new atomised network discourse (Goonewardena et al. (2008); Diefenbach et al. (2013)). This limitation which Marx emphasises, is that the masses have to confront the centre piece of the problem, which in regards contemporary class structure, is the elite bourgeoisie network downplaying the relevance of the communal interests of the masses, so as to distract them from a social and political structure which fails to serve their communal interests (Harvey (1989, and 2010)). This atomised network system leads to the bourgeoisie elite shrinking in size, but growing in wealth, at the cost of the proletariat class, who are increasing in size, but decreasing in wealth (Savage & Devine (2013)). In regards that point, Marx states that politically the masses are not going to press forward in-dealing with the existing atomised network class system, if they are not spatially organised to engage in some mode of class resistance (Thacker (2009); Eagleton (2012)).

Despite the differing interpretations of the individualistic, atomised class networks, be it in a spatial sense, national or regional, rural or urban, this is at root a social class structure which is related to this study. This occurs through a range of localised class networks in both urban and rural North-West Cumbria, where an analysis can be evaluated on a specific political network, that being the Labour Party. It appears for this connection of class, political affinity, consumerism, and locale to be fully understood, an understanding of such themes through a wider academic context, is necessary.

Review of Contemporary Research Streams

There have been numerous studies which have focussed attention to some extent on the ever changing, more complex contemporary social class structure and how it sequentially affects political party affiliation. This application, as Wring (2002)

states, ‘and usage of marketing from the mid-1980s onwards has led to important structural changes within the party which collectively combined to afford the leader and his aides greater power’. What was happening at the end of the 20th Century was something that had never been tried before; the idea of democracy was being taking over by a simplified economic model of human beings advancing their desire-fuelled consumerism, and in the process, freedom was redefined to mean nothing more than the ability of individuals to get whatever they coveted (Curtis (2002); Raphael (2017)). A desirable and democratic consequence of modern, atomised political marketing is to make parties more responsive to the widest section of the electorate, the implementation of this approach though can result in having the opposite effect in that some voters appear to become more relevant than others. This adoption of a political marketing approach to the electorate has been an important precursor to the development of the electorally successful New Labour brand, so skilfully fostered under the Blair leadership. Set in such an historical context, this shift, as recorded by McQuail (2010), and Geary & Pabst (2015), has enabled the current Labour leadership to exercise a greater amount of control over electoral strategy than was afforded their Old Labour predecessors.

In seeking to adopt the marketing concept, political organisations such as Labour use opinion research to develop long-term plans and strategic goals rather than just presentational ideas for the last few weeks of an election campaign. Sophisticated demographic and psychographic market research, as observed by Curtis (2002), and Marlin (2013), started to be fed into the design of the product, be it in relation to the image of a candidate, party or policy platform on which they stood. Marketing techniques, as noted by Rallings et al. (1996), ‘such as positioning, segmentation, and product development also began to be more fully integrated into electoral strategy. This phase of political marketing development contrasts with its predecessors in that targets other than just the general electorate become the focus of activity. The efforts become partly preoccupied with influencing opinion in the party itself, amongst interest groups and, crucially, the mass media’ (Rallings et al., 1996, p.107). What, as noted in generic terms by Joyce (1995), and Curtis (2002), had begun as a system of liberation was turning into a powerful system of control.

This marketing approach naturally correlated to New Labour's classless vision of a freer and more open Britain as they were in communication terms, promoting an atomised, consumer-driven society. In addition, with the benefit of prior review, the debate over the weakening of the standard class, political party, communication, and locale relationship is still open, especially with respect to support for the Labour Party particularly in the contemporary Post New Labour era. It is also commonly suggested that a decline in traditional political-class affinity in Britain, as remarked by Agger (1998), is a function of fluctuating party programmes rather than a weakening in the relevance of social class to the public at large. Social class issues though are still very influential in regards specific issues such as poverty, employment, and immigration, but less so in defining broader political party brands who need to cater to a much wider electorate.

The impression though, as professed by Mattelart (1992), and Wallace (2010), that social backgrounds and localities in particular, could modify political party affinity freely of individual socio-demographic characteristics has existed in some form for some time. These 'early attempts', as Andersen et al. (2006) states, 'to test for this type of contextual effect though were limited in that they relied on aggregate data'. Although 'their findings clearly showed compositional effects', such as for instance, the more traditional working-class a local area, the more likely it elected a candidate from a traditional working-class party (Andersen et al. (2006)). They did not, unlike Bernays (1955, and 1965), explicitly examine atomised and/or classless individual behaviours, and consequently their findings were limited as the spread of the population explored were too narrow. Such data also contained information about the parliamentary constituencies in which respondents live, permitting related data from the British census or other legitimate government sources to be assimilated as explanatory relevant themes. This outlook led to a solidity of electoral patterns, which meant that there was a clear conventional relationship between class assessment and political support, with the traditional working-classes chiefly voting Labour, and those who considered themselves to be from the collectivised middle-classes being more inclined to support the Conservatives (Joyce (1995); Seldon & Hickson (2004)).

Marx and Weber's communal categorisations were important in understanding the power structure in society as such formations enabled Bernays and his political apostle

Thatcher to overturn the dominant communal class ethos, replacing it with a more atomised perspective (Henry (1983); Breen & Rottman (1995)). They believed that such previous collectivised structures were irrelevant and had to be fragmented and atomised to suit the needs of the individual as an entity in itself. Following such clear contrasting divisions, the last four decades have witnessed a major rethinking of the relevance of the subject which prior to this seemed set within clearly defined broad guidelines, be it Marxist or Weberian (Runciman (2002); Parkin (2013)). An alternative atomised interpretation instead has come to prevail, that although not always explicitly Thatcherite, certainly, as affirmed by Jackson & Saunders (2012), and Evans (2013), shared her assumption that traditional class groupings are erroneous in a modern world where the power of the individual as a distinctive class in their own right has taken root.

Marx believed, as observed by Elster (1985), and Wood (2004), and quoted by Cannadine (1999), ‘that such deeply rooted and momentous struggles among socially-conscious classes, arise directly and predictably out of the conflicts inherent in the productive activities of the economy’, which give society its basic class focus. This would, as Cannadine (1999) continues, ‘lead to the socialist utopia, in which both the state and class would wither away. It is an intriguing irony that’, long before Tony Blair and New Labour made the phrase fashionable during the late 1990s, with his relentless advancement of the ‘Cool Britannia’ ethos, ‘Marx had predicted that a “classless society” would one day come into being’. This is because such a classless revolution which he famously predicted, would be that of the working-class overcoming their capitalist oppressors. In its place, what occurred was the rise of a class atomisation ethos which destroyed any such notions of working-class communal solidarity (Apple (1996); Foote (1997)). This was achieved by emphasising the role of the individual, through correlating their political values within the boundaries of a desire-fuelled consumerism, which allowed for the reactionary forces of the New Right to gain political power which as a consequence, enhanced their atomised philosophy even further.

The postmodern era, as noted by Giddens (2002), and Savage & Devine (2013), is defined by decentred and deconstructed discourse in which grand, traditional master communal, sociological, and political narratives no longer appear relevant. Cannadine

(1999) states, that ‘among the prime casualties of this new mode of thinking, have been those broad, all-encompassing, deterministic, ancient communal Marxist histories built around class formation, class conflict, and political revolution. The simple and direct connections between economic change which were the making of a communal class ethos for which large sections of the population can subscribe to and feel part of’, have by in large surrendered to the atomised perspective initially proposed by Bernays. It was this shift that, as noted by Goodlad (2015), initially provided the successful electoral framework for Margaret Thatcher and the New Right and more latterly, as remarked by Gould (1998), and Golding (2016), Tony Blair and the classless New Labour brand.

This paradox is critical in understanding Giddens’ Third Way classless theory as he himself states, ‘was concerned that neoliberal reforms, while necessary acts of modernisation, pulled apart the bonds of social class cohesion’ (Giddens, 2000, p.32). The Third Way, although accepting the Thatcherite social and political reforms of the 1980s, was not merely an exact continuation of the New Right atomisation agenda, where class power was defined by economic wealth, which in the main, lay in the hands of a corporate elite, but was instead, an alternative political ‘classless’ philosophy. Giddens’, as Mooney & Law (2007) state, ‘form of “social neoliberalism” seeks to ensure an equality of opportunity to enable individuals to compete and to remove arbitrary outmoded political and class barriers. In particular, convinced class prominent Marxists like Miliband and Thompson refused to share in the classless New Labour illusion that the market and social justice were compatible’ (Mooney & Law, 2007, p.265). Such deviations in the compositional construct of class perception generally do not denote the eradication of class struggle within society, and so by pursuing such a class context reformation, it is not realistic to believe that class-based industrial quarrels are remnants of a previous communal age (Edgell (1993); Marwick (1996)). Marx, while largely accurate that the bourgeoisie would streamline itself to control its priorities, was utterly inaccurate in regards to the future reformation of the proletariat class.

The question inevitably has to be asked whether referring to workers as ‘working-class’ on a homogeneous class-level still has any contemporary relevance (Turner (1999); Beer (2013)). ‘Class though is a central concept within the Marxist theoretical

framework; it has therefore always had a central place in the political discourse of socialists and Marxists' (Crompton, 2008, p.86). Marx 'would have thus accepted that class is a force that unites into groups people who differ from one another, by overriding the differences between them' (Marshall, 1950, p.114). He though, could not have foreseen such a variety of atomised class groupings both within Capital and Labour. This atomised structure, as outlined both by Bernays (1955), and Dahrendorf (1959), is so strong and ingrained that it has upheld the capitalist labour structure and the natural acceptance of such a structure by Labour representatives both within a localised perspective or a national context (Lowith (2004); Schmidt (2013)).

Classes 'never actually existed as recognisable historical phenomena, still less as the prime motor of historical change' (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.190), which has led to the rise of a less rigidly class-conscious voter which would have lasting effects on Labour politics. Thatcher was merely embracing a natural economic philosophy which, as articulated by Clarke (1991), and Berger (2007), stated that society is best served by principally promoting the ideal of the individual's personal satisfaction centred through the individual's own distinctive gratification. It was in a sense the triumph of considering individuals, on a political party and social class level, as purely emotional beings who have unconscious wants and desires that need to be satisfied before the advancement of any generically designed communal social class group.

Such credibility lessons would be inspired by the success of their main political rivals. The Conservative Party, as Rawnsley (2000) notes, 'had come to power in 1979, replacing a weak and failing Old Labour government. It was to remain in power until 1997, through elections in 1983, 1987, and 1992' in no small fashion by using very skilful marketing techniques (see Chapter III). New Labour, 'was the product of traumatic and multiple failures' (Rawnsley, 2000, pp.8-9), of promoting an out-dated Old Labour brand during such a time. Recognition of such failures emerged principally from the consistent electoral reverses during the Thatcher era, this generated a belief that the party had to modernise so as to reconnect with the wider electorate (Smith & Smith (1995); Beck (1997)). The process of modernisation hence began and the term and the New Labour brand was adopted at the hitherto noted 1994 Party Conference, which had the theme, 'New Labour, New Britain' (Fairclough (2003); Geary & Pabst (2015)). Reflections like those emphasising the emergence,

development, and evolution of the New Labour brand suggest that the concept of the classless brand, as noted by Hombach (2000), and Bennion (2002), was a necessary element in the modernisation of the party, and a device to suggest and promise change.

Underlying this acceptance of such a modern convoluted class mantra on the ideological Centre-left in Britain is a broader change in the ‘conventional vocabulary of political discussion and social perception. This occurred namely through the shift from the traditional preoccupation with people as collective producers to the alternative notion of people as individual consumers. This was partly Thatcher’s achievement’ (Cannadine (1999)). She was very perceptive in promoting such an atomised political structure through the aspirational temptations of consumerism. In relation to the former, by confronting and defeating the trades unions who symbolised the communal working-class ethos, the Thatcherite ideology, as declared by Carter & Wright (1997), and Turner (2008), could stress the latter by unleashing the role of the market. In relation to the latter, she promoted the concept of treating the public not as a collective Marxist social class group but as a corporate classless customer, thereby enabling the model of the atomised individual to flourish, which also consequently undermined the language of social solidarity based on historic, communal productive classes (Goodlad (2015); Veldman (2015)). She offered, through her atomised political, class philosophy, hope in a way that Old Labour never had, ‘to the traditional working and middle-classes that they might escape from the constraints of impoverished expectations and irremediable subordination’ (Cannadine (1999)).

Thatcher and Blair, thus had much in common, as both prioritised on an electoral level at least, the established middle-class grouping in Weberian parlance. The Thatcher and later Blair administrations, as Cannadine (1998) states, were post-atomised attempts to communicate to and about what they believed to be ‘the middle-class, without actually using the word “class” as a collective social category’. They wanted any such terms to be replaced with the emphasis on the atomised individual as an entity within itself. They both ‘sought to convey an impression of concern’ for the atomised individual as well as promoting a natural affinity to the traditional middle-class electorate. This was done so as to calm such people’s ‘feelings of insecurity and marginalisation which had come to the fore’ during the 1960s and 1970s, where the

Old Labour communal class perspective was still prevalent (Cannadine, 1998, p.184). ‘Middle England’, as Cannadine (1998) further alludes, was just an attempt by New Right, and New Labour politicians to try and foster an atomised, or classless agenda, for electoral advantage.

Labour, according to Carter & Wright (1997), and King (1997), has characteristically seen itself as a movement, not just as a party; such a trait is demarcated because its association with its class history greatly relates to its future perceptions. Although, historically in Britain, political parties in general and the Labour Party in particular, ‘are conflicted on both “class” and “status” interests’. It is very rare for a political party of any ideology to be fixed within such a singularly simplistic class grouping, like for instance the working masses or the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie class (Edgell, 1993, p.12). Labour historically has initiated its allure not just through a range of policies and principles, but via its advancement of promoting a vision of a greater society that can encompasses all classes within a modern structural framework (Crosland (1956); Ziegler (1995)).

Learning from its greatest political adversary, Margaret Thatcher and her atomised philosophy, Labour by becoming more classless in their broad perspective stayed relevant in modern electoral politics. Hobsbawm (1981) from a Marxist perspective, ‘attributed the breakdown of class politics, and in particular the poor showing of Labour at the polls’ during the Old Labour era, ‘to the new sectionalism and self-interest where the electorate had become fragmented politically along unfamiliar’ atomised lines (Marshall, 1997, p.32). This theory in a contemporary British political context was illustrated in the image of the 1980s ‘New Tories’, who were predominantly traditional working-class who would naturally previously have seen to have benefitted from traditional Labour policies. Even so, because of short-term financial benefits allied to the atomised, individualistic class orthodoxy of the age, they felt more affiliation with the Thatcherite ethos. The rise of such atomisation in relation to the British body-politic allowed Thatcher to comfortably, consistently defeat Old Labour at the polls (Griffiths & Hickson (2009)).

In addition, such traditional conflicts, as observed by Marshall (1997), and Black (2003), between workers and owners of production will not in the foreseeable future

pose a threat to the atomised social order. There is also no good reason to believe that any such communal class structures, as those purported by Renner (1953), and Dahrendorf (1959), and quoted by Miliband (1989), ‘are at all likely in advanced capitalist countries. In every generation, diverse voices insistently proclaim that the very notion of class struggle is obsolete. It is part of a world that has irrevocably vanished, and that the manifestations of it which still occur’ are gradually being eroded in this more diverse contemporary class culture (Miliband, 1989, p.207). The communal class struggle is along these lines, irrelevant in the Post-Thatcherite era where an atomised class dealignment has taken effect.

Social class dealignment refers to the declining propensity for members of given social classes to vote for their allegedly ‘natural’ class party; Labour (working-class public-service workers), and Conservative (middle-class private-sector employees) (Dunleavy & Husbands (1985)). Such class dealignment in a broad sense arises with the traditional working-classes, particularly those in middle-management in the public sector, switching away from their stereotypical natural Labour leanings and voting Conservative. It must be stated that the Conservatives have since the 1950s had a notable minority of their support coming from all sections of the communal working-classes in urban locales (Nordlinger (1967); McKenzie & Silver (1968)). This though became particularly prevalent during the Thatcherite 1980s with the introduction of ‘Essex Man’ and ‘Essex Woman’, a once traditional Labour voter, who now with the rise of the atomised consumerist culture were drawn to the Conservatives through their emphasis on personal aspiration and enrichment. This created a powerful coalition of the skilled working-class, and a small business class electorate, which Thatcher was ruthlessly effective in attracting, thus strengthening her electoral base.

In response, bourgeois gentrifiers often coming from professional middle-class backgrounds, as well as working in such occupations themselves, have traditionally had, to some degree, distinctly left-leaning politics. This was expressed in their support for the Labour Party, both in the Old Labour era, but particularly during the New Labour years. In the Post New Labour age, such class dealignment has remained, but its terms of reference generally have altered, for instead of the party losing important sections of their traditional skilled working-class support to the Conservatives, they now face the prospect of losing potentially large sections of their

traditional unskilled working-class support to the right-wing populists of UKIP. UKIP are a party in the past decade who have persuaded such people that Labour, particularly with their support of the European Union and the open-borders policy on immigration which comes with the promotion of such a policy, is no longer defending their class interests on broad economic grounds (Ford & Goodwin (2013)).

In ‘any such eventuality’, as Butler & Savage (1995) note, ‘it would be important to ask not only how far class dealignment has occurred, but further how far it was the accompaniment of party dealignment’. This perspective must be asked in regards New Labour on a policy basis, specifically in relation ‘to increase its appeal among this growing component of the electorate by moving rightwards – especially, say, in regard to redistributive issues and its relations with organised labour’ (Butler & Savage, 1995, p.324). The debate about the so-called decline of class politics provides a good illustration of the long-term ‘loosening of the class structure’. Class dealignment has ‘been advanced as an explanation for the recently poor performances of Labour at the polls’ (Joyce, 1995, p.62). Labour during the Thatcher era declined because it was seen as an antiquated communal class-based party. It did not appeal to the growing numbers of white-collar workers and failed to detect a ‘sea-change’ in the modern atomised attitudes of manual employees away from traditional class loyalties and concerns. In truth, as examined by Heath et al. (1985), such perceptions to a point though, contrast with the prevailing polling data over the subject, which support the notion that conventional class dealignment remained more or less constant throughout the period where the atomised, dealignment effect was meant to have taken effect.

The fact according to Joyce (1995), ‘that such variations as can be found to exist in the association between vote and class take the form of “trendless fluctuations” suggests that Labour’s electoral failures have a political rather than a sociological source’ (Joyce, 1995, p.63). The party by being seen to be out of touch with mainstream working-class opinion over issues such as defence and tax, inevitably left themselves vulnerable to being seen as unattractive to the new atomised mind-set which had taken over from the communal post-war consensus (Hughes & Wintour (1990); Dell (2000)). The scale of changes in such political and social structures, as documented by Jones (1994), and Stuart (2005), was a big factor in relation to the atomised transformation of the Labour Party from the mid-1980s onwards. New

Labour, as Rubinstein (2000) stated, ‘was born out of the reform process initiated at that time by Neil Kinnock and John Smith. The pragmatic post-war social democratic arguments for a mixed economy have given way, rightly or wrongly, to the celebration of competitive markets and private enterprise’ (Rubenstein, 2000, p.165). Rubenstein’s (2000) article argues an opinion that changes in policy during the New Labour era have been a natural reaction to intense mass economic and social changes such as the move from a communal to atomised social class ethos. These ideas and perceptions are not excluded by our encapsulation of New Labour as ‘post-Thatcherite’ (Cowell & Larkin (1999); Heppell & Theakston (2013)). He thus states that to blame New Labour for adapting to; and following such a structure is misplaced. Any change, as Cannadine (1998) states, ‘has been a rational response to new circumstances’. Rational or not, the fact that shifts from Old to New, to Post New, ‘are in part a response to what are perceived to be changed circumstances in no way diminishes the importance of those shifts’ (Cannadine, 1998, p.182). Thatcherism, as noted by Needham (2003), and Clarke & Newman (2004), was in part about the ideological right responding to ‘new times’, and as Cannadine (1998) also states, by accepting such an atomisation ethos along with promoting a classless strand within it, ‘Blair’s (and prior to that, Kinnock’s and Smith’s) Labour Party continued her legacy’ (Cannadine, 1998, p.182).

Thatcherism, according to Driver & Martell (2001), ‘just like the “post-war consensus”, was for that reason never as seamless and straightforward in broad political terms as often portrayed, but there was at the heart of Conservatism in the 1980s a challenge to the values and policy instruments of the left. The reform of the left accordingly grew out of the challenge from the right, not only in response to some new social context in which politics is conveniently left out, but it was an engagement, not a battle fought at a distance, and the new “new left” that emerged in the early 1990s was, in part, shaped by these engagements with the forces of Thatcherism. This is why Blair’s New Labour is different in class terms to their previous Old Labour predecessors’ (Driver & Martell, 2001, pp.49-50). In this manner, New Labour, following the new atomised Thatcherite consensus, communicated the language of ‘individual consumers’, rather than that of ‘collectivised workers’. When Tony Blair attacked ‘a class system unequal and antiquated’, and when he lamented that ‘Britain is still, after all these years, a place where class counts’, he like Thatcher and the New

Right before him, is insisting that the ‘old hierarchy of deference’ remains, and that it has to be ‘dismantled’ (Cannadine, 1998, p.182).

These academic debates as Crompton (2008) states, ‘relating to politics, it must be remembered, were taking place at a time in which (particularly in Britain), left-of-centre political parties endured successive electoral defeats (the Conservative government was in power from 1979 to 1997). The election of New Labour was a conscious attempt to distance itself from “old politics”, in particular the major representatives of “class politics” such as the trade unions. Indeed, the transformation of Labour politics might itself be seen as yet another instance of the increasing lack of relevance of “class” in contemporary political debates’ (Crompton, 2008, p.88). The Blairite revolution, as recorded by Beech & Lee (2008), and Minkin (2014), voiced an end to the party’s dependence on traditional class division for a new atomised reality and now the party must accept that they are deemed unprincipled, and to some extent confused over the issue.

This class dealignment remained effective throughout the 1980s as the Thatcherite atomised agenda prevailed, and hence Labour’s subsequent electoral defeats should by and large be explained by a combination of policies borne out of a lack of understanding of the ever-changing atomised class structure (Heath et al. (1985); Crewe et al. (2000)). Labour ‘performed poorly across the entire electorate, both within their traditional working-class base and beyond, because their policies, in particular on the economy and defence, were contrary to the views of the majority of the traditional working-classes. The party, suffering from internal ideological divisions, lacked the coherence required to be seen as an alternative government to Thatcherite realism which was being portrayed in the economic sphere’ (Joyce, 1995, p.63). The Labour Party simply had to find a new policy and image framework which would allow them to be highlighted as a relevant alternative to the Conservatives, the party had to reach a balance of transcending its accepted class base, as well as staying attractive to its hitherto loyal support.

Several conclusions can thus be drawn from the discussion in this chapter particularly with respect to the role which class has played in regards support for the Labour Party, both at a British national and a localised perspective. Previous empirical studies have

had very little focus on these research themes, hence such themes, which are at the heart of this study's theoretical analysis will add meaningful academic research originality. The 'last two decades', as Cannadine (1999) notes, 'have witnessed a deep-seated rethinking of the economic, social, and political history of modern Britain, with the result that social class analysis and social class conflict, which had until recently seemed so central to it, have ceased to carry the conviction which they once did'.

An 'alternative interpretation', as Cannadine (1999) continues, 'has come to prevail that, although not always explicitly Thatcherite, certainly shared its assumption that class should be downplayed, disregarded, and denied'. This follows the Bernaysian outlook, 'that grouping people in confrontational collectives is a subversive rhetorical and political device rather than an expression or description of a more complex, integrated, and individualistic social reality'. These 'classes had no clear identity or a shared sense of themselves which can be easily understood and defined. They were inert, inanimate social aggregations; they did not do, feel, or achieve anything collectively' as they are borne out of the atomisation ethos. They were not locked in perpetual struggle with other classes', as was the natural connotation of the communal structure promoted firstly by Marx and later refined by Weber; and so, they neither made history nor changed its course. These classes, as Cannadine (1999) further states, 'also anticipated and resembled the groups into which all individuals are placed in a national census, which are used to provide a comprehensive picture of society based on income, wealth, occupation, and location'. They also, according to Cannadine (1999), 'lie behind the work of successive generations of sociologists, who continue to refine and debate the number and nature of such classes to be found in modern Britain'. Equally, even accepting that such class atomisation has begun to prevail on a contemporary basis, such a communal class structure is still deemed relevant for assessing and evaluating political party affinity. By the same token, as suggested by Rockmore (2002), and Schmidt (2013), and quoted by Cannadine (1999), 'that even if the dictatorship of the proletariat had not yet arrived, as Marx had predicted, his insights still seemed to offer the best way of understanding the broad contours of the economic, social, and political development of modern Britain'.

What New Labour was originally aiming for in class terms, was a bid to break away from traditional ‘Labourism’, and to expand the image of the Labour Party through an atomised, classless brand. By following such a structure, they were inadvertently complying with communal class theory, admittedly whilst supporting the new atomised capitalist consensus. This is because it was a way of endeavouring to build a mass support of working-people, despite their atomised class perceptions, against a new ‘Elite’ class category within the cultural (Bourdieu (1984); Savage & Devine (2013)), or even atomised (Bernays (1955, and 1965)), contemporary British class structure. Although nobody would ever articulate it in those terms publicly, what New Labour was in reality trying to achieve was to promote another form of economic class organisation, condensed within a modern cultural and atomised class tradition, but with a distinct ‘Labourist’ message (Heffernan (2000); Stephens (2004)). On an economic level, this outlook promoted a Third Way political ethos which was neither state controlled nor free-market but instead structured in a communitarian fashion where people came together to organise their own localised, classless communities.

The relevance this new atomised reality in relation to class and political affinity has led to a different focus on the role such a structure has played within the specific context of geographic locale, be it spatial or network. Social class is a central tenant of social constructivism, leading to people being categorised along a range of class groupings. Such categorisations, as expressed by Merrifield (2014), and Ford (2016), could lead to social stigmatisation where people are assessed because of the social class label they carry, which coincides with the specific geographic locality in which they reside, and potentially the political party they support.

This chapter thus has outlined the broad relevance to Labour support that the rise of the Thatcherite New Right ethos has had in regards class perception and political affinity, where new atomised constructs clearly replaced previous communal certainties, both nationally and locally. The next chapter, entitled ‘Methodology’ will discuss and endeavour to answer in greater detail how such themes thus far noted in this thesis will be tied together within a clear and suitable methodological structure.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is arranged into six components, the first outlines the broad contours of the research design, that being purely qualitative research where the data collection is a combination of primary and secondary research. This leads on to how such a framework is both ethically viable, as well as providing data that is distinctive and can be appropriately integrated to the phenomenon being investigated. The relevance of the role of qualitative research is then ascertained, particularly that of the two types used in this study, Conceptual Analysis and Interviews, and through that the credibility of the data analysis procedures are evaluated, and the methodological reflexivity, and potential limitations and improvements are outlined.

Research Design

This thesis adopts a mixture of secondary and primary qualitative research techniques, the former being Conceptual Analysis of relevant sources, the latter being fifteen interviews with Labour Party, political representatives in North-West Cumbria. This research is an empirical study which derives knowledge mainly from second-hand literary perspectives. This is centred, as said by Warren & Karner (2009), and Sullivan (2011), within a classical phenomenological tradition, which correlates such empirical theory to the first-hand research analysis undertaken in the interviews. This thesis then is an empirical study that pragmatically investigates the relevance of the research phenomena of class-based support for the Labour Party since the emergence of the New Labour brand, and the possible effects that such a brand may have had in regards the party's support within a generalised locational basis, with a specific focus placed upon North-West Cumbria.

No data, as Ferraris (1996), and Merleau-Ponty (2012) principally refer, speaks for itself; it is always dependant on having a particular kind of perspective stated through a devised research hypothesis. This study thus analyses primary and secondary content, and similar to the works of Corbetta (2003), and Gallacher & Zahavi (2012), it correlates pertinent empirical theories and subsequent research themes to practical experience encountered by relevant research participants to evaluate a specific

research phenomenon. Pragmatic structures such as this, as noted by Schoenbach (2015), and Bryant (2017), can be pivotal to the conduct of empirical research of a specific research phenomenon as it places focus upon the logical link between the two (primary and secondary) models of inquiry in regards this study. The methodological choice in this thesis is determined by the research objective and influenced by practical constraints as well; such issues had to follow clear research ethical guidelines as noted below.

Research Ethics

Since this research involved formal interaction with human participants, clear ethical issues were raised due to the sensitive nature of the topic of social class and political party support. Both the Conceptual Analysis and Interview research methods format accordingly followed the officially set-out ethical procedure of Lancaster University along with, on a wider academic scale, the ethical research guidelines outlined by the British Sociological Association on their website.

The research ethics nucleus was set within the broad conditions connected to social science qualitative research, the analysis of which is outlined below:

Social benefits versus the harm of research

The social benefits of this research greatly outweigh the negatives. Convenience sampling was employed in this stage, whereby only participants who were conveniently available and willing to participate in the study were recruited. The Interview questions asked participants in a very light, polite, and open manner, their opinions over one of the most widely regarded socio-political topics of contemporary times, that of the connection between social class, voting behaviour, and the role and changing nature of political party marketing within a localised context.

The research methods highlighted a range of views from representatives within the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria, which may or may not affect their own, or the party's future perspective over the issue. The harm caused by this type of research is minimal, for even if the participants felt uncomfortable discussing certain questions or subjects, they could have elected, if they so wished, to by-pass any such areas.

Veracity

The Interview questions and the Conceptual Analysis themes were clear and concise, and not misleading in any way. All of the themes were outlined in an ethical sheet, which also stated my personal details, academic involvement, and the overall purpose of both the primary and secondary qualitative research conducted.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The topic of social class and voting behaviour can be very sensitive, especially if the questions are concentrated within the party in which the participants have an active involvement. The participants' privacy and confidentiality were preserved to a great extent as they did not have to state any of their personal details, consequently their personal profile remained completely confidential.

Informed Consent

Participation in the research study was optional; whether the participants gave informed consent was determined on whether or not they chose to partake in the Interview process.

Instrument Development

The scripts for the interviews were developed on information gleaned from the literature review (see Chapters II, and III). The scripts, after consultation with the academic supervisory team, were reviewed; similarly, a script for introducing individual interviews and interview protocol were developed and reviewed by the same peer group. These reviewers evaluated whether the questions were understandable, likely to elicit relevant responses, and logically flowed from one theme to another. During the theoretical research for instance, notes were taken of how smoothly words flowed during questioning and whether participants appeared confused when asked certain questions. Based on such research, some questions were rephrased to be more conversational before conducting the interview process. In addition, to elicit explanations from the participants, the questions, like those noted by Kvale (2008), and Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009), were structured to be open-ended. They progressed from simple (opening questions) towards complex (transition and key questions) and back towards simple (ending questions).

Study Setting

The interviews were conducted either in a room located in the University Library or inside interviewees' offices, venues that had minimal distractions and were convenient to the interviewees. The conference room was furnished with comfortable chairs and a table that enabled the moderator to see the participant who was being interviewed. Following ethical guidelines, the interview sessions lasted between forty minutes to two hours. Immediately after each session, a reflective exercise was undertaken which primarily involved re-writing the notes to ensure that the information collected were accurate representations of the recorded responses. Each interview was then transcribed word-for-word.

Moderator and Note-Taking

Following on from the notion that 'subjects [participants] tend to disclose more about themselves to people who resemble them in various ways than people who differ from them' (Jourard, 1964, p.15), efforts were made to ensure that the moderator was an individual with whom the participants were likely to feel comfortable. During each interview session, there was a brief explanation of the main purpose of the study, as well as an emphasis on the importance for participation through stating that no anticipated risks were associated with participation in the study. It was important on a practical basis, to have eye-contact with a shy respondent and occasionally call this person by their pre-determined interview pseudonym (e.g. participant 1), so as to encourage the person's contribution to the discussion. Whenever a participant provided a spontaneous response before a question was asked, the response was accepted as presented so long as it covered the topic sufficiently.

The interview structure, as articulated by Guest & Namey (2012), and Harding (2013), in staying ethically consistent, adhered to the questioning route as far as possible. This meant, for instance, not asking leading questions but allowing for situational variations depending on the needs of each participant who were probed reasonably whenever it was believed that they had additional information to offer. By the same token, when a vague comment was given, the interviewee would be asked, 'please, would you explain what you mean' or if a participant nodded in agreement with a statement or question which was presented to them, then they would be encouraged to

tell more as the non-verbal behaviours were noted as a supplement to the verbal responses provided.

Further Ethical Considerations

The participants were forewarned as to the nature of the study, but only in broad terms, that being the core themes and how they link with each other. This was outlined in the ethics sheet which was sent out to every participant prior to the interview taking place. There was no specific indication given in such correspondence to any potential theorist which may have arisen, therefore any mentioning of any theorists in relation to any theme (e.g. Mike Savage – *The Great British Class Survey (2013)*), was done solely by the participants themselves. There though naturally arises that by agreeing to undertake such a process, that it could be assumed that the participant's knowledge of the subject in question would be to of a reasonably high standard. Their responses thus would potentially be interpreted to some extent, to be of a more informed nature, than that of a member of the general public, whose interest in the area being explored would most likely not be as great.

Participants were also asked to sign an informed consent form, which described the purpose of the study and provided background information. Also, with the consent of the participants, each session was digitally tape-recorded and transcribed to ensure no response was omitted. Accepting that anonymity is critical for promoting honest disclosures, participants were assigned numerical pseudonyms and hence became known as Participant (and their respective number, which was decided upon by the date order in which their interview occurred). On a general level, both the Conceptual Analysis and Interview research methods format followed the officially set-out aforementioned ethical procedure of Lancaster University along with, on a wider academic scale, the ethical research guidelines outlined by the British Sociological Association (2015), on their website.

The Validity of the Qualitative Methods Approach

The concept of validity is another important criterion of a good piece of ethically acclaimed research. Validity serves the purpose of checking on the quality of the data and the results. There are commonly two key types of validity both of which are used in a qualitative study of this kind. One is external validity that, as noted by Zahavi

(2012), and Bednarek-Gilland (2015), referred to the extent to which the findings of a particular study can be generalised across populations, contexts, and time. A further type of validity is internal validity, which is conceptualised in relation to the degree to which the researcher is confident about the conclusion/inferences of the causal relationship between themes and events.

Such a methodological choice is also influenced by practical considerations (e.g. problem with data availability) as this methodological design allows the two types of data to integrate at all stages of the thesis, which in this manner enhanced the validity of the overall study. By doing so, as advocated by Morse (1993), and Atkinson et al. (2003), it is possible to achieve consistency in some findings, which accordingly increases the external validity of the overall research. It should be noted that, even though this study aimed to enhance external validity by combining primary and secondary qualitative methods, such generalisation, as with all research of this kind, is still a challenge (Gee (1995); Wiles (2012)). Achieving high internal validity, as noted by Bernard & Ryan (2007), and Gallagher (2008), allowed the researcher to be confident that the categories, relationships, and interpretations that have been generated, are actually true. The primary data was analysed in accordance with the secondary coding procedure (i.e. using techniques such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding), and this provided proper explanations about how theory was built.

In this study, the interviews were recorded with the participants' permission, where every one of the interviews was audio-recorded and were then transcribed carefully with a view to provide a basis for reliable evaluation. The accuracy of the data was checked by sending the transcripts or notes of the interviews back to the participants and getting their feedback. Effort was then made during the data collection process to reduce errors and bias, for example, different types of questions, such as main questions, follow-up questions, and probing questions, were asked to ensure the consistency of answers from interviewees. Probing questions, as Sapsford & Jupp (2006), and McQuail (2010), is a powerful technique to reduce threats to reliability and validity in terms of allowing the research to accommodate some of the problems caused by the complexities and limitations of the human mind. Attempts were therein also made to avoid leading questions and other potential introduction of bias.

Theoretical and Practical Qualitative Methods Research Design - Intersectionality and Integration of Data

Although there are similarities in the process, i.e. data preparation, data exploration, data analysis, representation, and data validation in qualitative methods research, the analysis, as Mohanty (1989), and Boyatzis (1998) recorded, is dependent on the design of the study. This study used explanatory designs which involved two major phases of data collection, the purpose being to analyse the data in a clear order so that the first database informs the second. Analysing data this way, as Glaser (1992), and Creswell (1998) observed, highlighted the importance of both study phases and both data sets, which as a consequence enabled the primary and secondary stages to be broadly supportive of each other as they are intrinsically linked to the success of the study. These issues of collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data are important to every aspect of a qualitative methods study, and hence need to be carefully taken into account at the research design stage (Yates (2004); Bold (2011)). Such issues include: the direction of the data collection and investigation, the priority or weight given to the primary and secondary research stages, and the phases in the research process at which these stages are connected and the results are integrated. In this section, the decision-making process of this study will be addressed in light of these issues, namely, timing decision, weighting decision, and mixing decision.

The mixing, timing, and weighting of this study

The mixing (or integration) decision, as a procedural consideration for a qualitative methods research design, refers to how the primary and secondary data relate to each other. Without explicitly relating to either of the two datasets, a study will, as Sapsford & Jupp (2006), and Emmel (2013) remarked, simply be a collection of multiple methods rather than a real, and strong qualitative methods design, even if it includes both primary and secondary data. In this thesis, primary and secondary data are integrated not only at the stage of results reporting, but also during the processes of data collection and data analysis so as to maximise the integration of the two data sets (Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2003); Boeije (2009)). During the data collection period, the data was collected through two research dimensions, the first being secondary research which comprised of a substantial Conceptual Analysis of a range of theorists whose writings were deemed to be connected to the study's question.

The second was as stated, by generating primary research through interviewing the Allerdale and Carlisle Labour Party political representatives, who very kindly agreed to be interview participants. The basic data analysis procedure in this study involved conducting separate data analyses for each of the primary and secondary data via relating one to the other with the purpose of triangulation and embedding. The integration of findings, as Potter (1996), and Gubrium & Holstein (1997) state, enables empirical results from one approach to complement the other. The integration of two datasets, as Feldman (1994), and Flick (2002) note, though achieves evidence triangulation in some important findings which enhanced the validity of the overall research. The integration of such primary and secondary empirical results will be discussed in detail in Chapters V, and VI.

The timing and weighting methodological elements are acutely important factors to consider in a study design like this which in short is intersectionality-informed qualitative methods research which is evaluated in concurrent sequences. This thesis' methodological design is thus termed as a 'sequential study', for it is, as remarked by Warren & Karner (2009), and Saven-Baden & Major (2010), a study where both the primary and secondary data are collected and explored over the period of time in two distinct phases. It is noted by Alasuutari (1995), and Gair & van Luyn (2016), that the sequential design is more appropriate for a qualitative methods study of this kind in which the purpose is to take advantage of text interpretation or embedding results. In such a qualitative design, the data analysis, and interpretation of results of primary and secondary studies also occur approximately at the same time, where they can interact with each other whenever there is a need (Gibson & Brown (2009); Holliday (2016)).

Qualitative methods research is such a procedure that not only collects and analyses two types of data, but also mixes or integrates them together (Dooley (2000); Silverman (2001)). The weighting or priority that is given to primary and secondary data in a study such as this is an important factor as it sets the broad tone of both its design, and its subsequent analytical framework. The data collection and analysis processes might depend upon a range of considerations, including as Minichiello et al. (1996), and Corti (2004) assert, the researcher's perspective, the research purposes and questions, and also some practical issues. In regards this thesis, equal weighting

was given to both the theoretical and practical studies. This is because each one positively developed the other, for the conceptual analysis needed the interviews to strengthen its core conclusions via practical output, whilst the interviews needed the conceptual analysis as it was that which would define the themes and thus generate the broad structure of the questions asked of the research participants.

Qualitative methods also, as noted by Goodyear et al. (2014), and Blatter et al. (2016), in regards the concept of the case study, are said to be powerful tools when the phenomenon is like that which is being studied in this thesis, that being, highly complex, with numerous themes and theorists comprising such a research phenomenon. In such a situation, both qualitative studies were important in terms of understanding the phenomenon as the conceptual analysis derived the core themes which were central to the phenomenon and the interviews then used the content of such analysis to derive first-hand perspectives from a localised source.

In addition to timing and weighting, it is more important, as Tieszan (2005), and Lichtman (2013) state, to make the decision about at which stage (s) the primary and secondary phases are connected and the results are integrated. Integration, as Mohanty (1989), and Denzin & Lincoln (2000, 2005, and 2012), emphasise, is a key challenge in qualitative methods research such as this. This research did not seek to quantify the secondary information, but rather endeavoured to integrate such forms of data through the process of analysis and interpretation. Such data was then prioritised into specific thematic categories which were then used as a broad guide to be developed into relevant and concise interview questions.

This inclusion of the interviews was crucial on an evaluative level, as it gave the participants a voice about their experiences, this was important as the relevance of the subject being explored and its specific localised factors are highly subjective. It is clear in the literature that although there will be similar experiences in regards a specific Labour Party political representative, either in Allerdale or Carlisle, be it because of their specific ideological and/or personal background, there is no ‘blueprint’ for these participants to denote how they must act or not act vis-à-vis their specific verbal output.

Thematic Categories - Data Collection and Analysis

Conceptual Analysis

Despite such methodological dependability and credibility, the research structure purported in this study firstly needed a theoretical backbone. This was achieved by analysing and evaluating relevant theorists whose broad works are centred via the three research themes at the heart of the study. The research structure thus appropriately followed a three phase ‘spiral model’ of knowledge construction (De Laine (2000); Moran (2005)).

The first part of this is conducted through a thematic explorative examination of appropriate texts and authors, some of which have been discussed in Chapters II, and III. This is supplemented by archival electoral documentation of the Labour Party’s electoral performance in both Allerdale and Carlisle, which is based in the Cumbria Public Library. Analysis of data of this kind was vital as it brought a statistical perspective on Labour’s broad support in North-West Cumbria; a perspective which if not explored, would have weakened the analysis.

Following on from such analysis, the study examined the relevance that the issue of social class has historically played on the Labour Party’s general foundation and contemporary marketing revolution and electoral support. If this were not investigated then the theoretical basis of the classless New Labour brand would not be necessarily understood particularly within a localised context. On a structural basis, Conceptual Analysis, as said by Wolcott (1994), and Saldana (2011), is an important skill in historical interpretation as it is not a mere summary or description of what happened, but rather an exploration of the motivation, intent, and purpose of a document within a particular historical context.

Conceptual Analysis is suited to this study as it is about trying to identify meaningful categories or themes in a body of data. By looking at the text, as Carter (1993), and Marshall & Rossman (2015) state, the researcher asks whether specific research themes, the analysis of which is determined via the workings of a number of relevant theorists, can validate a broad research phenomenon. Conceptual Analysis being purely qualitative in nature, as commented by Butler-Kisber (2010), and Berg & Lune (2011), does not offer quantifiable answers to issues raised within such social science

research, but it does offer a clear knowledge of the specific thematic categories and also how such categories link with each other so as to determine the general relevance of the research phenomenon being explored (Cook (1990); Williams (1992)). Conceptual Analysis, thus like the broad content in this thesis, does not afford fixed quantitative solutions, but instead offers an insight based on qualitative analysis and evaluation (Miller & Dingwall (1997); Bazeley (2013)).

The legitimacy of this type of research is consequently determined on the interpretation of the research themes, the key theorists, and how they in the main, interrelate with each other. Even the most effective academic arguments, as emphasised by Pierce (2008), and McNabb (2009), are reliant on such qualitative considerations and interpretations. Expressed in today's more pointed vocabulary, Conceptual Analysis, as Gauker (2003), and Ravitch (2015) summarised, is a deconstructive reading and interpretative evaluation of a text.

Interviews

In 'qualitative research like that undertaken within this thesis, the most common interviews following on from such conceptual analysis of texts are the semi-structured and unstructured ones; and more commonly those that comply fully with the standards and principles of qualitative research' (Cohen & Crabtree (2006)). The methodological limitations and procedural essentials of qualitative interviewing associated with this type of research are briefly listed.

It firstly, as noted by Sarantakos (2005), 'provides a "reflexivity"'; qualitative interviewing employs methods and a process of assessment in which to reflect upon the subjective approach to the world; and take into consideration the implications' of the knowledge the participants have generated through their experience of Labour politics in North-West Cumbria. This leads on to the 'primacy of the respondent'; the respondents are experts who provide valuable information (Crystal (1992); Salkie (1995)).

There is an 'absence of standardisation; qualitative interviews are unstandardised interviews, allowing freedom to respondents to express their beliefs without external limitations. This allows for a greater level of flexibility; as the qualitative interviews

ascertain aspects of personal experience as displayed in everyday life. Finally, the development from this is the theory of “explication” (Sarantakos, 2005, p.270). This is where the ‘findings emerge through the study and are interpreted during the process of interviewing. These methodological and technical aspects show that qualitative interviews are far from being a soft methodological option or an easy form of research. On the contrary, they require more competence on the part of the interviewer and higher ability on the part of the respondent to verbalise views, opinions, and ideas’ (Sarantakos, 2005, p.271).

Semi-structured interviewing, is best used when going out into the research field to collect data. The semi-structured interview by its simple format, in general terms, as noted by Olson (2011), and Aurini et al. (2016), provides a clear research framework for interviewers and thus provides reliable, comparable qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews, as stated by Schostak (2005), and Alvesson (2010), are frequently led by observation and unstructured interviewing. This enables the researcher to advance a clear grasp of the matter being studied, necessary for progressing with meaningful semi-structured questions (Biesta & Burbules (2003); Heaton (2004)). The insertion of such flexible questions afforded the opportunity for classifying distinct ways of appreciating and understanding the issue at hand (McCracken (1988); Roulston (2010)). ‘Many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time which allows for a greater level of preparation which potentially could strengthen their competence during the interview’ (Cohen & Crabtree (2006)).

Semi-structured interviews, as identified by Holstein & Gubrium (1995), and King & Horrocks (2010), also allowed informants the freedom to express their opinions in their own terms. In the second phase of the study, the collection of the primary data, as generally alluded to by Bernard (1988), and Rubin & Rubin (2011), had a clearly achieved aim, which was to help explain the research hypothesis and subsequent documentary analysis in greater depth. The interviews compared the differing or similar stances held over the matter of social class and contemporary Labour support by Labour Party political representatives in North-West Cumbria, and in this manner evaluated the relevance of locational area, be it urban or rural, to such a research phenomenon.

Interview Framework

The participants were chosen because they were local Labour representatives in North-West Cumbria in the districts of Allerdale and Carlisle, accordingly they would be acutely appropriate to offer a specific view from a localised perspective. From a methodological perspective, the freedom of the qualitative interview procedure, as Josselson (2013), and Weising (2016) emphasise, allowed the interviewees the scope to outline their thoughts in a clear and substantial manner, which strengthened the potential of the output generated from such a process. Persons meeting the inclusion criteria were invited to contact me through email and/or telephone correspondence. On making contact, an information package on the study was made available and potential participants were given an opportunity to ask questions. Following this, if potential participants wished to proceed, informed consent was gained, and arrangements to participate in the study were negotiated.

An interview framework of this kind, as noted by Galletta (2013), and Josselson (2013), should be numerically concise as too large a group can dilute the key findings central to the phenomenon being analysed, and the data must also be protected in a safe location. The ideal broad structure for interviews investigating a specific phenomenon of this kind is that the participants should be representative of any potential geographic factors being studied (Moustakas (1994); Moran (2000)). The interviews, to be most productive also, according to Oppenheim (1992), and Mann (2016), must take place in a safe and comfortable location as such conditions leads to the interviewees feeling more receptive to the questions being asked of them. The study's interview framework as noted below followed such guidelines.

Interview Framework

Design

15 Semi-Structured interviews in total were undertaken and completed, the duration of which ranged between 30 and 120 minutes;

The interviews were all digitally taped and transcribed, and like the Conceptual Analysis concept, the findings were stored, analysed, evaluated, and outlined, within the study's overall concluding findings and;

All of the interviews took place at the University of Cumbria, Fusehill Street Campus, Fusehill Street, CARLISLE, CA1 2HH, or if not convenient to the interviewee then at a suitable location of his/her choosing.

Participants

15 Labour Party, political representatives were recruited from North-West Cumbria: 6 from Allerdale, 9 from Carlisle; Age-Group (18-70);

There was no numerical specificity in regards the sex, race, religion, or sexual orientation, of the interviewees, but there was an aim to have a similar number of interviewees who either represented and/or had first-hand knowledge of the two respective North-West Cumbrian districts and;

The interview participants were recruited via email/phone contact from the local Labour Party offices in Allerdale and Carlisle.

Inclusion Criteria

The participants were all Labour Party, political representatives from North-West Cumbria – this was crucial as this enabled the three themes ‘Class/Identity’, ‘(Labour) Party’, and ‘Geography (North-West Cumbria)’, to be evaluated from a first-hand perspective in a specific context and;

The participants were all over the age of 18 years, who willingly consented to the study, and were proficient in spoken and written English – this was crucial as it meant that they were all adults and could outline their views verbally in a coherent manner, as well as complete the relevant ethical forms, the titles of which are outlined below.

As part of the ethics code of practice outlined by Lancaster University, each participant was sent the following three documents prior to their taking part in the Interview process:

‘Research Application Form (Humans) Research Students’ (summarising the theoretical nature of the study);
‘Ethics Participant Information Sheet Good Practice’ (outlining the practical nature of the study) and;
‘Research Ethics Participant Consent Form Good Practice’, (asking for their permission to undertake such practical research of this kind – this document had to be completed by the individual participant before the interview could be undertaken).

*It was stated in such correspondence that the researcher had never been a member of the Labour Party or any other political party, thus supporting my personal position of political neutrality. Such political neutrality was required so as to give the participants the assurance that the interpretation of the research data was not going to be biased either way, by any past or present personal political party affiliations.

Exclusion Criteria

Members of political parties and/or organisations which were not that of the Labour Party – this is because research of this kind solely centred upon the Labour Party, and so the perspectives deemed most relevant for the initial analysis and then subsequent evaluation were naturally most appropriate from representatives of that political party, and no other and;

Individuals who had not been Labour Party, political representatives in either of the districts of Allerdale or Carlisle were excluded from the study – this is because this research as well as defining the research phenomenon from a broad generalised perspective, does still have a localised focus on a specific locale, that being North-West Cumbria. It thus seems most appropriate under such conditions that all the participants taking part in this study should represent Labour in that particular area.

In-depth Interviews

The reason for conducting semi structured in-depth interviews in this study was that they best allowed for an open approach to interviewing in relation to a subject such as social class or political party affinity, which can be deemed sensitive, and possibly to some extent, emotive. They were a means of communicating and gathering information that had a focus; yet was less structured and intimidating than formal structured approaches of interviewing. In this study, guided by condensed content derived from the secondary data, the primary interviews enabled a greater understanding of important issues which related to the broad topic in question.

Equally, semi-structured interviews, generically speaking, as pronounced by Burawoy (2009), and Brinkmann (2013), were a simple, efficient, and practical means of collecting data. This allowed for the opportunity to probe and discuss in an appropriate manner, areas, such as generic definition of class, and Labour's position in regards the gradual atomisation of contemporary political, class discourse.

The validity and reliability of the interviews could be questioned, this occurs chiefly because semi-structured interviews, as noted by Hammersley (2008), and Galletta (2013), have a high validity as they allow the participant to talk in detail and can explain meanings behind actions with little or no input from the interviewer. It has also been argued, such as for instance by Packer (2010), and Bayne & Montague (2011), that semi-structured interviews have low validity because the researcher has no way of knowing if the participant is being genuine. The participant thus has the opportunity to consciously devise a response or unconsciously respond with the answer they feel the interviewer expects from them. Even if accepting these standard limitations, the positives of undertaking this type of methodology, as detailed by Holstein & Gubrium (1995), and Edwards & Holland (2013), outweighed any such negatives. A key strength for instance, of the semi-structured interview process in this study is that the participant had the opportunity to reflect and rationalise his or her actions on a personal level (Wengraf (2001); Bryman (2008)). In that way, this study through the strong explanatory nature of the detailed first-hand interviews provided additional depth to the subject matter, and further explained the data collected in the primary phase of the study. This allowed for the effective mixing of both primary and secondary data sets and ensured that a detailed exploration of the phenomenon was undertaken through an appropriate research criterion, the details of which are stated underneath.

Data Analysis Procedures

The individual interviews in this study, as alluded to earlier in the Ethics section of this chapter, were audio taped and transcribed. Statements unrelated to the question were deleted to obtain an edited version of the transcript, which was then subjected to an in-depth analytical process. This was achieved by reading the transcripts in their entirety and taking note of relevant statements, quotes, words, or key concepts cited.

Credibility and Dependability of Qualitative Results

The following techniques were employed to enhance credibility of the results of the qualitative component: method triangulation, data triangulation, and investigator triangulation. These forms of triangulations, such as that broadly denoted by Churton & Brown (2009), and Sharpe (2013), in accordance with the qualitative theoretical framework, were expected to yield convergence and/or contradictions. This thereby

enabled a clear and accurate construction of explanations of the research phenomenon, an example of this is by asking the participants the same questions, centred through the same themes in the same order. This extensive documentation of records and data as noted in ethics, was kept which enabled one to undertake constant comparison of relevant statements, and emergent themes during the data analysis. These records constituted authentic evidence of activities undertaken by myself and are available, upon request, to the Dissertation Committee, then, for the audit trail to be strengthened, forms of debriefings were executed. This was achieved primarily in accordance with the research supervision team where frequent meetings were scheduled to discuss the progress of the study. During such discourse, issues about research design, logistics of the interview sessions, and other critical questions related to preliminary findings were addressed. Research supervisors were also given a chance to critique the research design, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and interpretations as feedback was provided at various points in the research process by the academic supervisory team.

Practical Considerations

Data for the study was collected from June 2015 until February 2016. Initial email and telephone correspondence included an outline of the research being undertaken and why, the type and length of research being studied as well as outlining the thesis' general structure. The inclusion/exclusion criteria, as hitherto stated in the ethics section, that was most appropriate for the development of the philosophical approach within the research design were also addressed at this point to ensure participants were eligible to take part in such research prior to any meetings being arranged. Accepting it is often difficult for professional people with a busy schedule to travel long distances, arrangements were then made with participants willing to participate and who met the criteria, to meet either at their home or an agreed upon place. Email correspondence confirming these arrangements was sent to all participants prior to the Interview being undertaken.

Procedure of qualitative data collection

The research design for case studies can come from different sources of evidence, including documents, archival records, interviews, etc. Qualitative interviews, as asserted by Jackson & Mazzei (2011), and Silverman (2016), provided opportunities

for exploring the core themes in depth. It is very suitable for this study on broad philosophical terms, as it endeavoured to get rich and detailed information about intangibles from the perspectives of individuals with first-hand experience of the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria. Qualitative interview questions can be either unstructured or semi-structured; in this study, interview questions were designed to be semi-structured, because with the research looking at multiple themes, such a design was with its greater degree of flexibility, deemed more appropriate in terms of ensuring ‘cross-theme comparability’ than that of the unstructured interview.

The procedure of interview data collection followed interview instruments suggested by previous researchers and authors (e.g. Featherman & Hauser (1978); Giroux (1992)), which included targeting potential interviewees. It is not easy to discern in advance how much useful information the interviewee can provide, so the best the interviewer can do is to choose a person who is most appropriate, that being they should be experienced and knowledgeable in the area that is being studied. Experienced interviewees, as acknowledged by Van Manen (2014), and Paley (2016), can make the interview results more convincing, and interviewees who are knowledgeable about the research problem have the potential to provide useful information that one needs. Interviewing individuals from a variety of perspectives additionally provides the potential to enhance the credibility of findings and hence strengthen the research design undertaken (Gauld & Shotter (1977); Chirban (1996)). In this manner, by following the three-pronged research theme (‘Class/Identity’, ‘(Labour) Party’, and ‘Geography (North-West Cumbria)’), and interviewing two sets of participants, namely, Labour Party, political representatives in both Allerdale and Carlisle, a comprehensive picture of relevant themes at the heart of the research study was provided.

In a general sense, Strauss & Corbin (1998), and Smith et al. (2005), advocate, that samples in phenomenological theory were better to be drawn in terms of identifying as much variation in types as possible. Phenomenological theory technique was employed as the broad philosophical approach in this study to analyse case data, because the study intended to examine different conditions (research themes, later broken down into intra-thematic constructs), under which the phenomenon occurred and was subsequently analysed. Apart from reemphasising the guarantee of

confidentiality and privacy promised through ethics, each targeted interviewee was also given the promise that the confidential transcript of interview would be sent to the interviewee to check and any information that they did not wish to be revealed would be removed. The confidential case data would be used in this thesis only with the interviewee's agreement. Previous researchers in this field suggest that it is important for interviewers to, as Van Manen (1990), and Miles et al. (2013) maintained, have some prior knowledge about interviewees and their circumstances. Before each interview was conducted, a broad understanding was attained in regards the participant's political history. This was achieved by collecting relevant information about the interviewee in question via for instance an on-line search of their specific political position, role, and respective interests. Such research led to a greater knowledge of their general professional profile, which enabled them to feel that their own perspective was being respected in advance of the interview taking place. On a generic level, such a strategy can help the researcher to obtain trust from the interviewee.

At the beginning of each interview, effort was made to build trust and provide a comfortable atmosphere throughout the interview. The interviews were normally opened by a brief introduction of the area of study, the purpose of this research, and how the information would be used. Above all, as ethical procedures ascertained, emphasis was placed upon the perception that there was no right or wrong answer for each question, as the focus of interest was for the most part focussed within the interviewees' own opinions and experience. During the interview process following the general ethos, as noted by Sandywell (1996), and Becker (1998), different types of questions were asked to enhance the research design, such as main questions, follow-up questions, and probing questions. An interview guide containing a list of main questions was used to make sure that the important issues could be thoroughly examined in each interview, and also to enhance consistency across all interviews. The questions being semi-structured were designed to be expansive enough, with the purpose of encouraging interviewees to talk freely and openly about their experiences, perceptions, and understanding. The interview guide though was used flexibly, chiefly to decide the number and the sequence of the main questions asked.

The second type of questions frequently used were the follow-up questions. The main role in the interview process was to listen and to follow what the interviewee had said and then to explore the relevant content. Follow-up questions, as avowed by Smith & Thomasson (2005), and Sandelowski et al. (2009), were crucial for obtaining depth and detail, and did help in obtaining more nuanced answers. During the process of each interview, follow-up questions like for instance ‘could you expand on that original answer’, were routinely asked to pursue new ideas and to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on important themes. If this could be achieved, then this naturally would lead to a greater degree of thought and quality in regards their individual output.

This strategy was used on many occasions, such as when the participant did not prepare the main questions particularly well or when the interviewee appeared to be less conversable, follow-up questions were especially important in achieving a successful interview. There was an attempt as well to undertake a preliminary analysis of each case interview immediately after execution to understand what issues were important and needed to be further explored so as to embolden the customary research structure. This was helpful to formulate follow-up questions in the subsequent interviews with other interviewees. The research was also enhanced by the interviewer’s behaviour, such as listening carefully as well as showing interest and agreement to what the interviewee said which tended to be helpful in further probing the interviewee’s answers. It was of greater interest on a personal level to talk to participants who showed an enthusiastic attitude towards the subject being investigated. They also prioritised their discourse principally on a national British perspective and secondly on a localised context which was consistent with the general analytical structure at the heart of this thesis.

Methodological Reflexivity

Although it is clear that the combination of Conceptual Analysis and Interviews was the most suitable methodology, it must also be stated that two other research techniques, Focus Groups and Surveys, were also considered prior to the interviews taking place. Focus Groups were contemplated at the beginning of the thesis process, mainly because they could potentially provide an in-depth discussion. This broad range of information thus could open up opportunities to explore the views,

experiences, beliefs, and motivations of individual participants to the phenomenon being researched. After consideration with my supervisory team, this method though was not deemed appropriate for this study as it was thought that notwithstanding such advantages, the content being generated from such broad perspectives would have been difficult to control and more importantly keep streamlined and relevant to the core content of the thesis' themes and questions. The second reason why focus groups were not appropriate for this type of research was the concern over the general validity of the content being stated. This limitation, although broadly subjective, arises because individuals are more likely to feel intimidated by being surrounded by other people in a confined space (Lofland & Lofland (1984); Oppenheim (1992)). They thus are accordingly less likely to give their legitimate views than if they were taking part in a one-to-one interview environment, where by being the sole focus of attention, they can deliver their views in a more private and relaxed setting, and by this means, enhance the validity of the output being researched (Saldana (2011); Richards (2014)).

In regards the possible adoption of the Survey research technique, this was a technique that was considered because it was thought it would generate a notable quantity of feedback in relation to the research phenomenon, in a very quick and simple manner. Hence, a survey was constructed, the design of which took the form of four statements, with each one focussing on the broad relevance of each of the three research themes. The survey was initially sent out online to all local Labour representatives in both Allerdale and Carlisle. This occurred prior to the interviews taking place, however unlike the interviews where the feedback was in the main positive, the surveys feedback was very poor, and in the few completed forms which were received, the content was not fully completed. In response to such a situation, it was decided that the survey participation would be streamlined to just interviewing participants as it was thought they would be most likely to provide a stronger feedback as they had voluntarily agreed to take part in the much longer interview process. The general structure would be for the interview participants to complete the surveys immediately after the interviews had taken place, the reason for this being, that it was thought that it would potentially strengthen the content as the subject was still fresh in their minds. This aspiration though turned out to be unrealistic, as by using the first interviewee as a test case, the output she noted verbally via the surveys was considerably less focussed and relevant to the content she had espoused verbally via

the research interview. It was thus decided, in conjunction with my academic supervisors, that this form of methodological analysis was not adding any positive dimension to the evaluative perspective of the study and should be scrapped, for with its relatively poor feedback, was weakening to some extent, the strong analysis garnered from the interview technique.

The sample of the study as previously stated, consisted of 15 North-West Cumbrian Labour Party representatives, they being present or past local councillors in either the districts of Allerdale or Carlisle. In regards firstly, the number of participants who took part in the study, the initial invitation to partake in such a process was extended to all Labour councillors in North-West Cumbria. It was unrealistic in practical terms to expect the majority to agree to such an in-depth interview procedure, but following such standard guidelines that are attached to such qualitative phenomenological research of this kind, the appropriate sample size so as to make the exercise viable for analytical evaluation, generally ranges between 12 and 15. The foundation behind such a sample size is generally subjective, but the view purported by it is that less than 10 would mean that the sample size is not strong enough to provide a valid perspective to the subject being researched, whilst more than 15 has the potential of over-generalising such data, thus weakening any potential conclusions which may arise out of findings of this sort (Marvasti (2003); Yin (2009)). The second issue to consider is the professional viability of the participants themselves, for this to be effectively realised then certain guidelines attaining to their personal background were required. It was important that the participants had to have experience of being a local Labour political figure in the area, and not just a member of the public who traditionally voted Labour. This is because being a North-West Cumbrian representative clearly demonstrates that they have a genuine interest and knowledge of the party, and how it is regarded on a local level, as opposed to a standard voter, who not having such an experienced background in such affairs, would potentially not have the same level of first-hand understanding so as to provide as strong a level of feedback to the phenomenon being investigated via the interviews.

In addition, it would have been much more problematic to generate a definitive sample from the mass public, as their histories, perspectives, interests, and potential prejudices, would have been far more variable and thus the content they would state

would inevitably be far harder to substantiate, and generalise as to being relevant to the core phenomenon being explored. This is in contrast to a specific sample set within the views of Labour representatives in North-West Cumbria, for being a local representative alone allows for them to come at the subject from similarly structured terms of reference, which in pragmatic terms, leads to a stronger sense that their feedback would be most appropriate to understand, discern, and subsequently analyse and evaluate in an academic context. A further key proponent to the participants was not just that they were Labour representatives in the part of the county, which was being studied, but that they had all been elected by the public at large to their positions, as compared to being unelected party officials. This qualification was deemed important as it strengthened their content further, as they were giving a prospectus from a legitimate localised level concerning the breadth of the ward which they represented. Such a quality would have been missing if they were an unelected party official where their first-hand knowledge of the local area, and the party's place within it, could arguably have been considerably weaker.

The structure of the questions like the structure of the Conceptual Analysis research undertaken prior to it, was broadly centred on the three themes and their natural linkage to each other, so as to advance the general research phenomenon. These three themes thus provide the basis for the three stages that made up the broad interview structure which provided a simplistic stability to the research technique being undertaken. The first stage then was to understand the meaning, and subsequent relevance of class in both an historical and contemporary perspective, the shift from the communal to the atomised (Question 1). This led on to the second stage which endeavoured to link such class perceptions to general support for Labour, again providing analysis from both a past and present perspective, comparing Old, New, and Post New Labour in such a context. After the meaning of class, and its subsequent relevance to Labour support was ascertained, emphasis shifted to understanding how any potential shifts may have occurred. This took the form of enquiring into the importance of 'brand politics' and the role of the atomised communications culture which became prevalent in British politics post the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s (Questions 2-5). Such questioning enabled one to reach an understanding of how and why the Old to New, to even Post New Labour shift occurred, particularly from a national perspective. It was therefore important in concluding the interviews

and the broad research phenomenon, to use such knowledge to evaluate the relevance such a phenomenon had on a general local level, and specifically within the confines of North-West Cumbria (Questions 6-8).

On a practical level, the interviews lasted approximately between thirty minutes, and two hours. There was no specific time limit placed on any particular interview, it was wholly centred on the length of time the participant wanted to give to the process. Such an approach was deemed relevant because being purely a qualitative study, the subject and the questions being analysed took priority over any potential practical constraints such as time limits. The study being designed in such a qualitative fashion, asked broad open-ended questions structured within a broad three-themed phenomenon, there was no clear right or wrong answer or opinion. The content being discussed was primarily subjective in nature, which inevitably meant that responses could vary in regards the time they took (Seale (1999); Hennink (2010)).

This subjective style did not generally lead on to there being subjective analytical categorisations being placed on such questions, thus terms such as 'traditional' when referring to Old Labour, or 'atomised' when referring to New Labour were avoided. The purpose for this is that there could be a fear by initiating such terms to specific political constructs, that the participants could be led into developing an answer which had been biased by prior-assumptions that may not genuinely reflect their honest perspective, and in that way weaken the legitimacy of their feedback. The exception to this was the inclusion of the term 'Post New Labour', and this is because such a political categorisation had been developed in the contemporary era, during the leaderships of first Miliband and then Corbyn, which was clearly distinctive in class lines, from the previous Old and New Labour incarnations.

Perceived Methodological Limitations (and how they were overcome)

The mixed methodological structure in general proved very effective and was the most suitable for this type of qualitative research, but there were, by following such a design, some problems which had to be overcome, as outlined below. This thesis also by adopting a purely qualitative methods research approach integrated both critical and philosophical perspectives. It has in this manner, constructively contributed to the dialogue concerning philosophical and critical phenomenology and drawn attention to

the need to conduct text interpretations with critique and scepticism. It is also crucial to acknowledge short-comings because by doing so it will maintain the study's authenticity. There are still lessons that can be learned from the experience of undertaking a research study of this kind within this research field. Some of these relate to points of detail in the general design of the study that might make future projects of this type more effective. In view of that, due to the findings and subsequent discussion and analysis of the research phenomenon, the following recommendations should be considered.

The first recommendation, is that the content generated from the conceptual analysis in total amounted to a considerable sum, which naturally made it difficult to scrutinise, and then subsequently provide suitable analysis of such content. This limitation was overcome by gradually dissecting each interview transcription and selecting relevant content which broadly correlated with the general perspectives of a specific research theme. The interview questions though could be deemed as too broad, which would inevitably lead to generalised responses that would undermine the analytical validity of the research phenomenon being studied. This perceived constraint was as hitherto noted, mastered by the inclusion of 'prompt' and 'probe' statements, which supplemented each interview question so as to define the responses in a more condensed, and concise fashion. The shortcoming of undertaking this particular methodological structure is thus that there was always a potential risk that the content derived from the conceptual analysis would potentially prove rather opaque in practical terms, under interview conditions. This though turned out not to be an issue as the research participants, having read the required information sheets, fully understood the methodological design of the study, and by this means, answered the questions accordingly.

A further key limitation of this study in practical terms, is the narrow scope of interview participants. Central issues related to the quality of qualitative research are reliability, validity, sampling, and generalisability (Parker & Roffey (1997); Collingridge & Gantt (2008), both cited in Smith & Thomasson (2005)). Dreyfus & Hall (1982), encouraged researchers to consider both the length of time and the number of participants in interviews. They argue that to capture the voice, a sufficient number of words need to be collected from the participants, failing to do so, leads to a

crisis of representation (i.e. inability to capture lived experiences) and a crisis of legitimisation (i.e. inability to interpret and evaluate data). The study by interviewing only fifteen out of a potential sixty Labour representatives in North-West Cumbria makes the findings to some extent, difficult to generalise. This accordingly, by being solely focussed within the localised confines of North-West Cumbria, makes it inevitably difficult to correlate such research findings to any other area, county, or locale of Britain. Such a limitation though is considerably outweighed by the standard perception that a sample of 15 which encompasses a quarter of the potential participants available is the ideal amount for the balance of first and second-hand content to be most effectively analysed, evaluated, and summarised. This broad research structure clearly outlays a core foundation for the potential of such a three-themed phenomenon of this kind being expanded in future, by for instance, placing greater emphasis on the role of ever-changing and ever-advancing media outlets. How such evolving changes react and correlate with a continually more atomised political, sociological, and geographic landscape could possibly be the focus of post-doctoral studies in this or similar academic fields at a future date.

The research data being collected from a single political group within a small geographic area may have facilitated data collection but also limited the concrete generalisability of the findings. This occurs by placing emphasis on a specific locale which logically can make it difficult to comprehensively relate any such findings in a wider context, a limitation which also could be investigated in a post-doctoral research setting. It is not possible practically though to evaluate all Labour Party, political representatives in either Allerdale or Carlisle, so the study was limited to the number of representatives that were available and willing to give up their time to participate in the Interview process. Although the Interview process offered plenty of time for participants to state their individual and specific interpretations to the questions asked of them, the findings presented here represent only a snapshot of opinion which might not necessarily correlate with the common outlook of the North-West Cumbria Labour group as a whole. Some of the findings although worthwhile, do only offer an introductory framework over such a research phenomenon, thus for the study to stay relevant it needs to be verified in further post-doctoral research follow-up studies. This would allow for the research avenue not just to remain open but also be potentially broadened out to other counties in Britain. Any similar study in

other areas in Britain or even a within a cross-country comparative study could be worthwhile to validate the findings. Any replication might provide a more comprehensive research setting for generalising the present findings. Despite such criticisms as discussed in this chapter, major effort was made to enhance the reliability and validity of the study, primarily through the in-depth and flexible nature of the interview structure and its precise linkage to specific themes.

Many such practical difficulties were faced in the process of qualitative data collection, and these imposed some constraints on this study, an example of which would be the role of location to the phenomenon. The location though was in itself not markedly crucial, as the terms of analysis was on the relevance of location through a generic British context and not within the specific confines of North-West Cumbria. Any future research if deemed appropriate to the research framework of that particular study, may aim to place more emphasis upon the role of the specific locale. If that were to be North-West Cumbria, then possibly a greater exploration of distinct local issues such as the role of the Sellafield nuclear power plant could be undertaken. This could be correlated with the unique employment opportunities it brings and with it the possible distinctive effect it has on class and political party affinity.

In addition, even though the role of atomised brand culture for the most part, was included in this study to examine the antecedents of the relevance of contemporary Labour Party support both nationally and within the context of North-West Cumbria, the correlation of the three themes could prove hard to specify. A separate examination of the relevance of contemporary communications, and with it, the ever-changing concept of the brand, could lead to a more robust approach in any future research direction. In other words, an analytical study with a greater emphasis on the rapidly evolving role of communications within politics as well as society at large could play a constructive approach in any future research study.

A final shortcoming of the research design was the limited background offered in regards the research participants. This study concluded that, it was the themes themselves and not the individual participant perspectives which should take precedence. This makes sound analytical sense, but it would have been useful also to possibly have more information about individual participants' political outlook as this

could have provided a further route in which to delve into feedback in greater detail. If an ethically and practically sound manner of obtaining a greater balance over these two areas could be achieved, then it would be a useful addition to future studies.

In review, the methodological strength of this study is that it is a simple research design structured through two contrasting types of qualitative methodology, theoretical conceptual analysis, and practical interviews. This divergence in approaches was critical as it allowed for the phenomenon to come under the scrutiny of both primary and secondary research perspectives which provided separate, but necessary dimensions to the general structure of the study. Such a framework allowed for the data to be dissected, analysed, and evaluated in a coherent, concise manner, and consequently allowed for an in-depth exploration of the broad research phenomenon. This chapter thus overall provided a detailed description regarding sample selection, data sources, and methodological reflexivity. In the next chapter entitled ‘Hypothesis & Findings’, the research analysis both theoretical and practical, will be correlated to the core research themes examined within this thesis, via primarily reviewing the practical results generated from the research study.

CHAPTER V

HYPOTHESIS & FINDINGS

This chapter is split into two segments, the first headed 'Hypothesis', outlines a broad indication via the use of a range of empirical theory and statistical data, that the ever-increasing atomised nature of contemporary social class categorisations has made Labour's relationship with class more complex, both on a national and localised level. This is defined in greater detail in the second segment headed 'Findings', which through a first-hand semi-structured Interview technique, aims to define the practical relevance of the secondary research in relation to both the three-themed study phenomenon, and broad research hypothesis. This is achieved by outlining the meaning of class from both an historical and modern context, how such meanings affected Labour support both pre and post Thatcher and the rise of the New Right, and what consequences may arise in relation to how the party is seen on a class level, in a specific localised context, with a particular focus being placed upon North-West Cumbria.

Hypothesis

The thesis hypothesis is absorbed within the standard theoretical research framework, which endeavours to critically examine and link the Labour Party's past and present relationship with class, image and communications, voting support, location and area through the three concurrent thematic stages. The theoretical emphasis of the study thus has three dimensions or themes, which are predicated on the research hypothesis. Each respective theme and how they link within the research phenomenon is described in greater detail as the study progresses, but a brief outline of the merits of the three thematic categories is outlined below.

The first is to define the concept of 'class' within a British context. This primarily clarifies, through understanding the meaning of class as an entity in contemporary Britain, how the more complex and fragmented relationship between class and political party affinity, has clearly become orthodox in modern times. The initial part of such evaluation first and foremost aims to define the meaning of class both from an historical and contemporary perspective. This will be achieved chiefly through the

works of its key theorist Karl Marx and two of his most famed critics who refined the theory to relate to contemporary times, they being Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu.

The second is then to connect such findings to the Labour Party in the context of their historic ‘Old’, ‘New’, and contemporary ‘Post New Labour’ brand guises. Such evaluation will describe how the Labour Party over time altered its class perspective, this will be achieved by contrasting the simplistic traditional class culture of Old Labour to the concise classless brand culture promoted by New Labour. This second theoretical theme is narrowed further by connecting the studies of Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu to the class history and foundations of the Labour Party, advocated by the historical writings of Marxist scholars such as Gramsci, Hall, Thompson, Miliband, and Hobsbawm. Such content leads on to a breakdown of Old Labour and their communal class ethos, and how the decline of such a structure led to the gradual atomisation of Labour support. This theme defines New Labour’s class relations in the context of the rise of atomised brand politics. The first three themes although supplemented by quotes from the North-West Cumbrian participants, primarily derive evaluation from a general national perspective. This theme states how this new atomised class perspective came into being in accordance with the rise of the New Right and their tireless promotion of the consumer brand culture which replaced the broader class divisional structure that inspired the shift from Old to New Labour. Analysis of this kind will consequently be linked to the atomised discourse of the modern-day consumerist brand culture like that initially promoted by Bernays. This will be achieved by explaining how his theory laid the general foundations for the New Labour classless brand, under the banner of the ‘Third Way’, derived by Giddens. Content of this kind focuses upon how such a theory became prominent in British politics in the 1980s through the dominance of the powerful Thatcherite government and their New Right individualistic ethos which due to its formidable electoral success inspired a decade later, New Labour’s atomised class conversion.

This contrasts with the third and concluding theme where through focussing on the relevance the phenomenon plays in regards specific location, the first-hand content of the Labour political representatives naturally becomes more pointed. This theme accentuates the widespread relevance of specific locales in regards support for the Labour Party, with an emphasis upon North-West Cumbria. Analysis will finally then

state how, with this new individualistic class ethos, Labour support has naturally become deeply fragmented, both nationally and within the localised context. This has led to the electorate being judged on a more individualistic, atomised, or even classless basis in relation to social class categorisation, where external factors such as image and locale, instead of once traditional indicators like background and employment, have become greater factors in determining its potential relationship to current political party affinity.

This research phenomenon is achieved by connecting all of the above findings to the relevance of broad locational perspectives (such as North-West Cumbria) in regards contemporary Labour political support. Such work thus examines the comparison between the Labour Party at a national and local level from a political, communications, and class perspective.

A prime focus though is placed upon the role of class, image, and the consumerist, atomised culture in regards the party's supporter base nationally and with that the possibility of the party following a more corporate structure, espoused through the New Labour brand. This is correlated with a second inference that questions such a phenomenon within the specific locational confines of North-West Cumbria. Analysis in general, from the range of left-of-centre theorists will then centre on the relevance that social class plays on the Labour Party's supporter base. This will question whether or not the communal class perspective, which for so long was the bedrock of the party's sociological ethos, was indeed replaced by New Labour and their post-Thatcherite, atomised alternative. This will be achieved by comparing its broad relevance to its Old Labour predecessor and its, still to be defined Post New Labour successor. The definitive aim in undertaking such a study is to enhance the three core subject themes – 'Class/Identity', '(Labour) Party', and 'Geography (North-West Cumbria)' – for future research of this kind. Urban and rural societies in North-West Cumbria and in the respective districts of Allerdale and Carlisle, as it appears have traditionally had dissimilar class and political interests, which are supplemented through distinctive geographic disparities. Labour's traditional core sociological support is still generally substantiated in urban culture where communal class perspectives are for the most part, still prevalent, such as for instance in urban Allerdale and Carlisle. Rural Allerdale and Carlisle, in contrast, not being associated

with the stereotypical traditional class discourse, would thus find the classless, atomised perspective of the New Labour brand, more appealing. The results of this are outlined below, comparing the electoral performance in North-West Cumbria of the party in the last five general elections (2001-2017) to the average support the party achieved in the 1997 New Labour electoral landslide.

Table III: British General Elections (North-West Cumbria)

Party: Labour	Party: Labour
District: Carlisle	District: Allerdale
Constituency: Carlisle	Constituency: Workington
New Labour (NL) North-West Cumbria (NWC) Average (Avg.): (1997) - 60.8%	
Labour – After 1997 (2001-2017)	
Year % vote +/- NL NWC Avg.	Year % vote +/- NL NWC Avg.
2001: 51.2 (60.8) = -9.6	2001: 55.5 (60.8) = -5.3
2005: 48.1 (60.8) = -12.7	2005: 50.5 (60.8) = -10.3
2010: 37.3 (60.8) = -23.5	2010: 45.5 (60.8) = -15.3
2015: 37.8 (60.8) = -23	2015: 42.3 (60.8) = -18.5
2017: 43.8 (60.8) = -17	2017: 51.1 (60.8) = -9.7

***Old Labour (OL) North-West Cumbria (NWC) Average (Avg.): (1945-1992) - 54%**

Table III demonstrates that after New Labour's 1997 electoral peak (2001-2017), the more rural constituency of Workington was statistically affected to a greater positive degree electorally in each of the five general elections since 1997 in relation to the NL (New Labour) NWC (North-West Cumbria) vote share % average, than the urban

constituency of Carlisle. Such analysis suggests that the emergence of the classless New Labour brand has had a relatively more powerful effect on the non-traditional rural areas in North-West Cumbria than in their urban equivalents which historically were the basis for the bulk of the party's support. This data shows that an area that is chiefly rural and that has sizeable surrounding urban areas, like for instance Allerdale, would be akin to accepting such a marketing classless New Labour shift, if such an atomised change is networked or communicated in an appropriately substantial manner (JWT (2009)). This perspective can also be extrapolated to Carlisle as it, like Allerdale, is a district with a wide mixture of urban and rural geographic classifications, and so any potential patterns that may arise in the traditional urban/rural support for the Labour Party could still be deemed relevant. There is also a clear view that election results rose both from a broad localised perspective when the New Labour brand came into being. This was demonstrated from the party's average support in North-West Cumbria which increased from 54% in the fourteen post-war general elections held during the Old Labour era, spanning from 1945 until 1992, to 60.8% in the 1997 electoral zenith of New Labour.

Rural marketing in practical terms, is unlike that of marketing to urban consumers because being geographically spread, rural societies have a higher degree of social detachment, and consequently are somewhat disconnected from the mainstream population. Although even accepting that the dispersion of media communications is on the continual rise within rural societies, principally with the ever-increasing advancement of broadband and digital technology businesses in such settings, it must also be stated that it is still urban areas which are seen to be more advanced in regards media and communications development (Griffiths (2007); JWT (2009)). There are, as Griffiths (2007) expressed, few restricted rural channels which focus explicitly upon rural interests and particular sensitivities, of any magnitude in most media markets. Creating knowledge in rural communities for that reason, becomes more of a challenge and the concept of developing any type of brand devotion is more impaired than it is in an urban setting (JWT (2009)). Both Allerdale and Carlisle being districts that are in general proportionately mixed in regards both rural and urban areas consequently provide notable locational overlap and convergence over this matter. This thus suggests more of an intra-district urban-rural divide than a direct district by district comparison (Constantine (2006); Emett & Templeton (2010)).

Interview Data

Research Participants (North-West Cumbria)

The research participants are listed in Table IV, in the order in which their interview was conducted (number of interview and date on which it was undertaken). Following on from that is an account of their district (Allerdale or Carlisle), then their respective broad geographic area (Urban or Rural) for which they stood for Labour in North-West Cumbria, their sex, and party membership tenure. The interview structure and questions asked at interview are noted underneath.

Table IV: Research Participants' Geographic Background

Number & Date	District	Area	Sex	Membership Tenure
01 - 16/06/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Female	Late 1970s
02 - 28/07/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Male	Early 1970s
03 - 06/08/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Female	2010
04 - 11/08/2015	Allerdale	Urban	Male	1980
05 - 14/08/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Female	Early 1990s
06 - 25/08/2015	Allerdale	Rural	Male	1983
07 - 01/09/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Male	Early 1980s
08 - 04/09/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Male	1996
09 - 10/09/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Female	2009
10 - 16/09/2015	Carlisle	Urban	Male	2005
11 - 02/10/2015	Allerdale	Urban	Male	2007
12 - 15/10/2015	Allerdale	Urban	Male	1965
13 - 24/11/2015	Allerdale	Urban	Male	1980
14 - 10/02/2016	Carlisle	Urban	Female	2013
15 - 17/02/2016	Allerdale	Rural	Female	1966

The interview procedure was needed in basic practical terms, as it offered a distinctive prism in which the findings could be discussed, analysed, and evaluated through. The participants, as Labour political representatives in North-West Cumbria, naturally

offered a first-hand account both in broad terms (see Appendix II), and specifically in relation to the research phenomenon. This is noted in the below 'Findings' section which analyses the relationship that the party via its respective 'brands', has had with class through a specific localised context.

Findings

The analysis in this section is thus mostly concentrated upon the content provided by the research participants in their respective interviews. The content of such findings though places the relevance of the three broad thematic categories over that of the eight interview questions (see Appendix II). This is because the research subject being broad in nature, is in the main, theme-led and not question orientated.

On a practical level, some questions post-the interviews taking place, but prior to the write-up beginning, were deemed for all intents and purposes, fairly irrelevant to the core thematic research phenomenon being explored. An example of this appeared in Question 4 which outlined the role of communication techniques in regards contemporary Labour support on both a national and local basis, over that of the relevance of the brand itself. Such limitations also occurred in Question 6 which explored the relevance of class to a participant on a personal basis when the research phenomenon was primarily centred on the generalised perceptions of class to Labour politics and location than to that of specific individuals.

The structure of this section is thus dialectical, as it correlates the practical first-hand content of the research participants (primary data), to the theoretical workings of secondary research theorists (secondary data - see Chapters II, and III), within a concurrent analytical format. Each quote used, be it noted on an individual basis or supported by similar sentiments from other research participants, be they from an urban or rural constituency, is conveying an appropriate perspective to the development of the research phenomenon being explored. This provides a greater degree of research validity, for the theoretical content to correlate with the research phenomenon and subsequent hypothesis then the general theoretical findings must be in accordance with the broad perspectives opined by the interview participants.

The Meaning of Class: The Shift from the Broad Communal, to the Complex Atomised, and Cultural Structures

The general aim within this research phenomenon is thus to determine the relevance of social class in regards Labour Party support within a broad localised context, with a specific focus on North-West Cumbria. If this aim is to be realised then first of all there needs to be a clear understanding of how class has broadly been categorised from both an historic and contemporary perspective. This general sense of class division is primarily stated by the three most prominent class theorists of the last 150 years; Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Pierre Bourdieu. In view of that, for this to be achieved the participants were asked their opinions on what the term 'class' in a broad sense, meant to them. The original, more simplistic Marxist class perspective, still provided a clear class framework in which to follow, as one participant suggested:

'It all depends, are you a Marxian or a Weberian? I understand social class really as a construct related to status, social status. My understanding of class is an essentially Marxian one, an economic determination' (participant 4).

Participants were then asked to comment on various points of detail in regards why class in contemporary Britain has become more complex. They gave consideration to a range of reasons as to why such a situation has occurred, like for instance the advancement in general economic enrichment, which has led to a greater degree of material aspiration and ambition. A range of interviewees, five of whom outlined below, in the context of North-West Cumbria, thus raised issues primarily in the context of how the modern cultural class-capital model has made the traditional Marxist class perspective less relevant (Webb & Schirato (2002); Savage (2015)). New Social Movements such as these 'represent a significant break with class politics. The basis of their organisation does not correspond to socio-economic classes (traditional Marxist or Weberian), or their corresponding left/right ideologies, but [are] rather coded in categories taken from the movements issues' (Offe, 1985, p.833), like for instance, personal income and educational aspiration. An example such as this, of these new more complex class initiatives coming into being at the expense of broad communal class structures in contemporary Britain has wider societal effects. This is because it provides a clear focus towards the belief as noted below by five research participants, from both Allerdale and Carlisle, that a greater degree of

educational and consumerist opportunities has opened up for people from traditional working-class backgrounds:

‘I have noticed for instance, that I represent one of the poorer wards in the city and I have noticed that more and more children are going on to get Level 3, 4 qualifications and the parents are supporting them in this’ (participant 1).

‘I think over time social class has merged with more opportunities potentially with working-class kids to get to University’ (participant 5).

‘In terms of the way it feels to individuals it is more pronounced and that is partly because we have encouraged a great level of aspiration. Yes, a broader aspiration would be that people feel, not an entitlement perhaps, but feel that you’ve been successful in relative terms if you have a foreign holiday every year, if you have that in consumerist terms and because of the nature in the way that society operates that is in the minds of everybody’ (participant 7).

‘I think it became harder to define so it became less important and as people began to be able to achieve more, I mean we sort of had more women going out to work, people had more income, women started staying in education a lot longer so people were being educated much more so therefore, their class was changing based on other aspects of society, whether they had more money’ (participant 14).

‘It is more complex because people have more access to get into different classes because of their education and income, therefore there are more opportunities to switch classes or aspire to have a better education or to earn a better salary, there is more mobility certainly and there are probably more sub-sections but basically it is still there’ (participant 15).

There is though, a clear perspective from the research participants that even with accepting that social class has become ever atomised, that the concept itself has become absorbed paradoxically with a core belief in the traditional categorisations of the communal era. This is demonstrably shown by the continual attachment which the research participants held towards the traditional class categories like working and middle-class. Even though they accepted that class in today’s Britain is harder to define, they still naturally defined it through old and supposedly outdated Marxist concepts. Marxist theology, as noted by Callinicos (2011), and Baronian (2015),

would argue that, that naturally occurs because any such atomisation of social class categories is erroneous.

It is thus impossible to define because it is a mere blurring by the capitalist classes to distract and divide the working-masses from their true class interests which are best served through communal-styled unity. Giddens (2000), by promoting a classless vision, Bernays (1955, and 1965) an atomised perspective, and Bourdieu (1977, and 1984) with his cultural structure, offer a greater refined and flexible version of such class differentials. There is yet still a compelling case as the interviewees' note, to ignore these outlooks of greater class complexity and promote the simplistic historical two-class structure stated by Marx or the three-class structure espoused by Weber (see Appendix II). Alongside this common feeling that class in Britain has become more complex and harder to define, there were opinions to the contrary that believed the communal Marxist divisional class status is still prominent. Such atomised social developments do not coincide with a belief that the social class structure in Britain is individualistic in nature but instead, is still concentrated within the more simplistic, traditional paradigm. This perspective was stated by two Labour political representatives, the first from Carlisle; the second from Allerdale:

'I think there are a lot of people who think it's very fluid but I do think there are quite clear distinctions' (participant 3).

'It means to me that people put themselves in categories of class and from early on, you hear of you know, "lower-class", "middle-class", "upper-class", and whether you believe that system is still out there, to me, your social class would be where you fit-in in one of those three and often that is presumed by background, attitude, availability to finance an education would be my view on how you would determine your social class and opportunity'

(participant 10).

The central point which is highlighted by this research participant is that the Bourdieu/Savage class structure is far more relevant in contemporary Britain than the more simplistic communal equivalents. A number of different factors, as broadly stated by Fowler (1997), Robotham (2005), and quoted by Giddens (2002), 'served to push class analysts in the direction of identifying a "priori", a "class structure" located

within the structure of work and employment. A key element was the established convention in American and British sociology of identifying classes as occupational aggregates, the influence of structural Marxism, and the revival of sociological interest in the labour process' (Giddens, 2002, p.4). These developments ran in parallel with other approaches to the study of social class such as that purported by Bourdieu, which tended to be associated with a humanistic methodological approach which drew mostly upon anthropology (Jenkins (2002); Grenfell (2004)).

There is still for the most part, a class-based society in modern Britain, but it is in a sense much more nuanced and insidious, and harder to ascertain and evaluate. At the same time, the contemporary varied class system, as noted in Chapter II, and broadly alluded to by Ford (2016), and McDougal (2017), has become increasingly aware of the associational richness and diversity of people's specific social characteristics. This may play a role in their specific contemporary class perspective. For instance, as Inglehart (1990), and Savage & Devine (2013) allude, and Cannadine (1999) quotes, 'as men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children; as members of churches or trade unions or sports clubs or political parties; as individuals with loyalties to their firms, their villages, their districts, their towns, their cities, their counties, their regions, their country'. This was for the most part indicated by numerous participants, who following years of political party campaigning believed that this standard collectivist class construct is being replaced with a more complex perspective, be it cultural class capital or individualistic consumerism, where contemporary class perceptions have become markedly more opaque. Several interviewees, from both urban and rural areas comprising both the Allerdale and Carlisle districts, made the point that the rise of such an atomised class focus from the late 1970s onwards has had acute outcomes, by and large being the gradual blurring of the modern class system in comparison to its historical equivalent:

'To me, I don't think the definitions of the social class divisions are as clear as they were in past history' (participant 3).

'So, there is still a class-based society, it's in a sense much more kind of nuanced and insidious and harder to break, harder to find your way through' (participant 4).

‘It is more fluid, people are less constrained but I thought that the importance of social class perception was dying out in the 1970s’ (participant 6).

‘I think for some people it is; some people see the class system as still being there, but it has become so blurred, they do not understand it’ (participant 8).

‘There is so many ways in which people identify themselves now and not just about being “working-class”, “middle-class”, or “upper-class”’ (participant 9).

Most Marxists, as remarked by Blumberg (1998), and Schmidt (2013), and in contrast to such atomised class sentiments, believed that a person’s class identity was collective rather than individual, and was in the main, determined by his or her relationship to the means of production. This became developed on a more contemporary basis through a Weberian three-class model which, although refined further through a more focussed atomised, classless, cultural ethos, is still relevant within local North-West Cumbrian Labour Party circles. An argument in favour of such a perception was expounded below by two participants:

‘There is a greater status gradation for those who work with their hands and those who work with brains and I think that’s what it tends to mean in this country, “middle-class” means you work with your brains, “working-class” means you work with your hands, by in large it is all to do whether you wear a tie at work and a suit or you wear overalls and get your hands dirty’ (participant 4).

“‘Working-class’, well “traditional working-class” means somebody who has generally got a physical job usually working with their hands, I think someone who sits in an office with a tie on, is a white-collar worker’ (participant 11).

The standard long-held perception is that the traditional working-classes vote Labour and their middle-class equivalents were naturally Conservative. This communal notion generally speaking, is an accurate one, as it was widely accepted by the research participants. ‘In 19th Century Britain for instance’, as Cannadine (1999) states, ‘which had supposedly witnessed the final triumph of the bourgeoisie’, politics remained on the whole, a patrician pursuit, as there was never a hegemonic middle-class or working-class political party (Giddens (1994, and 2002)).

In 20th Century Britain though, many of these workers have voted Conservative, for if this were not the case then it would have been practically impossible for the Conservatives to have won elections so frequently on a full adult franchise (Weininger (2005)). While ‘the leadership of the Labour Party has for the most part been middle-class rather than proletarian, now as in earlier times, political parties are not dominated, as Marx had too readily assumed, by the exclusive interests of a single class, and thus political affinity is never merely the direct, unmediated expression of class identities and class conflicts’ (Cannadine (1999)). This position contended that many financially successful working people evidently broke with ingrained, historic Marxist structural social class stereotypes and instead followed external cultural factors like lifestyle and locale by moving out to more prosperous rural areas and as a consequence voted Conservative. This perspective was noted by two of the participants who strongly supported this electoral class dealignment:

‘I think the structured approach, where you could put people in one of three or four categories is not there anymore, and I think that is the success of post-war Britain in the sense that a lot of those divisions in regards political party support, have broken down’ (participant 7).

‘I think there has always been a much more variegated picture and after all if you had a united working-class that voted Labour there is no way the Conservative Party would have won an election after 1918’ (participant 12).

These quotes and other comments appear to suggest that the two biggest political parties in Britain, be it Conservative or Labour, have never been completely defined by a clear class consciousness in regards to their entire mass support. Politics, as testified by Muspratt et al. (1997), and Chilton (2004), is never merely the direct, unmediated expression of communal class identities, and class conflicts. It has become much more complex with the contemporary emergence of the cultural tradition which is derived through a more refined contemporary atomised context.

There is a view, in regards Labour politics at least, as illustrated in Chapter III by Giddens (2000), that such a class, political merging was derived through the flexible Third Way classless agenda which was the theoretical bedrock for the New Labour

brand. Giddens' utopian vision of a classless society, where classes are so complex that their relevance can be questioned in its entirety, is commendable. The notion though that contemporary social class division has been atomised and fragmented to such a degree that the concept of 'classlessness' and their promotion of the idea that class as an entity in itself is irrelevant in contemporary Britain, is infeasible. This is a vindication of the standard Marxist parlance that like the concept of atomised class categories, the idea of classlessness is unrealistic as capitalist society is driven by a simplistic class structure of the bourgeoisie oppressing the workers (Miliband (1961); Thompson (1963)). There was an almost collective agreement amongst research participants in North-West Cumbria as noted by the six quotes below, that social class categorisation, be it communal, cultural, or atomised, is an integral part of British life. This is in contrast to the concept of 'classlessness', which although deemed theoretically possible as nothing could effectively stop a person from not feeling part of the class structure, it was not in practical terms, realistically viable, as the class structure, be it communal or atomised, is ingrained within British culture:

'What's "classlessness", well it does not exist, there is a class, there is always going to be a class in my opinion' (participant 2).

'I do not feel that you can declare anybody else classless, an individual person may want to declare themselves as classless if that is the kind of life which they are idealistically endeavouring to lead' (participant 3).

'No, well my view would be that, if you actually look and examine the idea of a classless society as a base concept, then it's not feasible; I liken it to someone who says, "we should leave politics out of sport", it is based on a false premise' (participant 7).

'Unless we just totally wiped away all the structures what we have got including from the "House of Commons", "Peers of the Realm", "Royalty", everything like that, unless we totally change what Britain was, then I don't think that classless exists in this structure that we have got in Britain' (participant 9).

'I think the BBC did an on-line one where you could go on and find out what you were and there was like "Emergent Middle Class", and it is based on your "cultural capital", I think it is more to do with that and it is fluid' (participant 14).

‘No, I think it is a myth. You might aspire to be but if you are brought up in this country then it is just there, in your make-up, as a cultural thing’ (participant 15).

There were counterarguments used by some interviewees stating that Britain has become a classless society. There was though greater agreement that this had arisen because of the rise of brand culture in the late 1970s which led to a greater degree of social class atomisation. Following such an individualistic brand ethos (Bernays (1955)), an atomised society in regards class has clearly replaced the traditional, collectivised structure as one participant alluded to by stating:

‘So yes, a classless society, in one sense there is such a thing as a classless society because people do not break down into these homogenous blocks, it is much more atomised, so it is much more difficult to see any kind of commonality between people in these different situations’ (participant 4).

The preliminary general conclusion from these discussions seems to support the view that ‘where class differences matter politically, the most basic way in which social change might influence political alignments is through increases or decreases in the sizes of the different classes. The class structure simply refers to the relative size and number of classes. There is no theoretical agreement about the ways in which “class” itself should be defined’ (Sarre (1989)). Cochrane & Anderson (1989), states that ‘an alternative Marxist-influenced approach is that classes are defined by deep-seated aspects of where people stand in a system of production. Modern Marxist schemas classify people by whether they control the means of production or not, whether they control other people’s labour or not, and whether they dispose of substantial amounts of “educational capital” which can form the basis for social class definition’. In this approach, Cochrane & Anderson (1989) continue, analysis, like that also broadly noted by Lowith (2004), and Steadman Jones (2016), ‘move fairly directly to distinguish a smallish number of social classes on theoretical grounds. Both approaches argue in terms of the theoretical significance of their schemas, but also seek to show empirically that class differences structure other aspects of social relations in fundamental ways’ (Cochrane & Anderson, 1989, p.175). There is a perception though that class within Britain has become ever more complex and harder

to define. Consequently, logic suggests that the concept of ‘classless’, even if not clearly defined in itself could be deemed relevant in social and political discourse if such contemporary fragmented class categorisations cannot be clearly defined in any convincing, coherent, and credible way (Giddens (2006)).

Modern British class groupings are more complex than ‘working-class’, ‘middle-class’, and ‘upper-class’, although people still commonly refer to these traditional Marxist groupings as they are easier to understand and define. Social class in 21st Century Britain is fixed within more categorisations which are more atomised and harder to define than the traditional model. Such fluid ‘cultural’ class divisions like education, economics, materialism, and aspiration play a notable role in such a contemporary atomised class culture, but the idea of ‘classlessness’ in contemporary Britain, following previously noted communal logic, is not a viable social concept.

Old Labour and its Communal Class Traditions

Equally, if, as stated from the first section, that social class in contemporary Britain is far more complex than in the simplistic Old Labour class centred era, then its relationship within the context of the Labour Party through its Old, New, and Post New forms needs to be explored.

Labour firstly in general terms, by accepting such a class atomisation ethos, needs to go beyond the narrow communal class interpretations and open itself up to the contemporary diverse atomised ethos in regards the public at large who are not part of the economic ‘Elite’ (Savage & Devine (2013)), but are considered part of the universal economic working masses. Giddens attempted to relate such cultural differences in class attitudes and values to differing images of the class structure which, he thought, tended to prevail in different types of community and occupational situations (Giddens (1987, and 2006)). The typical proletarian worker, he said in Marxian terms, similar to Lockwood (1966), and Goldthorpe et al. (1969), from a more historical perspective, has distinct cultural tastes and social interests that coincide with a broad political doctrine known as ‘Labourism’ or ‘Labourist’, the substance of which is denoted below by two participants:

‘Yeah, there is a very strong “Labourist” strand in the Labour Party, and I have seen it, I was a grammar school lad who went to University, from a Labour family background, in the 1980s there was certain older people who said, “Ah but you’re not really Labour are you, you’ve got a degree, you wear a suit and collar to go to work” - you know a collar and tie to go to work – “you’re not real Labour, you don’t really get your hands dirty, you’re not a real worker”’ (participant 4).

‘It still carries that connotation. Its purpose was to originally represent the unions and their interests in parliament’ (participant 6).

This Marxist working-class perspective of the perception of the proletariat according to McNally (1993), ‘as an entity in itself’ was in contrast to Thompson’s (1963) concentration of ‘patterns of capital accretion and market competition’ (McNally (1993)). In taking up this position, Thompson, ‘was arguing against what he perceived to be the dominant sociological approach to “class analysis”’ (Crompton, 2008, p.39). Thompson’s theory was arguing in regards to the Labour Party, that they as a broad class entity in itself is defined by an attachment to, and promotion of communal working-class interests. This is a prominent perspective in urban North-West Cumbria, two examples of which are detailed below:

‘I think there was a strong connection and over the years, this has been going on for a long time now, although in possibly less linear ‘class’ times, such a perception on the whole has not got eroded, for it is there as a kind of a core facet to Labour support in North-West Cumbria; because Labour is their party, whether they would articulate that as, “I’m working-class, Labour’s working-class, therefore I vote Labour”, it is more about, “I vote Labour because they’re like me, they feel my pain, they’re people like me”’ (participant 4).

‘I would suggest that Old Labour is what I would call the “traditional” perspective on the Labour Party, that being predominantly a party of the “working-class”, for the “working-class”, so its roots are very clearly set within the development of the Trade Union movement and are very clearly set within historical events through the 20th Century in terms of the overarching ambition to improve the lives, the standard of living, the welfare, and the aspirations of the working-class’ (participant 7).

In regards this, ‘working-class collective action, as expressed in trade unionism and support for the Labour Party, has been steeped in instrumental rather than ideological motives’ (Scase, 1992, p.67). Rooted in such clear historic, communal class solidarity, Old Labour, as Hay (1999), and Jefferys (2002), largely alluded, conjured up the vision of strong trade unions; a real culture that was above all, dominated by the said traditional working-class solidarity. Within such a context, Old Labour, as noted by Ziegler (1995), and Griffiths & Hickson (2009), was like any political movement, that being a product of its times and its respective culture which is embedded with that. ‘The setting up of workingmen’s clubs, workers educational associations, trade unions’, and local branches of the Labour Party as were prominent in urban Allerdale and Carlisle, ‘enhanced such feelings of class affinity as well as the necessity of collective action if self-improvement were to be pursued’ (Scase, 1992, p.67). Sentiments of this kind were noted by several participants from a range of geographic backgrounds in North-West Cumbria:

‘The experiences of many of those during the Old Labour era was that it was very socialist, very left-wing, but also very outward looking as well, for the Labour movement has always been an international movement’ (participant 1).

‘Old Labour was about giving the working-class, which came to mean almost, almost the manual working-class, this chance to get on the ladder’ (participant 4).

‘Old Labour to me was the traditional working-class people wanting better schools, better education, retaining the NHS, good economy, and jobs’ (participant 5).

‘Old Labour would be, your working-class, Old Labour, yeah, the blue-collar, terraced houses, working a hundred hours for the boss’ (participant 10).

‘Old Labour to me tends to be people who have come from trade union backgrounds, strong union leaders, strong union members. I would tend to say it is made up of what we would call working-class’ (participant 11).

‘Old Labour to me would be going back to the miners, so working-class definitely, blue-collar, strength in the trade unions, that sort of thing. I would agree with that; they are actually fighting for the rights of workers’ (participant 14).

A ‘return to the values and policies of Old Labour’, Fielding (2006) notes, ‘or the period up to the early 1990s, is extremely unlikely’ in the Post New Labour era. This is because of the ‘change in contextual circumstances, that Britain in 1997 was a very different place from the country that had last elected a Labour government’. The modern world in ‘which political parties have to operate has changed drastically from the world that Old Labour operated within’. The most meaningful ‘changes that caused the Labour Party to move away from the left’, Fielding (2006) maintains, ‘and will continue to prevent it from returning to social democracy, include globalisation, the prevalence of neo-liberalism, and its economic classical liberalism’ (Fielding, 2006, p.6), which promoted social atomisation.

This shift occurred as the Keynesianism social democratic economic system and its social communal ethos was being discredited, which inescapably led to the decline of the traditional working-class, which previously had been the nucleus of Labour’s supporter base (Fielding (2006); Beech & Lee (2008)). Such a decline, which is linked to the hitherto stated broad economic changes, meant that Labour had to try and widen its support to other parts of the political spectrum, including the traditional middle-classes.

The Impact of Thatcher & the New Right to Labour in the 1980s

Labour thus clearly moved from a traditional Old Labour ethos towards a more atomised, brand orientated outlook promoted by New Labour. The inspiration primarily arose through the success of the Party’s great political nemesis a decade before; Margaret Thatcher. This atomised perspective, as Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2005) commented, initially promoted by the New Right meant as quoted by Crompton (2008), ‘that left-leaning parties suffered successive electoral defeats in both the United States and in Britain, which ushered in a neoliberal free-market agenda in government policies (‘Reaganomics’ in the United States, ‘Thatcherism’ in Britain)’ (Crompton, 2008, p.86).

In the face of this desperate electoral predicament, an ever-increasing number within the Labour Party became persuaded that if they were ever to return to government office, they would need to come to terms with the new individualist consumer-driven

way of life at the expense of previously held rigid class divisions (McClelland (1996); Devine (1997)). The intensification of such cosmetic class fragmentation promoted through the revolutionary Thatcherite premiership was powerfully emphasised by a number of participants, two of which are outlined below:

‘When I joined the party (in the 1970s) there was a clear distinction there, you knew that you were joining a party that was going to look after working people, right, by whatever means but all that has changed and the other element that has affected that change was Thatcher, she said, “there is no such thing as community, only self” (participant 2).

‘Thatcher’s genius was to appeal right the way across and Thatcher was a “class-warrior” per excellence you know, that was her philosophy of life really, but she recognised that electoral success was very much wedded to drawing in the broadest coalition of people and it was not until Tony Blair came along, I would contend that we got the same message’ (participant 7).

Following on from such statements, in a broad-spectrum, drawing explicitly on the Gramscian hegemonic structure, Hall (1997) discussed the shift towards this Thatcherite atomisation from traditional, communal class politics as a response to an organic phenomenon. He argued that political forces in favour of the status quo had intervened to create a new balance of forces with the intention of maintaining their power. A further argument used to support such class fragmentation, as Hall notes, was Mrs. Thatcher’s success in translating free-market economics into the language of experience, moral imperative, and common sense.

This in the wider sense, provided a philosophy which promoted an alternative ethic to that of the collectivised ‘caring society’ (Smith (2016)). He described this as a translation of a theoretical ideology into a popular idiom. Thatcherism, as documented by Jackson & Saunders (2012), and Veldman (2015), articulated a new desire-fueled populist politics through drawing attention to such commercialised weaknesses of the then entrenched traditional political, class structure, through addressing people as consumers rather than producers. This Bernaysian concept of the political party as a brand that could be packaged-up and sold to the individual voter as an atomised, classless consumer has become a standard perception

of contemporary British politics. The central tenet of this is aptly stressed by two Labour political representatives, the former from Allerdale; the latter from Carlisle:

‘Like all sales and marketing, you can sell anybody something once. Marketing is about positioning yourself so that you have got what people want so they keep going back and buying it over and over again, so if you have a product that actually is not what it should (be), no amount of advertising space will actually get people to buy it, well there may be a gullible few but you have to actually create a brand identity, you (the political party) have to identify with something’ (participant 4).

‘I can accept that you have to have the disciplines that go with that, you have to have the repetitions, you have to have the identity, you have to build on certain key strengths, and consequently be attractive in the broadest possible sense’ (participant 7).

During ‘the 1980s, the Conservative government in this manner, started their very own revolution, it was a political revolution of ideas that has all but removed the notion of “class” from public discourse’ (Thorpe (2011)). A practical and highly effective example, as documented by Foote (1997), and Rosen (2005), of embedding this atomised perspective in pragmatic political terms was by encouraging traditional working-class aspiration through selling off council houses. The objective was to change people’s attitudes towards their social standing to achieve the broadest social class supporter base. Thatcher understood, indeed, promoted such materialistic perspectives, which were the bedrock of Bernays’ theory, and by this means changed the predominant communal perception of political party affinity towards a more atomised ethos (Curtis (2002)), a view supported by one Allerdale participant:

‘I think if you say; “we are standing up solely for the working-classes”, then I think you disenfranchise anybody else who is not part of that class. That was the issue with Thatcher, Thatcher offered Council Houses, she gave people aspiration and whether you agreed with it or not, a lot of people who were born working-class and owned their own council house suddenly became shareholders’ (participant 11).

In the process, following the atomised premise, consumers were persuaded to see the gratification of their desires as the paramount priority, through the concept of a political brand (Bernays (1955); Driver & Martell (1998)). Such a brand, as noted at

first by Bernays and supported by the research participants, is a multidimensional construct, involving the merging of functional and emotional values to tally with consumers' preferences and psychosocial desires (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley (1998)). One of the goals of branding is to make a brand not just expansive and relevant but also unique on dimensions that are both relevant and welcomed by consumers (De Chernatony & McDonald (1999)).

Success, as Bernays' theory evokes, 'in an overcrowded market will depend on effective brand differentiation, based on the identification, internalisation, and communication of unique brand values that are both pertinent to and desired by consumers. Powerful brands communicate their values through every point of contact they have with consumers' (Cleaver (1999)). This atomised brand culture, which the participants accept has come into being in contemporary British politics, has made the relevance of outmoded class categorisations gradually obsolete. This was no more evident than within the confines of the Labour Party, who could effectively promote a classless brand, an image central to obtain electoral success (Giddens (2002)). Such a standpoint is highlighted by an Allerdale Labour representative:

'The class-based politics became less relevant, there are other ways of skinning a cat, you didn't have to nationalise, you didn't need to take over the means of production, you didn't have to go down that route, have an alternative I suppose; Labour light' (participant 6).

In both the United States and in Britain, the concept of branding, as noted by Buchanan (1996), and Braman (2003), through the development of media and marketing communications has become increasingly prevalent. In relation to the context of the Labour Party, outdated communal perspectives of political communication where the primary function was to motivate their traditional working-class support base has been replaced with an atomised, consumer sovereignty (Curtis (2002)). This has led to a shift from debates surrounding the party's socialist ideology in the Old Labour era towards a non-ideological age, where post-Thatcher, the concept of socialism with its broad communal class structure has been notably weakened. This has been replaced by the ever-increasing relevance of image and brand perception, which were the core foundations of the New Right revolution (Wring (2004)).

The understanding of when such a shift occurred in a Labour context, whether directly under the Blair leadership or it being achieved on a gradual basis prior to that, with the development of the New Labour brand being the culmination of such change, is open for debate, although it was clearly an important factor.

Labour with its movement towards a less traditional, class-focused perspective was in effect a gradual process, firstly through the revisionist leadership of Hugh Gaitskell in the late 1950s and early 1960s; a figure promoting a New Labour-styled agenda, forty years before the actual reincarnation. This moderation was advanced in regards the contemporary era through the leadership of Neil Kinnock in the 1980s. Gaitskell and Kinnock though unlike Blair, failed to receive the electoral benefit so naturally their political relevance is not seen as great, but certainly in the case of Kinnock, as the research participants agree, he played an important role in the development of the New Labour brand (Wring (1996a, and b, and 2004)).

Kinnock to some extent started the journey by recognising that Old Labour was institutionalised in its original collectivised class-based form. This ‘stern and effective party management was the most impressive aspect of the Kinnock leadership. It is doubtful that the Labour Party would have survived as a major player in British politics without him’ (Cole, 1995, p.273). He realised that the party was becoming less electable as people had gradually grown to define themselves less by communal class groups based on background but by external classless individualised proponents like locale, material possessions, and specific interests distinctive to themselves as atomised consumers as two participants from Carlisle claimed:

‘There was a gradual move (from Kinnock to New Labour), then when Blair got elected, we all know what happened to Clause IV, so then the Labour Government got elected with Tony Blair as the leader, he moved to the right and he took the people with him, we were seen as the party of the middle’ (participant 2).

‘It almost feels like Kinnock took all the pain on the party’s behalf, he took the bullets, and Blair was the electoral beneficiary’ (participant 8).

On an electoral level then, that traditional communal class outlook was electorally undermined in the 1980s when the atomised class ethos of the Thatcherite revolution took hold. Blair following in the footsteps of Kinnock's modernisation agenda, recognised that the party needed to move beyond the traditional constituency so as to be deemed relevant to the wider spectrum of the electorate.

The New Labour Classless Conversion

New Labour, as Coates (2005) states, 'was created and represented capitalism with a social conscience by replacing' the formerly held communal class dictum of 'equality of outcome' with a revisionist 'equality of opportunity and making social democracy more bearable by toning it down'. The party though from a communal critique was, 'restricted to this narrow centrist ideology, because it could neither move to the left because of the political landscape, nor the right of the political spectrum because of its historical background' (Coates, 2005, p.30).

This means that Post New Labour, whose definitive class perspective as formerly noted, are limited as it is an embryonic brand in ever-evolving class, political times. They will despite its communal policies, still on a communications basis at least, be compromised by the electoral success of the atomised New Labour brand. They thus may invent new methods to achieve a distinctive brand edge with the aim of increasing their popularity, as Corbyn for instance, did so effectively during the 2017 general election by generating the youth vote (see Postscript).

At its core, though, there was a reckoning in the sense that Blair had to reconcile some of the issues with the traditional support because there was a danger that if the party completely transferred to the same atomised class ground as the Conservatives then they would leave party loyalists behind (Jefferys (2002); Geary & Pabst (2015)). Many interviewees claimed that such a risk was necessary as by so doing they were building a powerful classless focus for which the party could gain and subsequently sustain political power:

'I think there is a strong faction who would think themselves as classless or kind of aspirational, and I think they refer to themselves as Blairites' (participant 3).

‘What they were basically saying was, at one level look, “do not look down on him because he’s got a University degree and works with a pen, you know he can be part of our movement too”. So, it was classlessness in a sense, it was breaking down barriers of social status. I think in New Labour the concept of class became something we didn’t talk about, it almost became an embarrassment, it was something people did not want to talk about because people would say, “oh yes, we’re all classless now”, what they actually meant to say was, these social gradations between the white-collar and the blue-collar are blurring’ (participant 4).

‘I think it is much less so now than it used to be and I think it shifted and shaped into a different kind of party in order to ensure electoral success’ (participant 7).

‘Yeah, I think so, I think it took class out of it’ (participant 11).

‘I think it did happen, yeah, I would agree with you that definition of classless that it became a party for everybody or anybody’ (participant 14).

The communal class critique of this New Labour classless vision was that as they were converged within an erroneous atomised class ethos, they were accordingly restricted in regards political theory and respective substance, a position summarised by two participants:

‘That got picked up by the Blair era, New Labour, remember he did not have a political philosophy about what works, it is about spinning what works and eventually we got to the point where it was all spin and there was no bloody substance left, nobody knew what Labour believed in anymore’ (participant 4).

‘It in some way, can be a deception, and that is maybe what people felt about the Labour Party, that they were too slick and clever’ (participant 15).

This is a marked difference ‘between conventional Old Labour politicians who were generally working-class, having strong links with trade union culture, and were seen as being easily relatable to the class position of those who elected them’ (Paxman, 2002, p.56). This outlook, Marxist in character, was also in extensive agreement with the standard Weberian perspective of individuals being connected to communal class categories through playing specific roles, for Dahrendorf had developed a model of

the ‘class structure’ in which ‘classes are...based on a structural arrangement of social roles’ (Dahrendorf, 1959, p.148). Dahrendorf’s analysis focuses on the structuring of these roles, rather than on their incumbents: ‘Classes are based on the differences in legitimate power associated with certain ‘positions’, i.e. on the structure of social roles with respect to their authority expectations. It follows from this that an individual becomes a member of a class by playing a social role’ (Dahrendorf, 1959, p.149). The party accordingly shifted emphasis from the traditional class perspective, from initially promoting collectivised communal interests, to that of atomised individuals, who defined their modern class position upon consumerist factors such as cultural interests, career aspirations, and locale (Savage & Devine (2013)). The conclusion, as suggested by a number of participants, must be twofold, first that this is just a sign of the more complex, or possibly even classless times. Secondly though on a negative note, there could be a perception that despite such contemporary class complexities, that on a social class level at least, the party and its national political representatives by promoting a classless brand politics, lost touch with the party’s long-established, traditional class grassroots:

‘The perception was; they all look the same, they all dress the same, they all speak the same - you didn’t get any real hard line working-class, you get certain members, but a lot of the Cabinet were all very well spoken, it is almost like they came off the production line’ (participant 5).

‘The composition of Labour MPs has moved from Old Labour times of union people, teachers, councillors, you put in a lot of time before you were finally elected, you know as a middle-aged person usually a man, whereas now, you get a perception that it is sanitised; they go in as private parliamentary secretaries and then are parachuted into a constituency and from there they just stay in parliament for the rest of their lives’ (participant 6).

Some local representatives in North-West Cumbria stated that there was a question mark on how such a classless New Labour clientele could possibly understand what it is like to be involved in local politics. This degree of connection, as broadly alluded to by Paxman (2002), and Seyd & Whiteley (2002), within all echelons of the party, be it national or local, is an area which requires improvement. This more atomised attitude towards social class and parliamentary selection contrasted markedly with the

more rigid traditional class stance conventionally perceived to be the stereotypical hallmark of the Old Labour politician:

‘I think the problem with New Labour was they all seemed to be copies of each other. Yeah, especially in Parliamentary Selections, because there is definitely a feeling out there, or there was, that prospective parliamentary candidates were being parachuted is the phrase, into parliamentary constituencies and often they were policy advisors, they were people who had been quite close to people within the party, parliamentary party’ (participant 11).

‘Old Labour to me generated a feeling, be it true or otherwise, that working-class people ran the party, New Labour brought in people from university who were educated in a more middle-class manner. They had a good education and they went right into politics’ (participant 13).

In contrast to the stereotypical Old Labour traditional working-class culture, New Labour with their newly elected MPs from a range of social class and educational backgrounds was developing a classless brand to be potentially attractive to a far wider section of the electorate in a more atomised contemporary class structure. Even so, while the explicit causes may be complex, the importance of communication in establishing and sustaining the brand and its perceived broad appeal cannot be understated. New Labour were thus promoting a classless political brand so as to garner a greater level of support across traditional class lines. This led them to successfully court non-core working-class voters in the communal tradition. This is a position summarised below by two long-standing Labour representatives in Carlisle, an area that was on the whole, enticed by the New Labour classless brand:

‘They realised that they could have their core Labour voters, but they needed to attract non-Labour voters from a higher social class, more middle-class people, from richer areas, and try and persuade them that they were the party of the future; an investment’ (participant 5).

‘I think what they wanted to do was to retain the base and then add on to it and make the party have a broader appeal across different class levels. That is what I believe it tried to do, it tried to be all things to all people and it recognised that in order to stay in power for any length of time it needed to have broader appeal with people who saw themselves perhaps as higher in social standing than the communal blue-collar working-classes’ (participant 8).

In regards Labour's sociological development, within a contemporary framework, the New Labour brand clearly was more attractive to a wider scope of people than that of its Old Labour predecessor. Despite the previous entrenched loyalty to stereotypical working-class interests, Blair, according to Dell (2000), and Wallace (2010), could see past such narrow class baggage. He was the first Labour leader to prioritise the communal middle-classes and the relevance of the atomised individual over the party's established mainstay working-class electorate. This was done in the main, to broaden their general class appeal in specific marginal areas such as North-West Cumbria, and make the prospect of electoral success seem realistically attainable, a sentiment epitomised by a Labour representative in Carlisle:

‘Absolutely because of what he did in recognising and supporting the middle, and saying the right things to the middle, and giving policies to the middle, that is what he did so effectively, and as a consequence they became Labour supporters, and they said, “this guy is looking after us”, which is what it is about, so that happened yes, it drew the middle-class in from his policies and the way he looked, and the way he spoke’ (participant 2).

New Labour ‘was seduced by the gospel’ of atomised consumerism, ‘which is self-regulating and requires no social or institutional framework to function. The sovereign consumer had replaced the ideas of the citizen and the public sphere. The image that guided New Labour’s policies is one of the lonely individual, set free from the state in order to face life’s risks alone – like those lean urban “survivors” on their mountain bikes who haunt our streets’ (Giddens, 2000, p.12). It can be seen, as stated by Dunleavy (1989), and Rosen (2005), that such an aspirational ethos was a political project that worked to secure consent of popular forces, by playing to their inner-selfish consumer desires.

This strategy was orchestrated so as to accumulate the widest possible class support, a strategy which a decade later would inspire the New Labour classless outlook. The outcome of this was the fragmentation of the communal class ethos as the politics of aspiration required that people materialistically pursued larger houses and richer more fulfilled lives; they were hence eager to trade communal commonality for atomised, consumerist gain. The rise of this New Labour alternative to Thatcherism had notable

detrimental effects on the Conservative Party as they were seen as socially redundant during the Blair years, for ‘although they valued individual freedom and at least claimed to value communities’ (Thorpe (2011)), they failed unlike New Labour, to appreciate that this must be tallied with the promotion of social justice and egalitarianism.

The traditional working-class, the core of the Old Labour support, is currently thought in decline as it has been fragmented, and atomised. It can no longer be assumed that all working people, or to follow Marxist parlance, those with only their labour power to sell, feel a natural political association or relevance to those of similar economic background that they possibly once did in the early post-war years.

The Blairite New Labour agenda pronounced an end to the party’s dependence on class division, as the traditional working-class for whom the party had consistently spoken up for, and as a consequence which it relied upon for its core political viability, was disappearing (Dale (2008); Ormrod et al. (2013)). This impression is illustrated below in the context of Labour support in North-West Cumbria, where the voter determines his or her vote on what can advance his or her as an atomised individual rather than as part of a communal class grouping. This is an argument noted by two participants, the first from Allerdale; the second from Carlisle:

‘People in their everyday lives frankly do not talk about specific political issues; when people go in the ballot box, the most important thing that is in their mind is, “does this person I’m voting for understand me, get where I’m coming from, can I rely on him or her if I seek support, will they almost instinctively act in a way that I would agree with?”’ (participant 4).

‘It’s about what people want out of it now as individual citizens; it is not particularly about broad ideological argument’ (participant 9).

The rise of the atomised Thatcherite agenda has clearly taken root in common class, political discourse, thus Labour needs to keep adapting itself so as to keep up with the enormity of such an ever-evolving contemporary structure. Class divisions, in the old communal sense, have become irrelevant (Gould (1998); Kriegel & Williford (2006)). Politics in Britain, like that in the United States, ‘is now an open contest between

conflicting solutions to real problems in which parties must convince individual voters of the force of their arguments’ through an acceptable, packaged-up political brand (Daly (2008)). This was a widely-held view encapsulated below by three participants from a variety of areas and districts in North-West Cumbria:

‘I think in the New Labour era, the position was, “if we want to have our values and we want to deliver on them, we will package ourselves up so that we’ll get elected”’ (participant 5).

‘What they saw was the emergence of a new brand; which in the main, was very much about how people looked, how people spoke, what they wore, it did become much more corporate, definitely. I think they learned that from the Conservatives, that you, in order to be seen as politically viable, then you have got to present a brand’ (participant 14).

‘I mean everything just seemed to be right, didn’t it, like he (Tony Blair) was saying; “this is a slightly unknown shiny new party”, which had been out of power for so long and they seemed to have shaken-off their old-fashioned class image, which was less relevant’ (participant 15).

In addition, as Coates (2005) notes, ‘the class structure changed, public opinion also changed with the creation of a new popular rhetoric by the Thatcher governments. For example, all mainstream political parties now endorse the new atomised “popular capitalism” ethos which encourages people to see themselves as distinct individuals’. This ‘meant policy and ideological change were needed to reflect these permanent changes in the political landscape and to be electorally viable, and New Labour was born for this purpose’. It is thus more likely that that New Labour ideology, which refers to the period from 1994 onwards, will remain in some fashion because it reflects the context within which the mainstream party politics operates.

This ‘is because it is difficult for the party to change further in terms of ideology as they are restricted by their history and the circumstances in which they find themselves. There are only two broad economic systems; socialism which is associated with the left, and capitalism which is associated with the right, within which parties can locate their ideology. Labour was created by the trade unions and working people to support their [communal] class cause, which means that the party has to lean towards socialism, or the left, if only slightly because they are hemmed in

by their historical structure and party tradition. Old Labour leaned towards socialism with its brand of social democracy but this is no longer viable' due to contemporary class atomisation, 'so there has been a move to the centre for the party with the creation of New Labour' (Coates, 2005, p.30).

New Labour as follows had to break explicitly with its collectivist class past, and to demonstrate this they symbolically altered their long-held principles (Gould (1998); Dell (2000)). This involved changing the party's constitution and founding communal class principles, among them Clause IV, which committed the party to taking major components of the economy into public ownership. A revised Clause IV allowed for the workings of the consumerised market economy at the expense of the historicised rhetoric of the workers owning the means of production.

New Labour, as stated by Foote (1997), and Fairclough (2000), set out to represent functional classless values of openness, modernity, economic orthodoxy, and redistributory social policy. The brand had to emotionally reassure and hence remove the fear that voters still after many years felt that a Labour government would return the country to the dark days of obsolete, communal class-war mentality whose philosophy was depicted theoretically at least, through Clause IV. This was an interpretation mentioned below by Labour representatives in both Allerdale and Carlisle:

'It (the Labour Party) identified with the "working-class", but as an industrial class it has died, it had to find a new constituency so to speak' (participant 6).

'The abolition of Clause IV was the perfect example of where Blair's was, if you like in the sense of what needed to happen symbolically, to show the party had changed' (participant 7).

Blair accomplished these objectives, persuading the party to accept that Thatcher's atomised cultural discourse of the 1980s is here to stay, and successfully carrying through the abolition of Clause IV (Dell (2000); Griffiths & Hickson (2009)). The key to Blair's politics was the nurturing of the reciprocal relationship between the atomised individual and society at large, where this culture of community and inclusivity left no room for the outdated notions of communal class identity, class

interest, and class conflict (Cannadine (1999)). Such an assessment is lucidly denoted in the explicit parochial setting of North-West Cumbria by an experienced Labour political representative in Carlisle:

‘They probably do look at themselves as a brand now, yeah, and making themselves appealing to whoever, that is the issue now’ (participant 10).

This brand culture specifically arose as an attempt to destroy the communal ethos by dividing working people from believing they had common class interests; but were instead individual consumers that could be manipulated to promote a capitalist system which suppresses them. Thatcher, as a result of her policies, as stated by Bottomore (1991), and Cannadine (1998), went a long way towards achieving her ambition of banishing from political debate the language of traditional class dialogue and with it the powerful class loyalty it inflicted upon the Labour movement.

The fact that ‘Blair did not resurrect it is a measure of her achievement in changing the way people think about social structures, social relations, and social identities in today’s Britain’ (Crompton, 2008, p.87). The party had shifted and they were communicating to the new atomised populace, the contemporary class discourse that they wished to hear; they were for the most part, won over, so consequently there was a meaningful class-based shift.

Kinnock and his successor John Smith were doing a genuine repositioning of the party to what would become New Labour (Drower (1994); Jones (1994)), nonetheless, as Hay (1999), and Stuart (2005) stated, under Blair it was polished and spun to create an effective electoral package, a view supported by four research participants below:

‘Branding, you could use the word modernise because they (the New Labour modernisers) felt that the Old Labour appeared to be an old class-based lumbering, so when New Labour formed they issued with new badges, bright red things, everyone used to wear them to begin with. You go to “middle-class” theatre functions and there were people with these bright red badges on, pronouncing “New Labour, New Britain”’ (participant 6).

‘If a party is serious about wanting to run the country and if it is serious about being a national political party of government, then they have to get serious about how they promote and portray a professional communications image as nobody gets any plaudits for being amateurish; New Labour ultimately did this and were electorally successful’ (participant 7).

‘In the New Labour era, the position was, “if we want to have our values and we want to deliver on them, we will package ourselves up so that we will get elected and we can start changing things”. I think it was a brand that they were putting across, this idea that the party was not simply just for the “working-classes” anymore but it was for anybody so, yeah, it is classless. They came across as slick and efficient, and more importantly they, unlike Old Labour, were non-threatening in the sense in a class and policy-sense’ (participant 14).

‘I think people were saying, “Yes, this New Labour, this is really good”’ (participant 15).

The election of Blair in 1997, then to some extent changed the party’s generic past class brand persona as it became cool to be associated with the Labour Party, as it was part of the ‘Cool Britannia’ new cultural theme which was prescient at the time (Panich & Leys (1997)). It must also be stated that such consumerism, although clearly relevant, does have its limitations (Crompton (2008); Baines & Shaughnessy (2014)), as the British public will only support such a party if they believe what is behind the change in brand image is genuinely real and true. This position was noted by one Carlisle participant in the context of the New Labour classless brand success:

‘I think it can be overstated, and I think there was a recognition in the Labour Party that in doing that, there were potential pitfalls and I think we (New Labour) guarded against those to some degree, so the party at that time did not just become a completely empty vessel that was defined and promoted via a more attractive logo or whatever, the party actually had to have some solid stuff there and it had to be grounded in something and I think they (New Labour) pulled that off very well, they managed that trick very well’ (participant 7).

A political party can broadly, according to the research participants, be successful for a limited period of time, but eventually people in these atomised class times, start to question the party’s brand authenticity. Equally, there are required standard disciplines that go with that, like the repetitions and the brand identity which aim to build on certain key strengths so as to be as attractive in the widest possible sense.

This section ascertained the relevance and role which the rise of such an atomised and classless consumerist, communications culture has played in regards Labour's position and their class-based support. New Labour skilfully embraced the new brand culture promoted by Bernays and the New Right a decade before. They developed a classless political brand which was very effective both nationally and locally.

The ideological challenge for Labour in the future, is to provide a pragmatic, leftist alternative in the promotion of individual aspiration, which is distinctive from the standardised Thatcherite atomised ethos (Giddens (2002); Cohen (2007)). By being at heart, the party of the communal working masses, Labour must ensure that they take ownership of the socio-political consensus, and in this manner, dictate the narrative for future political, class debate in Britain.

Post New Labour and its Class Confusion

Post New Labour for that reason, given the emotional power of its traditional class history, have to recognise as the research participants alluded to, that they must not within both a general or a specific geographic context of North-West Cumbria, come across as ideologically and/or sociologically threatening in this contemporary atomised classless era. This sociological contradiction has led to a confusion as to what Post New Labour was meant to represent, an interpretation of which is outlined below.

This was a commonly-held sentiment held by a range of research participants. By this means, by combining such scepticism of New Labour with a refusal to endorse a return to Old Labour communal politics, the party portrayed an image of confusion in regards its class perspective, a belief reinforced by five research participants below:

‘(The party is) a complete mess, it’s struggling to redefine itself’ (participant 1).

‘Well that is what Ed Miliband tried and the country rejected, it was in essence a compromise between Old and New without having a clear definition. The leadership tenure of Ed Miliband was much divided, the reason he failed to convince was because he tried to speak left to the party and moderate to the country and they could see through him’ (participant 2).

‘I mean from 2010 (the election defeat), obviously and then the disastrous election defeat (2015), I think that’s just indicative of how confused I think the party was’ (participant 3).

‘Wishy-washy Labour, it was not a clear message, and this is the key point’ (participant 7).

‘I just don’t think he (Ed Miliband) had the opportunity to describe a new vision, whatever way he went, whether he tried to be like Blair, or he tried to be like Harold Wilson, somehow he didn’t have the opportunity or the skill to stamp his own identity’ (participant 15).

Further insight into this issue of the contemporary Post New Labour class outlook is that it is in constant and continual flux. This assessment was particularly prevalent since the election of left-winger Jeremy Corbyn in September 2015 (and re-election a year later). There is now a strong perception within the party in North-West Cumbria that he could take the party back to the Old Labour, more traditional class-based politics, a perspective commonplace before the premiership of Tony Blair.

This notion that Corbyn was associated with Old Labour communal class politics (Prince (2016); Seymour (2016)), is highlighted on a locational backdrop as the new members that have joined the party in Carlisle and Allerdale are from predominantly urban areas. The sociological assumptions being for the most part, that they are people from a conventional Old Labour class tradition that are reaffirming a desire for the party to return to promoting the interests of a collectivised working-class:

‘It will go back to the class politics, and it will alienate anyone else from wanting to vote Labour’ (participant 5).

‘I think it would be very much about income redistribution, climbing heights of industry, it would be very much about an economic policy based around high taxes and an approach to business which is very different to where you are now’ (participant 7).

‘But now Corbyn has also got elected, he is veering towards the other direction, the left’ (participant 11).

‘I think they are trying to move towards an Old Labour direction, definitely, I’m just speaking of what I’ve experienced through the surge of the new members and the new people that have joined the party in Carlisle, there is that definitely, those people from Old Labour have re-joined and are reaffirming, “let’s get it back to what it was”, that old style’ (participant 14).

Jeremy Corbyn definitely should be acclaimed for shepherding in this traditional type of class-centric ideological politics. He has achieved this, as Oborne (2016) stated, ‘by reinventing public discourse itself. He has abandoned the discredited politics of spin and manipulation associated both with Peter Mandelson and Tony Blair’s New Labour and David Cameron’s Tories. Corbyn is not by any means a great orator, but he speaks in the simple, intelligible language of ordinary people’. This communal perspective was highlighted by the final research participant, who after witnessing his performance as leader at the despatch box in the House of Commons could sense that Corbyn had moved considerably beyond the once dominant New Labour classless theme:

‘He is going back to Old Labour in the sense that he stands up for the ordinary person in the street and like in his first “Prime Minister’s Question Time”, he actually read out emails or tweets from ordinary people, so he has got that spirit in him to say, “hang on, never mind all this House of Commons nonsense, let’s stand up for ordinary people”’ (participant 15).

Notwithstanding the rise of the left, there are still sizeable splits in the party, as it struggles to define its new class outlook. This was shown during the last but one election campaign as one participant noted:

‘Ed Miliband just dropped the “New” and the party became Labour again, but it was not Old Labour either, they are all Post-New Labour’ (participant 4).

There is clearly as of yet, not a new, clear class consensus for which the party could unite under at this point in the Post New Labour era. This is notably illustrated through the bitter divisions highlighted during the last two leadership elections in 2015 and 2016. On a general class level, the party’s strategy, according to Dell (2000), and Golding (2016), needs to be recalibrated. They must endeavour to try and recapture the atomised and classless ethos which they have lost in the last decade

which was so skilfully developed and engineered during the New Labour years. They must also though from a communal perspective, accept that Labour first and foremost is the party which must support the traditional working-classes, a communal class categorisation which even with the rise of the atomisation ethos, is still the most definable in contemporary class discourse.

The Conservatives are endeavouring to stigmatise Labour as being the party of the unemployed, or as Savage & Devine (2013) would assert, the ‘Precariat’ or the ‘Underclass’. They are trying, as stated by the research participants, to portray the Post New Labour brand under the leadership of Corbyn like that to a lesser extent as with Miliband, as an antiquated communal-styled class dinosaur which is irrelevant to the wider electorate. The question is still open, certainly from the content stated by local representatives in North-West Cumbria. At the time of writing, whether Labour, in its contemporary Post New Labour guise, can prevent such a brand perception from taking root is still an open-question which can be further dissected in future academic research of this kind.

In summary, the Labour Party’s class consciousness has developed with that of society at large, as the party generally speaking is chiefly class-based, but as time has advanced the party has altered its accustomed stance over this issue. Old Labour was principally traditional in its class outlook by promoting the communal interests of the working-classes. New Labour, since the elevation of the Thatcherite atomised revolution of the 1980s, followed the rise of the individualised class culture promoted by the New Right, while Post New Labour is struggling to define its class position. The next section aims to show how the party under the new fragmented class culture was affected by rural/urban locational basis, specifically within North-West Cumbria.

The Urban/Rural Dynamic of Labour Support – The Spatial

Such analysis is correlated to Althusser, Lefebvre, and Harvey’s Marxist social spatial analysis, and Castells’ atomised network society theory. Attention is placed upon the final theme of the study which relates to issues concerning the Labour Party’s brand, be it Old, New, or Post New, to the relevance of a specific geographic space, and the resulting attitude that could develop in regards potential affinity for a particular political brand. This thematic category through distinctive first-hand interview

research, consequently endeavours to link class, communications, and location to support for the Labour Party both nationally and within a broad localised context with a specific focus placed upon North-West Cumbria.

The initial part of the interviews focused on the general awareness of the role of class and political party affinity, and the subsequent relevance of contemporary communication and brand culture at a national rather than a local level. In this fashion, not unexpectedly, knowledge and understanding of these themes did not vary considerably.

This was outlined when the dialogue turned to the role of locality, where the rural and the urban representatives, agreed that Labour is still seen, both nationally and within the spatialised confines of North-West Cumbria, as a traditional working-class urban centric party which fails to promote its class image effectively in rural areas.

Both urban and rural representatives stated the belief that the party is not especially comfortable campaigning in rural areas as its common class character which is urban by nature, is not suited to campaign to such an electorate:

‘If you’re talking about Labour, there is still a strong perception that Labour does not represent the interests of people that live in rural areas’ (participant 1).

‘I suppose people were a lot friendlier and pleased to see you in the urban areas; in the rural areas, by the time you had walked up the drive and knocked on the door you didn’t quite know what was going to happen to you, you know that you are going to meet more opposition in a rural area’ (participant 15).

Labour, Old, New, or Post New, is chiefly an urban working-class party. This is highlighted over the issue of the broad allocation of resources at election time, where typical predominance is given to the urban area as it is still the locale where the party believes their natural working-class base still resides, and hence needs to be given priority of focus as it will deliver the greater number of votes and seats:

‘Traditionally, in the rural, we have struggled. Labour core support tends to be in urban constituencies’ (participant 2).

‘Resources, well yeah, I could tell you the Carlisle story, I think it will give you an indication of the difficulties here, from a resource perspective, our ability to get around to face-to-face communications is much easier in an urban area than it is in a rural area because they are more disparate but I think ultimately the level of concentration on the urban area is because we can basically do more work in a much shorter space of time’ (participant 7).

‘Quite often they would, if it came down to a choice between campaigning in an urban area and campaigning in a rural area, they would campaign in an urban area because you would get more done, the houses are packed together, you are more likely to get elected by those people, whilst if you went into the rural areas you’ve got miles and miles of driveways to walk down, you maybe knock on three houses and drive ten miles and none of them would vote for you anyway, you have got to make that judgement’ (participant 11).

This contrasts greatly with the rural representatives who believe that this prioritising of the urban vote at the expense of the rural support is deeply flawed. The party is missing a chance to widen its appeal within rural locales with a sizable composite of habitual working-class voters who in the past they have failed to connect with, and if they ever could do so then the party’s electoral strength in such rural areas would be considerably enhanced (Griffiths (2007); Griffiths & Hickson (2009)).

Most interviewees noted the entrenchment of this type of position, where the following three quotes illustrated the justification for such an argument. The major problem, as one Labour representative in a rural area in Allerdale observed, is brand recognition:

‘We went to see people in the villages around Cockermouth where they had never seen a Labour Party person ever and we found all sorts of people who voted Labour’ (participant 15).

Similarly, another two participants representing urban wards in Carlisle agreed with such sentiments:

‘Oh, we go out every Saturday but because we focus our efforts on the areas we represent, now as a Council, I did listening Council events last week where it was about talking to local people about what should our priorities be for the next three years and I actually went out into Longtown, and Brampton and did some sessions there. What was interesting was that people were saying, “thanks for coming out, we’re really impressed that a Labour politician has actually come and sat in our rural community centre for two hours to listen to us”, so it was almost a bit of a surprise that Labour had turned up’ (participant 8).

‘There is less work done in rural areas because they are seen as more Conservative areas (class-wise), and they are thus simply written-off as Conservative areas’ (participant 14).

The clear marketing shift which played a role in the rise of Labour support from the class-based Old Labour to the more classless New Labour cut through locations, chiefly highlighting its rise in prominence in non-traditional rural areas in North-West Cumbria:

‘Politics is complicated in a place like Cumbria, it is very complicated because I think ultimately it is quite Conservative with a small “c”, and I think the Labour Party in Carlisle and probably in Allerdale as well has taken a lot of coaxing and shifting and moving into a place where it recognises that in terms of modernising; communications are really important’ (participant 7).

The overriding conclusion appears to be that the Labour Party in the Post New Labour era in North-West Cumbria cannot campaign in rural areas because they have limited resources so they tend to concentrate on protecting the traditionally more urban wards that the party stereotypically believe are more attainable electorally. In some areas of rural Allerdale, the party follows this traditional rigid class perspective to extreme limits, where people are categorised along broad spatial socio-geographic lines (Althusser (1970); Lefebvre (1974); Harvey (2010)). The party tends to ignore the numerous rural wards such as in the villages near Cockermouth where the populace is traditional rural middle-class. They instead favour prioritising their resources in the far fewer urban wards, like for instance in Workington. This is a stance highlighted by a participant who as hitherto noted, represents a rural area in Allerdale:

‘I now represent a rural constituency, I live in a village and the Labour Party was campaigning away in Cockermouth, we said, “we’ll just do our own thing out here” and they said, “Alright”, so we went around all the villages and saw everybody but that was a conscious decision. We weren’t encouraged to do that and it’s never happened before, so we went to see people in the villages around Cockermouth where they had never seen a Labour Party person ever and we found all sorts of people who voted Labour, so it is more difficult to campaign in rural areas because you have got to walk there or get in your car. Labour does not feel particularly comfortable campaigning in a traditional rural area because they think around every corner there is going to be a Conservative supporter, which is not necessarily true’ (participant 15).

Following the rigid Marxist socio-geographic symbolism (Castree & Gregory (1996); Middleton (2013)), the urban populace is widely perceived to be chiefly of the communal working-class, whilst the rural inhabitants are to some extent seen to be more middle-class and accordingly are sociologically atomised (Susser (2001); Bell (2006)). The Labour Party in North-West Cumbria thus mostly see rural constituencies as simply being out of touch on a traditional class basis. This was a position noted by participants from both districts, whether they represented an urban or rural district made no difference, the first example of which is noted below from a participant representing an urban ward in Carlisle:

‘We are never going to get them (rural electorate), now that might change over time, but what they (the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria) do is they strategically target areas [where] they know they will get the vote’ (participant 5).

Another interviewee from a rural background in Allerdale similarly recounted that the degree of concentration on the urban area, and the importance placed upon the relevance of cultural space like that promoted by the works of Lefebvre (1974), is evident in North-West Cumbrian Labour politics:

‘Yes, I would agree that generally Carlisle, Whitehaven, Workington, Barrow (urban areas) would all vote Labour, but out in the rural areas (in North-West Cumbria) they would return Conservatives’ (participant 6).

More importantly though in terms of communications, the Labour Party certainly as hitherto noted, in its current Post New Labour form, within the context of North-West Cumbria, commonly follows this broad spatial concept. This occurs not just because of resource prioritisation, but also due to a belief that rural areas are not electorally attainable, thus as a consequence they do not focus on the rural wards as much as they should. Such frustration is expanded underneath by a leading Labour political representative in urban North-West Cumbria:

‘We don’t have any rural wards, we have held them in the past, but we generally don’t, so our foot soldiers are focussed on the wards that they represent, now we do go out in places like Dalston, Longtown, Brampton, but not as frequently as we would do in our urban areas because that is where our core support is. We normally lose them (non-traditional rural wards) now by a significant margin and what happened was we thought “we’ve lost them, we’re not going to get them back any time soon, so we won’t have much of a focus on them”’ (participant 8).

The message and the kind of publicity that is being promoted by the party in urban areas has to be different to what needs to be promoted in rural areas; for it must promote rural issues which traditionally in general terms, is not the natural political message associated with communal Labour politics. This perspective follows the spatial analysis (Sprinker (1992); Elden (2004)), that location in its traditional sense, is still the determining factor of voting behaviour. Subsequent political affiliation is demonstrated on a communications level by how Labour accept that they need to brand themselves differently depending on whether they are fighting for votes in a predominantly urban or rural constituency.

Such a notion in practical terms, is supported by one local Labour Councillor representing an urban area in Carlisle, who ascertained that the communications of such a message in a rural area would have to be different to that of an urban one:

‘I think it would need a lot of thinking about, how you would brand a Labour Party that would go out to say not Stanwix urban, but Stanwix rural and say, “how do we brand ourselves for the electorate here”, I would be interested to see how it could be done’ (participant 9).

There is a successful precedent for such a strategy in North-West Cumbria. Labour for instance branded themselves successfully in a rural ward in the Solway area at the 2011 local election, where the party branded a local candidate under the banner of the ‘Labour Coast and Countryside candidate’. He primarily promoted the spatial idea in North-West Cumbria which communicated the Labour Party’s message differently in the deep rural areas because coastal areas, coastal resorts, seaside resorts, farming communities react more negatively to communal class politics than their urban equivalents (Griffiths (2007)).

This atomised party branding, inspired by locational class priorities, on the whole prevailed, as the candidate polled above expectations, a view outlined by as hitherto noted, a senior Labour representative in Carlisle:

‘This occurred because the leaflets going through people’s doors didn’t look like Labour leaflets; they had “Labour Coast and Country”, which almost got the individual into trouble with people in the regional office because they were very centralistic about branding but he was promoting a message, very effectively, that the Labour Party was actually speaking to rural people on a socio-political level, about their specific problems’ (participant 8).

This strategy equally can work in practical terms in reverse, as was illustrated when the party prevailed in the customary Conservative town of Keswick in 1991, three years before Tony Blair became party leader. The party used Old Labour style communal class politics, where the Labour representative concentrated on solidifying his core ‘working-class’ support, and as a result gained a surprise victory in an area previously deemed unattainable to the party:

‘For years Labour kept losing here (rural Keswick ward) and then we stopped putting up candidates and so I had a go and I realised that despite the general Conservative voters in this area, one third of people lived in Council Estates, a very high proportion, so I concentrated on them, on getting them out, but everyone assumed Keswick was just Tory’ (participant 6).

It would be logical to recognise that if Labour does not promote a wider geographic perspective, then they are not going to increase their support in such non-traditional areas. A strategy of meeting and communicating with people who are not of a

traditional, spatial class locality, would be more beneficial as it would widen the perceived relevance of the party's message. This view is espoused by a Labour representative below who from a rural perspective in Allerdale, presents a first-hand account of such a class focus in North-West Cumbria:

'Labour have got to realise that there are deprived people in the countryside who are struggling for whatever reason, maybe they are renting an old damp cottage, it is not just all about big houses. It is seen that the Labour Party are not interested in them because they are in a rural village and you have got to try and change that. Nationally as well, the Labour Party does not get themselves represented on to rural forums in North-West Cumbria. However, because they do not have many representatives in the rural areas, it is difficult, but I feel it is a missed opportunity possibly' (participant 15).

In the last analysis, broad class categories, although important, are never the determining factor of political party affinity, a view supported by Best (2005), and Marcuse et al. (2011), who state that class and its relationship with a specific area is always a disfigured expression of social reality. This is not to undermine the strides that the party has made to widen its class appeal to the more refined contemporary class categorisation by placing more emphasis particularly during the New Labour classless era to identify a more atomised, cultural class support in the rural areas. Following the increase in Labour support in such locales, this modern cultural class concept could, and to some extent, did work in practical terms. This was principally true with individuals who were deemed to be from traditional middle-class backgrounds who generally speaking, in the post-Thatcherite, New Labour period would naturally feel less need to associate themselves with the historic working-class traditions which were the hallmark of the Old Labour brand (Hay (1999); Rosen (2005)).

In addition, this though would be enmeshed, or as Althusser (1970) would state, hegemonised within a specific urban locale of traditional middle-class individuals who largely worked in the educated social sectors such as for instance, teaching, and counselling. They would inexorably also still feel more inclined to have a natural cultural affinity for the party on a class basis, as one urban-based participant observed in the context of Carlisle:

‘Yeah, say a situation in an urban constituency when you can have a teacher living in that urban constituency, who could be deemed “middle-class” because of their surroundings they may feel that they are part of a big society here and would be more associated with Labour’ (participant 7).

By following such a diverse modern cultural class framework, this same participant claims that the party in North-West Cumbria were taking some of that cultural contemporary class support for granted:

‘If you were a Labour voter living in Wetheral, a village just outside Carlisle, the sense is that if you are a middle-class person, and if you are voting Labour, then you are going to vote Labour anyway, you are going to have enough political literacy about you’ (participant 7).

The party activists have to, following the communal spatial ethos, make a pragmatic judgement in regards to prioritising their greater natural, traditional class support in urban areas, over that of rural locales where there is a general view that the party, in the main, has less of a natural class affinity. This is a perception which is lamented from the standpoint of the party in rural Allerdale:

‘I think it is seen that the Labour Party are not interested in them because they are in a rural village, yeah, so in my experience I would say that in an urban area they will spend far more time canvassing in Workington than you would in Keswick for instance’ (participant 15).

The party also on a strategic level, has to realistically judge where they are going to get the maximum result from, so the accepted long-established class prejudices occur when faced with such harsh pragmatic electoral realities of party politics in North-West Cumbria. The issue of ‘class’ emerged, as remarked by Goonewardena et al. (2008), and McQuire (2016), as a heuristic for the idea of ‘comfort’ and economic wealth, and how the perception of the space in and around these factors is part of the natural attachment towards conservative ideology and hence contrary to stereotypical Labour values.

Several of the participants interviewed recognised, in a similar fashion to Diamond & Kenny (2011), and Diamond (2015), that Post New Labour, by following a communal

class structure, contradicts the New Labour's classless brand itinerary. This in the context of North-West Cumbria, was noted concisely by three Labour representatives in urban wards who have experienced such perceptions in regards potential rural support for the party:

'I walk up some rural roads and see some big houses and driveways and think to myself; "why would you vote Labour"' (participant 7).

'Ultimately then, there are more refined class differences and Labour has traditionally neglected more mixed, small town rural areas in North-West Cumbria. If you analyse North-West Cumbria, the rural area tends to be what you would class as Conservative areas, the party struggles in the Brampton's and Hayton's of this world to get the vote' (participant 8).

'When we have had lots of time and supplies, we have gone to places that are rural, out of the way and they've said, "this is great and it's so good that you have come because nobody ever comes here", but we still do not get voted in because they are naturally Conservative, we may go around knocking on the door and the Conservative candidate hasn't but they still vote for the Conservative candidate' (participant 11).

There is thus, according to the Labour political representatives interviewed in North-West Cumbria, an assumption that rural areas like those who border prosperous employment sites, the most prominent of which as noted in Appendix I, being Sellafield, are natural Conservative areas. In such areas where there is a predominance of large houses and economic wealth (Wynne et al. (1993); Blowers (2016)), they habitually have been averse to communal Labour politics where income redistribution was deemed a priority.

This historic class perspective where the party concentrated on traditional locales associated with previously held communal class allegiances is contradictory to the New Labour dream of becoming a truly classless party, able to win in any locale. In a broad localised context, influenced by the Giddens' Third Way tradition, such a philosophy endeavoured to move the party away from big Trade Union communal influence, and to instead speak to a new classless group of working people who were endeavouring to adapt to this new atomised reality (Hay (1999); Geary & Pabst (2015)). Such changes, as alluded to by Castells (2000, and 2012), and quoted by

Giddens (2010), ‘included intensifying globalisation, the development of a post-industrial or service economy and, in an information age’ the emergence of an unskilled, less politicised, atomised class culture. The expansion of the service economy went hand in hand with the shrinking of the communal working-class, and with it the weakening of the Old Labour supporter base. Such sentiments are supported by a Labour representative in an urban ward in Allerdale:

‘Consequently, the political certainties which they had grown up with and used as their anchor pads were gradually breaking down. The concept of traditional employment, lifelong employment, apprenticeships, where “working people” could rely on, were all breaking down, national barriers were breaking down, everything was becoming much more fluid on a class level, with more complex atomised classifications. New Labour was an attempt to build a new coalition of those who found, all that was solid in their lives as being melted away. All the old Weberian and even Marxist traditional structures of solidarity, social structures were breaking down. People no longer lived within half a mile of their nearest relatives, there was this whole kind of breakdown of the solid structures of society’ (participant 4).

By this means, New Labour’s refined modern class message impacted on Labour voters in North-West Cumbria similar to how it impacted on Labour voters in any other industrial area. This was undertaken for the most part by creating an intra-district class divide, but on more focussed class terms which theoretically was a compromise between traditional and atomised perspectives.

The above noted interview participant from Allerdale, stated that the contemporary Labour Party (Post New Labour) from a traditional spatial analysis, should, as Hasan & Macintyre (2011), and Prince (2016) allude, and Thorpe (2011) quote, ‘be embracing these disparate communities and uniting them as the vanguard of a new 21st Century’ communal ‘Labour Movement’:

‘Jamie Reed (Labour MP for Copeland) has an interesting thing of what Labour needs to do, it needs to reconnect with the Rugby League, lower division Football League towns in this country, the Carlisle’s, the Swindon’s, the Darlington’s, the Doncaster’s, the Crewe’s, the industrial towns not the metropolitan’s, not the Greater Manchester’s, the Birmingham’s, not the big metropolitan cities, the city regions, but the towns like Carlisle’ (participant 4).

It seems to be, following the geographic areas in which they are winning local elections, that the Conservatives concentrate their support in the less dense rural areas, whereas Labour supporters are economically assembled within the urban heartlands. In view of that, crucially, if it came down to a choice between campaigning in an urban area and campaigning in a rural area, the party in North-West Cumbria clearly promotes a ‘spatial’ strategy to maximise electoral political capital. The opinion prevails that they would campaign in an urban area because following the spatial prioritisation agenda, it numerically would be more productive as they believe the majority of their core working-class supporter base are located there. This would have the effect of increasing the chances of maximising their vote in such environments and by this means, keep the party’s electoral representation strong in those areas. In contrast, as by and large referred to by Bell (2006), and Griffiths (2007), rural areas are sporadically spread spatially and realistically there would be limited expectations of there being any communal-styled class support within such geographic surroundings.

In urban areas, Labour activists for that reason, will spend far more time canvassing in urban Workington, as it follows their core, spatial class geographic outlook, than they would in rural Keswick. They also would determine an area as either urban or rural and campaign accordingly in such a place notwithstanding specific localities. This is powerfully emphasised below by the previously noted participant, who by representing an urban ward in a predominantly rural district of Allerdale, compares his general attitude towards the hypothetical situation where he was based in the chiefly urban district of Carlisle:

‘I would campaign in an urban part of Carlisle in exactly the same way I would in the urban part of Workington or Whitehaven or Barrow or Lancaster or whatever, and I would run a different campaign in Longtown and Brampton or in Aspatria’ (participant 4).

This spatial ethos which clearly defines Labour’s attitude to Urban/Rural politics is clearly still prominent, but since New Labour, the party have realised that class perception has become more complex, and been replaced with an atomised network thesis, where the relationship between class, political party affinity, and location, has become harder to discern.

The New Labour effect on Locale (North-West Cumbria): The Network

There is thus a recognition that the rise of this atomised network thesis in regards Labour's support has occurred on both a national as well as on a local level in North-West Cumbria, a view effectively voiced below from the insight of rural Allerdale:

'The change to New Labour would have been part of winning in rural areas, but also there was the extreme reluctance of people to continue supporting the Tory government that had run out of ideas, so therefore it was not just because of the class shift to New Labour that led to electoral improvement both locally and nationally, but it did make it more acceptable to some people' (participant 15).

Having a figure like Tony Blair as the modern charming face of the New Labour classless brand which developed a diverse societal network, was beneficial on a class level as it helped them win over the atomised voter who had previously voted for the Conservatives during the Thatcher era. This enabled the party to comfortably win the general elections of 1997, 2001, and 2005 (Giddens (2000); Pugh (2011)). Such a perception was not lost on three participants, who speaking in the context of differential Labour support in North-West Cumbria, recognised his appeal:

'I think he did have an appeal and he was totally different to anything that the Tories were offering as well, people were ready for a change' (participant 1).

'Yeah it must have done purely by the scale of the MPs that we returned' (participant 3).

'We managed to win in Keswick which is two thirds Conservative but the Labour candidate in 1997 managed to win here' (participant 6).

It is clear from these replies that if Labour in a broad sense, can have a balanced class perception and focus then they can transcend established class politics in North-West Cumbria. New Labour, as noted by Rubinstein (2005), and Heppell & Theakston (2013), offered a modern classless image which was a clear difference from the traditional Old Labour vision which encouraged a wider spectrum of people who were prepared to vote for the party. They, largely were enticed by New Labour's atomised-

styled brand; a classless network realistically open to anybody in any geographic area, a view maintained by two participants in urban Carlisle:

‘You then have this massive shift and yes support the urban, but you have to by some means encourage rural to become involved and support you, which is what Blair did’ (participant 2).

‘I think it was very much about selling the party to those people and to try and convert them to support the Labour Party’ (participant 8).

In their early stages, New Labour, as acknowledged by Hay (1999), and Russell (2005), managed to hold on to their core support and add on to it those wavering voters who might have voted Conservative in the past but were now comfortable with the classless image New Labour was promoting. This was a position stated below by two urban-based participants, firstly by a Carlisle, and then by an Allerdale Labour Councillor, as they both believed that the party during such an era, began to try and expand the atomised, Castellan network further away from its traditional class-based, urban-centric support roots:

‘I would imagine that there was a general appeal as far as, the electoral uprising did not just occur from what I would deem to be from the working-classes, there must have been an (atomised) appeal from a range across the board’ (participant 9).

‘Yeah it was more acceptable, maybe not acceptable, that is not the right word, but New Labour were offering everybody and anybody something that you could sign-up to if you lived in a rural area’ (participant 14).

Such an atomised, if not classlessness philosophy, which was triggered particularly during the New Labour era, has though at times failed. This is because the traditional class categorisations, no matter how outdated they may seem in contemporary society, still to some extent at least, determine broad perspectives over the issue and its subsequent correlation to political party affinity (Heffernan (2000); Minkin (2014)). If no party can please the whole electorate on contemporary atomised class terms, the question naturally arises whether they should return to communal class politics, or in fact instead look for different demographics. In addition, with the relative electoral success of the New Labour brand in rural areas both in North-West Cumbria (see

Table III) and within a nationalised context, there is a suspicion, as broadly noted by Robotham (2005), and Parker (2015), that such contemporary atomised class perceptions have led to a form of political party merging.

This is a perspective which would have been unthinkable in the previous communal class era. In this current complex classless era though, external sociological and political network factors such as where a person is geographically located spatially and the cultural implications that occur through this, can potentially affect political party affinity which then can lead to a merging of political convictions (Bell (2006); Howard (2011)). This position, inspired by the core spatial works of Castells (2000), was expressed by a research participant from an urban area, whilst discussing Labour's political representation on a generic scale in North-West Cumbria, where she suggested:

‘I have come across Labour politicians that really are Tories and Tory politicians who really are Right-Wing Labour’ (participant 1).

There are doubtless similar Conservative areas where activists join that party with the purpose of being active in local politics, but this viewpoint through this study has been expressed in the context of the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria. This classless dissection can also affect political representatives or prospective political representatives who do not have any strong political convictions on an ideological level but just want to play a part in local politics. This view, as noted below by four urban participants, claimed that they thought they would become hegemonised through geographic identity into the dominant network:

‘It is definitely blurring; the edges are blurring. There certainly is at least one city councillor who is a Labour councillor and I doubt if he is Labour; he is right-wing’ (participant 2).

‘I think it is easy to join whichever party. There were people locally here do it, there is a councillor on the City Council who joined a party because they want to represent the ward where they live’ (participant 3).

‘Yes, they would become Tories, but only if Labour defines itself in an Old Labour way. For example, I could point to several members of my own political party and even some Councillors in Cumbria County Council and Allerdale Borough Council who I keep thinking, that, “you’re only in the Labour Party because that’s how you get elected in your area, you don’t actually believe a word that the Labour Party believes in”’ (participant 4).

‘I have heard, I will not name names; a local politician got elected for a party that he is not really in full support of and I think if he could have got a seat to stand for his original political affiliation then he would have done but it never happened so he swung’ (participant 5).

These quotes seem to suggest that there is broad support that in such atomised class times there is a potential merging of traditional political affiliations. Labour representatives, as widely denoted by Butler (2014), and Clark (2014), certainly might be reticent in expressing their genuine political allegiance, be it over class or specific policy, because they perceive it to be a potential hindrance in obtaining support in a place such as Keswick in rural North-West Cumbria. They would instead, with the benefit of this new classless political era, stand as an ‘Independent’ and then after being elected, could vote with the Labour Party if they so wish. This would allow them to disguise to some extent their true ideological allegiances; a view noted by two participants from contrasting demographic backgrounds in North-West Cumbria, the former from rural Allerdale, the latter from urban Carlisle:

‘For some people, yes, I think certainly some people might conceal their true politics at a parish level, maybe even at a district level, for personal political advantage. If a person stood for the Parish Council or stood for the district, it may well be perceived to be politically advantageous to be an Independent rather than a Labour person because they may intrinsically feel that being a Labour candidate would lose votes’ (participant 6).

‘I mean I have seen such a situation occur in North-West Cumbria, I have seen someone who has been more left leaning as a Conservative councillor and you know, there are difficulties there, then they go and stand as an “Independent”, so yeah people do it’ (participant 9).

Interviewees were next asked to comment on their perceptions of the overall impact of such potential merging during the ascent of the New Labour brand. The party during the New Labour era, by and large became a catch-all classless party, in the Giddensian

tradition, one which tried to capture support in non-traditional rural areas, areas which previously were out of bounds to the Old Labour brand (Giddens 2002, and 2006)).

The following six quotes show that the success of such a philosophy has led to a gradual merging of political party affinity between Labour and the Conservatives, in relation to the wider electorate as well as to their potential political representatives:

“‘When in Rome do what the Romans do’, if you move to a particular place there would be pressure on you to conform to the culture of that place. If everybody washes the car on a Sunday morning, then curtains would twitch if you did not do it as well’ (participant 4).

‘I would find that really hard to swallow although it probably does happen’ (participant 5).

‘Oh, yeah absolutely, I think it is a danger for both (political parties: Conservative and Labour) and I think it is a reflection of something of this whole notion of political allegiance becoming less, if you like, wedded on one side or the other and that is a reflection of improving living standards for people definitely and it is also a reflection of the fact that our politics allows or has moved into a place where support is less structured’ (participant 7).

‘I think some people just want to serve their community, they are not actually that interested in the broader picture, they just want to be a local representative and make their community better and therefore you look at them and think they are not particularly political so they will, maybe opportunists are too strong a word, but they will go into whatever party will help them’ (participant 8).

‘Yeah, I think that could actually happen; if you move out to a rural area and you are a Labour voter but you are a soft Labour voter, absolutely you could well become a Conservative voter’ (participant 9).

‘I think this can happen, you do hear from time to time, “oh such and such is a Tory”, in an insulting way when he is actually a Labour Party member and as I said before, “if such and such were in a different place, they wouldn’t be Labour, they would be Conservative”. Yeah, I think so, there is bound to be people who think, “right what is the easiest bus to get on here’ to where I want to be”’ (participant 11).

This argument must be considered critically though, as there was common agreement with the research participants that this would likely reinforce such a hegemonic ethos. In practical terms, this would occur if a Labour voter is surrounded by many other Labour voters, be it socially or geographically, as it would in general simply reinforce their spatial or atomised network perceptions. If a person moves out to a small rural village maybe because they get employment at Sellafield or somewhere else, they may be surrounded by new neighbours and friends who may commonly be less inclined to vote Labour. Such a potential locale shift may gradually atomise them on both a social and/or political basis, for they could come to see themselves as an individual entity in their own right rather than being part of a collectivised group (Hart Davis (1997); Bernard (2005)). The consequence of this is that they might find that their previous communal class ethos is hegemonised by a classless perspective, as testified below from a general rural perspective:

‘Yeah, but you would probably reinforce each other so if you are a Labour voter and you are surrounded by a lot of other Labour voters then that will reinforce your opinion basically. If you move out to a small village and your neighbours and friends may be less inclined to vote Labour and then you might find that your own attitudes are questioned’ (participant 6).

The corollary is that their political class affinity has been compromised through the locale in which they reside. They have become individualised in their perspective, as their political party allegiance is affected by New Labour’s atomised and consumerist underpinnings like individual status and area, and not by ideological principle fostered through a clear class background, which was the theoretical feature of the collectivised Old Labour class era (Hay (1999); Ludlam & Smith (2000)). Such sentiments were greatly supported by a Labour representative in urban Carlisle:

‘Oh yeah, I think again, if we go back to Old Labour in the 1960s, and 1970s, it was very much, “this is your background, this is your political party”, and it was inherent, but now it’s like, “I’m doing this, this is my choice, so I’m changing”’ (participant 14).

In this thematic category, the relevance that the ‘atomised’ and/or ‘classless’ class culture has had in relation to Labour support on a local level was ascertained, chiefly comparing urban to rural areas in the context of North-West Cumbria and with that,

the possible subsequent political effects which may occur. The Labour Party though still feels more comfortable in traditional urban areas, for that is where the majority of their potential class support is still based. This perception is shared with a common acknowledgement that there has still been a clear rise in atomised class culture in contemporary Britain.

In regards North-West Cumbria, the New Labour classless brand was still deemed appealing in once non-traditional areas, hence differentiating it from their previous more communal Old Labour guise. There is some blurring in relation to the traditional class, political lines in North-West Cumbria, which to some degree has led to a merging of the ideological and class divisions (Savage (2015)). Such blurring is further supported by the general analysis that an atomised class shift has weakened the individual's long-held political and sociological perceptions, which can result in their view of class being fragmented and atomised mainly through external, non-political matters such as relocating area.

The findings confirmed the core perspectives of each of the major theorists but extended their findings through correlating them together via a broad theoretical framework. It informed the topic very effectively, as by outlining the theoretical positions of the respective theorists in their respective themes it demonstrated a clear thematic link to the phenomenon being investigated. This provided a distinct basis for the thesis overall as it allowed for the connection of such analysis to the primary findings, thus generating outcomes which were well supported and correlated to a range of core literature previously undertaken in this field (s) of research.

In respect to the context of the data garnered within this study, there is a sharp correlation between, hypothesis, theory, and practical analysis. It follows, that modern social class groupings, as documented by Giddens (1997), and Diefenbach et al. (2013), are more complex and atomised than 'working-class' and 'middle-class', predominantly following the logic of the cultural categorisation (Savage & Devine (2013)). The concept of 'classlessness' as a broad term, exists, for as class perception has become so fragmented via the promotion of the atomised ethos of the late 1970s, it has made such a concept more realistic to comprehend. This position although relevant in broad theoretical terms, is pragmatically considered by most of the North-

West Cumbrian Labour political representatives as erroneous on a generic level within contemporary Britain.

The concept of social class in contemporary Britain is thus structured within more categorisations which are more atomised and thus harder to define than the communal model. This is further enhanced by cultural class divisions such as education, economics, materialism, and aspiration that were born out of the rise of such structures. In general, people still refer to these traditional groupings, because they are the core communal class categories which can be defined and understood; in this manner, the idea of classlessness as defined by Giddens (2002, and 2006) in modern British culture is far too vague a concept to be deemed viable in such terms. The Labour Party's class consciousness has developed with that of society at large as the party is primarily class-based, but as time has advanced the party has altered its accustomed stance. Old Labour was communal in its social class outlook as it defended the political concerns of the working-classes. New Labour in contrast embraced the new brand culture promoted by Bernays and the New Right a decade hence. They developed a classless political brand which was very effective both nationally and locally, especially within the context of North-West Cumbria where contemporary social class support for the Labour Party became more adaptable.

This atomised shift in class politics in the context of the Labour Party and the formation of the New Labour brand culture occurred when Tony Blair became party leader. The feeling that by the mid-1990s Labour had shifted from their communal Old Labour discourse and had become a fully-fledged apostle of the contemporary atomised, post-Thatcherite initiative was crystallised, 'primarily by Blair himself, when he consistently spoke of his genuine admiration of Mrs Thatcher as a "radical, not a Tory"' (Seldon, 1997, p.595). More importantly though, as Stephens (2004) notes, 'he remade the landscape of British politics' because he was the first Labour leader to make sizeable inroads into traditional Conservative electoral territory'. He derided the old communal ideological outdated divides between the centre-right, representing the interests of the traditional middle-classes and the centre-left, representing the collectivised interests of the traditional working-classes. He instead embraced the values of progressive communitarian style politics while crucially discarding the accumulation of traditional class-based socialist dogma which had

dominated Old Labour discourse. This, with the rise of Thatcher and the New Right atomisation ethos, as Stephens (2004) continues, ‘had played a seismic role in the party’s electoral downfall for the previous two decades prior to the formation of New Labour’ (Stephens, 2004, p.3).

This atomised marketing shift from Old to New Labour was thus very successful in regards consistently winning general elections. In regards a general localised perspective and specifically that of North-West Cumbria, the New Labour classless brand was also deemed more appealing in non-traditional class areas than their Old Labour predecessor. This though in the long-term had its negative consequences, for, as commented by Hay (1999), and Griffiths & Hickson (2009), the New Labour consumerised brand became tarnished, as by endorsing marketing techniques they began to be compromised. This situation arose because they were to some extent, seen as ideologically erroneous; they were ‘professional politicians’ who naturally embraced this new classless framework. There then also followed a clear blurring of the traditional class, political lines according to the research participants in North-West Cumbria, which has led to a merging to some degree of the traditional ideological and social class divisions.

Post New Labour under the leadership of Miliband and particularly now under Corbyn, were, and are, not clear what their class focus or image/brand should be. There was, and is, confusion on whether they should promote historically rigid Old Labour class politics or the more atomised New Labour class perspective. Unlike their previous Old and New incarnations, Post New Labour is a continuing brand and consequently their position in relation to the contemporary class structure is still yet to be defined. Such a position, as noted by Hasan & Macintyre (2011), and Seymour (2016), has led to the party being naturally unclear about their class position. Ed Miliband sought a compromise between Old and New Labour, but Jeremy Corbyn with his focus on poverty and social issues has moved towards a more Old Labour trajectory.

In general terms, Post New Labour’s confusion over class is a symptom of contemporary political, class times where political allegiance has become less class or location conscious, and more brand orientated or personalised. Some affluent manual

workers may even have joined the middle-class; by this means consolidating the so-called ‘embourgeoisement’ theory. Such blurring is further supported by the general analysis that an atomised class shift has weakened the individual’s traditional political, class perception towards a more complex modern cultural perspective, which consequently can be affected by external issues such as relocating area. Even so, despite the rise to prominence of this modern fragmented class, political culture, the party in the Post New Labour era still feels more comfortable following the traditional spatial analysis (Althusser (1970); Lefebvre (1974); Harvey (2010)). They, in the main, prefer campaigning in an urban constituency rather than a rural one because their time-honoured working-class base support is chiefly located within urban areas, this is evident in North-West Cumbria. By this means, their geographic differentials are slight, making the urban-rural split intra-district, rather than a comparison between the two districts. In dispersed rural areas, as for instance in the outlying rural parts of Carlisle and Allerdale, the party needs to adopt a stronger localised communications strategy which deals with the specific needs of the rural community at large so as to show the local inhabitants that Labour understands their area’s specific concerns and accordingly can adapt beyond their natural urban hinterland.

This clear definition of geographical areas within North-West Cumbria needs to be stated to enable the urban-rural division within the two districts to be analysed and evaluated in its most accurate context. The prominence of the New Labour brand in contrast to Old Labour, led to creating a classless network support in non-traditional Labour areas like in rural North-West Cumbria. This lead to some extent, a merging in political values between customary political left and right positions, as the parties being less divided over hitherto stereotypical class loyalties, endeavoured to prioritise a wider section of the electorate. The result being, political representatives or for that matter general voters, that move from one geographic area to another, like that noted by the research participants within the context of both urban and rural North-West Cumbria, could be likely to change their pre-held personalised perception of class and accordingly their natural political affiliation (Savage (2000, and 2015)). There is then a search for class consciousness, as measured in terms of political beliefs or class self-placement, to demonstrate the continuing salience of class subjectivity in modern society. Such Marxist writers though such as Korpi (1983), proceed to argue that it is only the absence of an appropriate political agency, which is normally a role given to

the Labour Party in Britain, that prevents the working-class from becoming a major force for revolutionary social change.

The objective is perhaps rather more prescriptive as the thesis endeavoured to highlight a range of issues which, though perhaps characteristic of a new political science of Labour politics, have arguably tended to be overlooked or, at least are insufficiently developed in the political analysis of Labour. In addition, ‘that such change has not already occurred is usually interpreted to be the result of ideological and organisational failings of these political agencies and their inability to nurture the latent class consciousness of their natural supporters’ (Scase, 1992, p.2). If this study plays some part in encouraging dialogue between such competing contemporary class interpretations of Labour be it Old, New, or Post New, then the party might benefit from the unleashing of such knowledge on a national as well as from a local perspective. This is an acutely opportune time for such reflections, as contemporary political analysis is perhaps more conscious than it has ever been of its most core analytical assumptions.

In summary, the objective of analysis like that used in this chapter was to highlight a series of key theorists, connect them to a relevant theme or themes and emphasise the relationship that their works have in regards the subject in question. In such analysis, it is not so much the empirical evidence as the selection of what counts as evidence in the first place that is the pre-determined factor, but the relevance of the interpretation placed upon such content to the wider thesis argument (Maxwell (2005); Cooper & White (2011)). This chapter overall provided a detailed description regarding the relevance of the first-hand interviews to the broad research themes analysed via secondary research as part of the review of literature. In the next chapter entitled ‘Discussion’, the research analysis, préciséd in this section, will be evaluated in greater depth and detail, to form an appropriate discussion to the core research themes examined within this study.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This chapter endeavours to use the relevant content outlined through the research findings and extrapolate it to the wider secondary research, structured through the three-themed phenomenon. This will be achieved in the first theme ‘Class/Identity’ by outlining how class has become more complex in contemporary society, where there has been a noticeable shift from the communal towards the atomised ethos. This leads on to the second theme ‘(Labour) Party’, which links such class atomisation to the broad effects it has had in relation to Labour support in general terms. The traditional Old Labour communal perspectives had post-Thatcher been made practically redundant, the party had to adapt to the new conditions to how the electorate defined their personal social class perspective, and consequently then related it to their natural political allegiance. This they did most successfully during the New Labour years, where inspired by the atomisation thesis of the New Right, they promoted a refined classless agenda which kept the party electorally viable. Such changes in the Class-Labour Party dynamic lead on to the third theme ‘Geography (North-West Cumbria)’, which analyses the relevance any potential shifts of this kind have had on a general locational perspective, with a particular emphasis on North-West Cumbria. The chapter concludes with a ‘Postscript’ evaluation of how Labour in its Post New Labour form, under the current leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, will develop in regards its future relationship with class, and how that might affect them on a specific localised basis. The first aim though, following this term of reference, is to evaluate how the meaning and subsequent categorisation of class has gradually become atomised in contemporary culture.

Class/Identity

The interviewees generally expressed strong views that people in Britain commonly still refer to class under the broad Marxian (bourgeoisie, and proletariat) and Weberian (owner, manager, and worker) vernacular. There is subsequently a perception according to the research participants, growing up in the early post-war era that class as a distinct concept followed the Weberian three-class category system (Whimster (2006)). They as a rule, consequently followed the standard communal

perspective that ‘working-class’ was a person who worked with their hands, known as ‘blue-collar’. In contrast, ‘middle-class’ represented a person who worked with their brain, known as ‘white-collar’ (Dahrendorf (1959); Lee & Turner (1996)). In many such cases, the clear point which must be stated is that the traditional Marxist distinctions or even the more contemporary Weberian distinctions are still, as stated by Derham (2012), and Brunn & Whimster (2013), to some extent, relevant in modern British vernacular.

Most interviewees noted that these stereotypical communal class terms were quickly cast aside and overtaken by a more concise and relevant theme; that class in contemporary Britain had moved beyond such expansive categories and become far more atomised, and hence more complex (Savage & Devine (2013)). The relationship between ‘class’ and the ever-increasing complexities of modern British society is a view verified, as with all quotes denoted in this chapter, by a range of North-West Cumbria Labour Party participants within this study, both from an urban and rural locality. The form of such complexities, as remarked by Butler & Savage (1995), and Caffyn & Dahlstrom (2005), is similar to that noted in contemporary cultural discourse of Bourdieu (1992), and his modern protégé Savage (2015), as there are simply a variety of class positions and categorisations in which people can clearly identify themselves with now. In addition, as the research participants consistently referred, and Cannadine (1999) quotes, ‘to write the entity of class out of British history and British life is to disregard or misunderstand one of its central themes’, that being of categorised identity, be it communal, cultural, or atomised.

In its post-war peak, as the research participants concluded, the issue of class and its connection to political party affinity was the sole defining factor in determining political party affinity. This dominant narrative, communal and simplistic in its nature, is today deemed erroneous in the post-Thatcherite era where such broad class divisions and thus their once natural political connections are seen as outdated and irrelevant. In its place instead, there is the atomised version of individual fulfilment which has taken primacy over that of the one-dominant communal vision of society.

Such an approach indeed may prove particularly valuable in reaching fresh understandings of the most recent ideological transformation of the party from Old to

New Labour, which is a complex political problem which requires continuous analysis and evaluation. Old Labour, as alluded to by Diamond (2015), and quoted by Kelly (2010), ‘was at its most powerful when it spoke to a clear sense of national purpose and gave expression to the cultural’, as well as the communal class identity of working people. This type of culturalised class politics in this sense, as the research participants noted and Kelly (2010) stated, ‘lay in articulating the aspirations and culture of the broad mass of voters’. It was, as Kelly (2010) continues, ‘mainly white, mostly male, and unashamedly collectivist. In Britain, this endowed Labour with a social patriotism for much of the post-war period and helped maintain its affinities to its working-class base’. The primary research confirmed that, as Kelly (2010) notes, ‘the decline in traditional industrial working-class communities’, as the research participants asserted, ‘with the patterns of life and historical memory they maintained, levied a high toll on Labour’s class self-identity, cutting away’ the communal foundation ‘on which the party’s core support was built’.

Above all, far from following the Marxist structure of joining together to overthrow their capitalist overlords, they as the research participants stated, became atomised and fractured into a plurality of different roles which lead on to different interests. Equally ‘subversive of this traditional perception of class has been the rise to prominence of postmodernist literary theory which was promoted by the discovery of the “linguistic turn”’ (Cannadine (1999)), like that alluded to by Stedman Jones (1976, and 1983), which promoted the atomised class, political ethos from a Marxist literary standpoint.

The research participants following such a more complex, classless, political structure, as quoted by Cannadine (1999), ‘no longer regarded class as the study of the vexed Marxist communal relations among land, capital, and labour, and of the political conflicts arising out of them’. Equally, as Baert & Carreira da Silva (2009), and Mount (2012) state, they see class as the study of the language that people used, and their material consumerised ambitions and locales where they resided. Such contemporary atomised constructs provided the principal source of their social and political identities, as class was still a definable entity in itself, but in modern times it was categorised in a far more atomised perspective.

(Labour) Party

The ‘lessons from this’, as reflected by Davison (2011), ‘are firstly that hegemony was actively constructed, it was not inevitable, and secondly that the left could also set about constructing a project that tapped into popular thinking with a view to mobilising around a different’ set of fragmented class, political aims. In relation to this research phenomenon, the preeminence of the individual as a consumer or a brand in itself surpassed the rigidity of historically broad class groupings which were beginning to be seen as tired, outdated, and irrelevant to the common needs of the atomised, individual citizen as the 20th Century came to a close.

The second issue concerned the effectiveness with which ‘the idea of a hegemonic project is to take the elements of good sense that already exist and articulate them together to create new ways of making sense of the present, embodied in a political programme’ (Davison (2011)), which focused on the benefits of the individual over that of the society in which they reside. By the 1980s, as the research participants professed via first-hand perspectives of having lived through such times, Thatcher and her advisers and supporters in the communications and media industry had transported the atomised desires of the individual to the very centre of the political mainstream as she encouraged business to take over from government the role of fulfilling the needs of the people (Jackson & Saunders (2012); Evans (2013)).

On a broader functional point, applying branding principles to a political party is effective if the brand is suitably developed to offer functional and emotional values to an electorate as part of its appeal. The New Labour brand, as the research participants affirmed, was developed, as enunciated by Driver & Martell (1998), and Fairclough (2000), as part of the modernisation of the Labour Party, which occurred of necessity between 1983 and 1994. The class shift within the context of the Labour Party occurred during this time with the atomisation of class categorisation. This view, in accepting the more complex nature of class divisions needed to create a brand that could electorally cater to satisfy an extensive swathe of the newly materialised, atomised consumers. The party, as the research participants elucidated, thus had to shift and change in some major ways, partly because, as asserted by McSmith (1996), and Thomas (2015), they needed to be more brand-orientated, and accordingly seen as more plausible to the modern electorate.

This is well exemplified as the participants recalled, in the case of Tony Blair himself, who following the stance taken by his Conservative predecessors Margaret Thatcher and John Major, was an ideal personality to be Labour leader and prime minister for the contemporary atomised times. Blair was not saturated as the participants claimed, with Labour's archaic language and categories of class, and as a result inevitably expressed no ambition to promote communal class consciousness or to incite such class conflict. He was above all interested in talking about a classless consensus amid an atomised categorisation; hence, standard Marxist class categorisations like those portrayed by Miliband (1961), act as an outdated irrelevant political class obstacle to such contemporary discourse. This, as the participants described in general terms, explained Blair's determination to rid Old Labour of its 'Marxist intellectual analysis', with its 'false' perception of class, a categorisation which was always out of kilter with the real atomised contemporary world.

New Labour's attitude towards embracing the ever-changing atomised structure was pragmatically realistic. They, as the research participants agreed, realised that the traditional, collectivised working-class, for whom the party had previously depended upon for political viability, was disappearing. The new political argument as the research participants in the main claimed, is not focused on social class as an entity in itself as was the formerly perceived wisdom during the Old Labour era; instead it is about classless social mobility (Giddens (2002); Pugh (2011)). The rise of the classless New Labour brand as all the research participants believed, demonstrated the increased importance of communications in modern British politics. In contemporary times, political allegiance has clearly become less communal class conscious and more brand orientated or personalised. New Labour's success at shifting the party away from such traditional leftist values, as noted by Butler & Savage (1995), and Toynbee & Walker (2005), demonstrated the resilient strength that reactionary, atomised conservative politics such as that promoted by Thatcher and the New Right played in regards to the relationship between social class and political affinity in Britain.

The view that rigid class associations cause political parties in Britain to struggle to gain meaningful support is a strong example of class dealignment, that being, a

weakening in the association between social class and political party affinity, is taking precedence. This theory, as noted by Joyce (1995), and supported by the research participants, was consistently illustrated during the 1980s when the Labour Party in opposition to the Thatcher administration, was for the most part, seen as an old fashioned, antiquated, communal party. The prime aim was to champion the wellbeing of the shrinking electorate who saw themselves as part of the traditional working-classes and their collectivised interests. It did not, as the research participants emphasised, appeal to the growing number of white-collar employees and failed to adapt their policy or image to cater for the more atomised class stratification, which saw people gradually move away from conventional class loyalties and concerns, a shift which took root during the Thatcher era.

From the mid-1990s the Labour Party, after nearly two decades of opposition encompassing four successive general election defeats, decided to draw a dividing line between its past (Old Labour) and its present and subsequent future (New Labour). Everything connected with Old Labour on a class level, as the research participants reluctantly but firmly admitted, was as Northedge (2013) noted, ‘communicated as archaic, socialist rhetoric. This was contrasted with the contemporary New Labour communications image of embracing the accumulation of wealth through the promotion of the laissez-faire capitalist societal framework’. By this means, participants confirmed Giddens’ (2000) view ‘that Labour’s continual rejection at the polls, Labour or New Labour felt the need to shed themselves from working-class institutionalised internal forces. An example of this would be the overbearing influence of the traditional, collectivised class centred influence of the Trade Unions and Clause IV, which followed Marxist class discourse, that being that the workers should control the means of labour production. A move to the political-centre was consequently required for the party to have any chance of reclaiming government office’ (Giddens, 2000, p.43), and as a result, a more refined classless perspective which is concentrated upon in Giddens’ Third Way, became a clear path for the party to follow.

These findings ‘stand behind the disquiet of Third Way politics and its connection with the political-centre’ (Giddens, 2000, p.43). ‘Third Way politics by its nature is moderate, and those who are divided within the traditional left-right political struggle

and the stereotypical class allegiances which derive from such a divide, consider the centre to be ideologically weak' (Giddens, 2000, p.44). This is mainly because it enabled them to be seen as more appealing to a sizable portion of 'Middle England', which according to Prideaux (2005), and Rentoul (2013), the Old Labour brand simply could not attract. Such broad class politics, as detailed by Panitch & Leys (1997), and Beech & Lee (2008), though had an electoral price, for as time passed, their long-established core working-class support became disenfranchised with the classless New Labour ethos. This was demonstrated as the interviewees claimed, and Northedge (2013) also quoted, 'that after thirteen years of power from 1997 until 2010, and with the continual political and personal scandals, as well as the enduring disaster of the Iraq War, the New Labour classless brand by the start of the second decade of the 21st Century had become significantly tarnished'.

Following on from this though, despite its gradual decline, the 'New' brand, as several participants stated, was, and is, as further noted by Northedge (2013), 'seen as crucial to the party's general acceptability to the wider electorate'. The party's marketing shift as noted by the research participants both at a general national level, and also supported by their first-hand localised knowledge of North-West Cumbria, had prevailed, for during the New Labour era, 'the party represented brand values of modernisation and victory. They, by doing so, discarded out-dated and unattractive traditional Old Labour brand values of socialism and defeat' (Northedge (2013)).

It is a consequence of such a branding success that Miliband and latterly Corbyn, have decided that the ideological political shift has occurred and thereby the party cannot be accused of representing irrelevant traditional socialist values. The 'removal of the "New" brand does have some ideological undercurrents, Blair in his autobiography (2010), criticised the party's 2010 general election campaign for not embracing New Labour values, claiming that it offered a genuine new political direction and was not just a sophisticated marketing gimmick' (Northedge (2013)). The initial success of the New Labour brand as the research participants concluded similar to Blair (2010), was very symbolic as it demonstrated the clear shift both policy and image-wise that the party had made from Old to New Labour. It was though not an empty gesture, for the "New" marketing prefix', as many research participants alluded to, despite its electoral victories, is seen as 'more than a meaningless tag in front of the name of a

party' (Northedge (2013)). This advancement in brand politics during the New Labour era, had notable effects on Labour's support on a specific locational basis.

Geography (North-West Cumbria)

The 'social class structure of modern Britain', as a number of the research participants stated, and Cannadine (1999) notes, 'was more elaborate, and also more integrated, than Marx had allowed' in his theory which stated that the conflict between the classes was the direct, inevitable consequence of a repressive capitalist system which in the end determined the nature of the political structure. In regards North-West Cumbria, and within the districts of Allerdale and Carlisle, this traditional outlook is supported as the party generates the bulk of their class support from the more industrialised habitual 'working-class' urban areas. They by this means, struggle within the more fragmented class outlooks stereotypically portrayed in rural areas. Such perceptions coincided with the already stated belief by the research participants that the party feels more comfortable campaigning in urban rather than rural areas. The data demonstrated that Labour Party political representatives recognised that they as individuals, and the party in general campaigned differently communications-wise, in an urban area than they did in a rural area, outlining the urban-rural Marxist spatial ethos of Althusser (1970), Lefebvre (1974), and Harvey (2010). This is evident in North-West Cumbria where the divide in this context is for that reason based on area rather than district, this occurs as the hypothesis stated and the participants supported, because although Carlisle being predominantly urban and Allerdale being predominantly rural, they both have substantial rural and urban areas in their respective districts.

The participants overall therein allowed stereotypical conventional class norms to dictate their behaviour in regards campaigning in what they considered to be a core or for that matter, a non-core locale. This perspective contradicted the widely-held conclusion that New Labour had a meaningful effect on destroying such class-locale assumptions in North-West Cumbria. This is because there is a sense, as Thacker (2009), and Parker (2015) stated, that as traditional class categorisations have disappeared this inescapably has led to a gradual dilution of its stereotypical relationship with respective political party affinity. This contemporary predominance of atomised class culture connotes that political parties have become further

ideologically merged, and consequently class perception has become more individualised and less communal.

It must be stated all the same, that Labour in its current Post New Labour pretext, did a great deal of work in the rural areas in North-West Cumbria during 2015 compared to previous elections because of the increased degree of finance generated by the centralised party machine. This support in such individual cases as those stated above, cannot disguise the reality that Labour ordinarily, feel more class affiliation in a conventional traditional sense, with working-class urban areas over that of middle-class rural areas (Woods (2005); Griffiths (2007)). The party still to a large number of people who live in traditional rural communities, bears no relation to their specific area, as Labour from a class perspective, simply does not have any relevance in such surroundings. The reasons for Labour's general election defeat in 2015 both nationally and within a localised context of North-West Cumbria was that it fatally took for granted the traditional working-class categories which were the core basis of the party's support.

Althusser (1970), Lefebvre (1974), and Harvey (2010), through focussing on the relevance of the role of space and by questioning how such spatiality affects class perception and political affinity, examined struggles over the meaning of space and considered how relations across urban and rural territories were given cultural meaning. In the process, they attempted to establish the importance of traditional 'lived' grassroots experiences and understandings of geographical space as being part of a communal class, political context. Such theoretical connections between political affinity, social class, and geographic location, set the general tone for the comparative shift in Labour support from Old, to New, to Post New, in both a localised and national context. This account is replicated throughout North-West Cumbria, where for instance in an urban area like Denton Holme there is little chance of the party surrendering their electoral dominance. The same issue arises in relation to most rural wards like those which border Sellafield for instance (Blowers (1999, and 2016)), so in both Allerdale and Carlisle, where they still contest elections in such non-traditional areas, although they realise pragmatically that success is unrealistic.

In view of that, via a specific localised context that is in accordance with the rigid spatial class perspective, the party does not undertake much publicity in rural areas. This is because such a community is small-scale and particularistic in the sense, ‘that most individuals are known to most others and seen and judged as individuals’ (Hamilton & Hirschowicz, 1993, p.183), and hence more naturally akin to the contemporary political, class culture promoted by Bernays and Thatcher. Such communities, as observed by Sprinker (1992), and LeGates & Stout (2015), have an innate culture that promotes the concept of social individualism over that of social collectivism. This perspective is demonstrated on broad industrial-class terms, where workers in rural areas tend to be employed within small sectors like agriculture and farming which traditionally have more of a conservative ethos and are thus less trade union orientated. This is in contrast to the larger urban-focussed manufacturing sectors, which historically have had a greater level of collectivised action. They are thus less culturally suited to the traditional class structure promoted by Old Labour and were naturally more attracted to the atomised ethos promoted through the New Labour brand.

This communal class rigidity, like that noted by (Dahrendorf (1959); Shortell (2014)), was meant though to have been dismantled by New Labour’s inspired classless politics, where the party was supposed to be able to gain support in any area or locality throughout the country; but in regards North-West Cumbria, this concept has to some extent, succeeded. In short, the party was not as fixated on the urban/rural communal class divide which clearly is still prominent in North-West Cumbria, but instead was more focussed on defining a different type of class-based supporter through the ever-changing atomised class perspective taking root in contemporary Britain.

Prior to Blair becoming leader, in rural North-West Cumbria in places such as Keswick, the Labour Party had roughly one third of the electorate which could be relied upon, but as the New Labour brand and the communitarian, atomised network took hold, they gradually managed to perform electorally better in such traditionally Conservative areas. The New Labour brand was on the whole seen as less threatening in rural North-West Cumbria. This was allied to the fact that large sections of the electorate had become utterly tired with the then existing Conservative government, so

they as a consequence felt comfortable enough in its modernised brand to vote for the classless vision being sold to them by New Labour. Such sentiments lead to a perception that there is not a great deal of class or ideological difference between the two major parties (Giddens (2002, and 2006)). The interviews proved to be useful in examining the role and context of such potential political party merging through locale and as a result, all of the stakeholders representing the Labour Party in North-West Cumbria felt it to be an important issue which needed to be discussed. They were though clear in justifying this widely-held view that such a prospective class shift or merger would only occur during the classless New Labour years or, potentially in the still to be defined Post New Labour era.

It is perhaps plausible to argue as the research participants in North-West Cumbria state that some people doubtless just want to be politically active in their community; They are not acutely political, and hence the relevance of the traditional communal class, political divide is not of a high priority, so they will go into whatever geographic locale or ‘spatial’ (Shields (1998); Elliott (2009)), or party network, which will help them succeed electorally. These perceptions are meaningful in that, as Dear (2000), and Montag (2002) note, the arguments relate as much to the social as well as to the political effects. If a person, be it a political representative or for that matter a general voter, moves from an urban to rural setting be it in North-West Cumbria or anywhere else, with the aim of being enmeshed into the stereotypical class ethos of the area then clearly there is less reason for them to remain attached to any ideological commitments held by the Labour Party.

The standard perception as the research participants noted, was that more complex contemporary and atomised factors have become prevalent in regards to influencing political party affinity. Following the cultural class structure espoused by Bourdieu and later Savage, new factors were emphasised which in previous communal class times were deemed irrelevant, such as for instance someone’s gender, their ethnicity, the media they consume be it predominantly mainstream or social, and more importantly the geographic locale where they live.

Those espousing this atomised and classless thesis promulgated first by Thatcher and later by New Labour, certainly are correct in their assessment that the social class

structure, particularly within a political context, has changed. It is also perhaps true, as noted by Goonewardena et al. (2008), and Thacker (2009), that these structural changes have emboldened new class perceptions to arise. This thesis, again both within a national or a general localised or a specific North-West Cumbria context, suggests that class categorisation is still an important factor for individual voters, even if the relevance of such class divides is smaller than it once was. Voters in other words in these modern atomised times have become less tied to traditional, collectivised voting patterns, in that they are less likely to use such out-dated communal class loyalties as a short-cut to party choice (Giddens (2006); Tunney (2006)).

The power of this new atomised structure, which focussed on new political, class constructs like image and locale, in regards support for the Labour Party was most aptly demonstrated when the party returned to power in 1997. Labour at the height of the New Labour classless ethos could confidently assert, as Reynolds (2015) states, ‘for the first time in its century-old history, it was “the party of the countryside”, because it genuinely competed with the Conservatives for rural votes. The current electoral map of North-West Cumbria mirrors that of England at large, as it follows a pattern where the Conservatives dominate the rural constituencies and Labour the urban ones. This reflects an unhealthy urban-rural political divide that has rarely been more pronounced. Labour has not always been an urban party as in the early to mid-20th Century it was far more popular in the countryside than it is today’. In 1997, ‘even in the 50 most rural seats, Labour won 31.5 per cent of the vote against the Conservatives 40 per cent. Labour’s rural vote has shrunk dramatically and its urban vote expanded, as in 2015 Labour won an average of 41 per cent of the vote in urban areas, and just 18 per cent in the 150 least densely populated constituencies; as it stands, Labour holds nearly half as many rural seats as the Conservatives’.

This is a similar pattern in North-West Cumbria as noted in Table III, where support for Labour as a rule, in its Old Labour guise was for the most part urban-based, while support for the party in the county’s rural heartlands only improved once the New Labour classless brand took hold. The ‘stereotypical urban centric Labour alternative’, as Reynolds (2015) continues, ‘to such Conservative dominance in rural England, is not a viable electoral challenge; poverty, disempowerment, and cuts to

services in rural areas should improve the party's chances' in such historic, non-traditional geographic areas, but as the research participants stated, using their personal knowledge of the area that Labour in the context of North-West Cumbria, still gives the impression that the rural culture is contradictory to their urban centric political, class mentality. Today, much of Labour's current agenda, in the Post New Labour era, is still defined by urban-rural spatial antagonism, designed to appeal to their spatial urban base and not prioritise the needs of rural people (Griffiths (2007); Lees-Marshment (2009)). There is no doubt that Labour in both image and focus is perceived to be attuned to urban rather than rural interests, as has all too often been the case, there is not much sense, as alluded to by the Labour representatives in North-West Cumbria, that the party is markedly interested in rural locales. It, as Shopova (2014) states, 'is also worth remembering that Labour has only won general election landslides – 1945, 1966, 1997, and 2001 - when it has done well in rural Britain'.

Labour for that reason needs to promote an atomised class agenda, both nationally and locally, which means, as stated by Carter & Wright (1997), and Fielding (2003), the party placing priority in regards attracting rural, as well as urban voters. Labour must find a new idiom and a relevant class narrative which appeals beyond the spatial ethos and instead to the more complex network-styled rural vote, both locally as in areas such as North-West Cumbria but also within a national context, if they are going to succeed in capturing power. In 'truth, there are strong Labour traditions in many rural areas, but they have become lost or confused' (Shopova (2014)).

The record of Labour councils in North-West Cumbria is overall effective, but it could be doing a great deal more to trumpet its success on issues that matter exclusively to rural voters. This could happen, as noted by Labour representatives in rural North-West Cumbria, with the party activists being more visible in the local area and showing more interest in specifically rural concerns which previously have been neglected by the party. There should, as Clapson (1998), and Geary & Pabst (2015) clearly state, be a point in voting Labour in such locales, but for too long in many constituencies, these reasons have not been made clear. Lack of resources has also led to a focus only on those target urban seats which correlated with the traditional spatial ethos. It is too easy for Post New Labour strategists to see rural seats as out of reach, equally, while the party traditionally may not feel a natural class compatibility with

many rural voters since the New Labour era, they cannot simply write off thousands of voters as unwinnable.

This represented a clear move away from a traditional working-class supporter base concentrated within a redundant rigid social class structure, to the modern fragmented, widely culturalised framework (White (2001); Rosen (2005)). This caused a substantial scale of working-class divisiveness around the contemporary relevance of the connection between the atomised, localised network of social class and political party affiliation. The theories, according to the research participants for why such a situation has occurred principally within the context of North-West Cumbria was, as Weakliem (1991) notes, 'largely due to changes in social and geographical mobility. The prime reason being the movement from rural to urban allied to the tremendous growth of mass communications' which has promoted such class, political atomised discourse.

This chapter overall provided an expansive discussion of the relevance of the content dissected in both the secondary conceptual analysis and primary interviews in regards the research phenomenon hypothesised. The analysis by dissecting the critical fragmentation of the development of social class categorisations in Britain through the mid-20th Century to the present day, linked such demographic and social shifts to the changing perspectives of the Labour Party over the issue, and how it has broadly affected the party from the localised perspective of North-West Cumbria. In the next and final chapter entitled 'Conclusions', the research analysis, detailed in the previous two chapters, will be summarised to form an appropriate conclusion to the core research themes examined within the study.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is divided into two parts, the initial emphasis is placed upon a summary of the core analysis within the three-themed research phenomenon. Those findings state that social class in Britain has shifted from an historic communal construct towards a modern atomised one. This atomised ethos occurred on a broad political level with the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s, led to the symbolic Old to New Labour shift, which altered the party's general class perspective along such lines. Such a class shift has to some extent, made the party in the New Labour era more appealing to a wider class base than during the hitherto Old Labour years, particularly in non-traditional rural areas, where the traditional spatial perspective has been replaced by an atomised network structure. Such analysis leads on to the second part of the chapter which states a range of theoretical implications in regards the study as a whole. Directed by the research findings, the limitations of the research are noted, and several future research directions are also suggested to possibly advance similar studies in this academic field.

Core Analysis

The concept of social class has become more complex since the rise to prominence of the contemporary atomised communications and cultural networks which occurred in the latter quarter of the 20th Century and are still predominant until the present day. Class in contemporary Britain is accordingly getting evermore difficult to classify. On a more specific level, the findings in the main, correlated with the broad sentiments outlined by the research hypothesis, and by combining the theoretical approach from relevant theories within a distinctive three-themed phenomenon, this research thus has made a clear academic contribution to this field of expertise. The first of these themes was to determine what class means in a generic sense in contemporary Britain. The answer was that although almost all of the participants accepted the standard Weberian three-stage class model (working-class, middle-class, and upper-class), they also accepted the modern cultural thesis that class in 21st Century Britain is a more complex concept, with wider status gradations. They did

not accept though that within this more convoluted contemporary class structure that the concept of ‘classlessness’ although theoretically viable, is practically realistic.

A further reason why class, political relations in 21st Century Britain are more complex is because it is mostly centred on the concept founded through the works of Bourdieu (1990), and refined by Savage & Devine (2013), of ‘cultural class capital’. Following such perspectives this study emphasises a need to shift away from traditional and long-standing concerns about historic, communal class groupings of middle and working-class, and instead argues that there is a new more sophisticated, pragmatic, and socially cultured way to analyse the nature of class in today’s Britain. This is where non-traditional class distinctions such as materialism, aspiration, and cultural taste have come to the fore, and as a consequence have had an important effect on how class is seen, understood, and categorised in modern Britain. There is a notable legitimacy about the accuracy and hence the overall reliability of such sentiments that state how class in contemporary Britain is more complex because of the possible predominance of such cultural class indicators like educational attainment or personal enrichment from a wider social context. This refined cultural class ethos has also above all placed greater emphasis on the relevance of locale, where people’s area surroundings, be it urban or rural, now are deemed an inherent part of their cultural make-up, and also their potential political party allegiance.

This complex class framework has had a notable effect on the Labour Party, whose contemporary support, naturally following the less rigid, atomised ethos of the post-Thatcherite era, have become less traditionally class orientated. This contrasts starkly with the communal class age of the Old Labour Party era, which in more simplistic times, fervently promoted the interests of the collectivised working-classes. This leads on to analysing how this atomised class context has affected the development of British politics, principally in relation to Labour support. The findings demonstrated that Labour, chiefly Old Labour, were very much regarded as a class-based party, but such characteristics clearly seem at odds in a modern Britain where class distinctions are notably more multifaceted and harder to define in relation to general political party affinity. The party, particularly after four successive election defeats between 1979 and 1992, aimed to counter such limitations. They did so by making themselves more appealing to a wider section of the electorate who with the advancement of the

Bernaysian-styled consumerist ethos saw themselves as individuals in their own right rather than being part of a collective social group.

The advance of such a contemporary communication culture coincided with the rise of the New Right on both sides of the Atlantic which paved the way for the concept of the political party as brand ready to be marketed for consumption towards an atomised voting public. Labour in this fashion under the leadership of Tony Blair created a New Labour brand which followed a modern atomised and classless agenda. This shift from the communal to the atomised structure characterised the classless New Labour brand, which was defined by not being tarnished with the out-dated class limitations of the Old Labour era. Such a consumerised shift from the historic Old Labour to the modern New Labour class brand was valuable because it led to unprecedented electoral success. New Labour's effective Third Way classless perspective though, it must be stated, was nothing new in itself as it was primarily borne out of such an atomised shift in class consciousness two decades before.

After the 2010 election defeat, the Post New Labour era was born, where the party has endeavoured on a class basis, to find a compromise between the positions of Old and New Labour. Post New Labour firstly under the perceived moderate leadership of Ed Miliband and later through the more radical helm of Jeremy Corbyn, have been trying to find a new class position to enhance their electoral validity and credibility. This, following two further electoral defeats in 2015 and 2017, is a journey which remains undefined and is thus currently open for future interpretation. This lack of clarity has occurred because primarily since the election of Corbyn, the party with its ideological shift leftwards has been torn between embracing both Old and New Labour values. They have for instance reinforced Old Labour principles of promoting the economic interests of a communal working-class electorate, whilst also accepting that such communal class divisions are still considered as erroneous in modern-day Britain, where class structures are determined by New Labour's post-Thatcherite, atomised categorisations. Following on from such events, this seemed an especially conducive time to compare the Post New Labour brand which in these current, complex, political, class times, is still in flux, as is its relationship with social class to that of its clearly defined Old and New predecessors. This is a research phenomenon and area which it appears has been starved of such polemic academic research of this kind.

The Labour Party in its current Post New Labour form though, according to the party's representatives in North-West Cumbria, are struggling to understand the appropriate position for them to hold in regards their conception of class consciousness. The party is currently trapped by their past behaviour over this matter, for in more simplistic communal class orientated times, there was little need for Old Labour to consider the relationship between politics, class, communications, and specific location any deeper than promoting the needs of their traditional core working-class support. This established social class context not only shifted with the atomised Thatcherite revolution, but was developed afterwards by New Labour through their classless rhetoric. This language of 'classlessness', by this means was a refined concept of atomised class individuality, through the works of Giddens (1987, 1994, and 2000). This refined class outlook had become a concept which drove a new model of politics; from traditional, simplistic, communal class politics towards a contemporary, individualistic, framework. It would accordingly be appropriate to state that this study builds upon work of a range of political social theorists like Bernays, Giddens, Althusser, and Harvey, who have contributed a great deal to the development of political, class analysis in Britain, both on an historical and contemporary academic level.

Even so, as regards examination of social class perception and subsequent political support, what works with one demographic may not work with another. Urban and rural communities, as Lefebvre and Harvey point out, have traditionally had distinct demographics and political priorities. Rural areas are normally more culturally conservative and hence less akin to Old Labour's collectivised class-based values than the more refined atomised or classless perspective promoted by the party in the post-Thatcherite era. There was a clear paradox on a North-West Cumbrian level, as the data demonstrated that Labour representatives recognised that they as individuals, and the party in general, prioritise their communications effort more robustly in traditional urban areas at the expense of their rural equivalents. This is in accordance with the Marxian spatial ethos that space, class, and political affinity are naturally interlinked. This also coincided with the traditional view that the party feels more comfortable campaigning in urban rather than rural areas. This divide in the context of North-West Cumbria is based upon urban and rural areas within Allerdale and Carlisle rather

than the two districts themselves which are in this regard, geographically mixed. By this means, perhaps inevitably, interviewees allowed stereotypical traditional class norms to dictate their behaviour in regards campaigning in a core working-class urban area or as the case be, not in a non-core middle-class rural area.

This perspective although relevant coincides with the widely-held conclusion that New Labour still had a clear impact on destroying such class-locale assumptions in North-West Cumbria. This broadly developed because the prominence of the New Labour classless brand in contrast to Old Labour, led to an emerging network or atomised class support, like that asserted by Manuel Castells (2012), in non-traditional Labour supporting rural areas. The rise of this more atomised class culture could have long-lasting localised consequences in areas such as North-West Cumbria, if not even nationally, as there is a sense that traditional class categorisations have disappeared. This invariably has led to a gradual dilution of its stereotypical relationship with respective political party affinity.

Theoretical Implications

Such findings as reported and summarised, have several theoretical implications as hitherto briefly noted in Chapter IV. The theoretical developments which describe the underpinned arguments in the literature have provided impetus for investigating the antecedents of the relationship between social class and political affiliation, specifically in relation to the Labour Party since the emergence of the New Labour brand. The thesis made contributions in the social science academic research field in a number of ways as it enabled such a distinctive three-themed phenomenon to be outlined, analysed, and evaluated through the relevant content of a range of social science theorists and local Labour political representatives in North-West Cumbria. They, with their respective second-hand academic expertise and first-hand practical experience, brought a clarity to the phenomenon being researched. This study thus overall has been successful in providing a distinctive form of phenomenological research. This was achieved from a locational perspective, where North-West Cumbria was as an area, ideal for such research, as it offered the right mix of political, sociological, and geographic variation, a quality required to bring a sense of variety to the research phenomenon being investigated. In addition, as well as offering a clear

balance of rural/urban classification, it was also a location which had been starved of any research of this kind.

Although acknowledging such limitations, this research though does exhibit an effective comprehension of the contemporary relationship between the relevance of social class, communications, and location to support for the Labour Party.

Measurement of the participants' and theorist's competencies, and knowledge and experience also represent a range of relevant research directions. The study made contributions to the academic research field in a number of ways, most meaningful of which being the development of a theoretical model/framework under a new empirical research setting drawn from a range of extant theories encompassing a variety of linked themes. These themes which determined the research phenomenon, offered a clear structure, for by applying such a broad correlation between both primary and secondary data, this study provided a solid foundation for future research avenues within this research field.

The prime objective of this thesis then has been to establish the potential contribution of an emerging new political science of British politics that is more reflective about such core analytical assumptions. A condition of so doing would be a far higher consciousness of, and greater reflexivity towards such analytical assumptions. If this can be achieved, then future studies of this kind will be better placed to focus attention on the strategies most appropriate for the Labour Party to follow so as for them to fully comprehend the relevance that sociological divisions play not just in North-West Cumbria but in other areas across Britain. The argument is stated simply, though its implications, if accepted, could lead to a more realistic dissection of complex contemporary class divisions and their subsequent relationship to political party affinity, be it Labour or indeed anyone else. This theoretical framework could be expanded to other major political parties, particularly the Conservatives, and then when such findings are developed, the next step would be to compare and contrast them to those of the original perspectives outlined in this research on Labour. This comparison could lead to a greater sense of class distinctiveness between the two potential governing parties in Britain.

A further distinctive feature of this thesis is its propensity to effectively measure in broad terms, Labour's adaptability in relation to its ability to adjust to the generic social class shift from the communal structure which dominated the discourse of the Old Labour era towards the atomised perspective of the New Labour brand. 'By those tests, the party led by Tony Blair was far less a party of social reform even than that led by Harold Wilson. New Labour deployed the buzzword of "modernisation" to good short-term electoral effect' (Callaghan et al., 2003, p.80), but was principally atomised in their class thinking, which brought into question the relevance that the communications machine placed upon any ideological loyalty to the traditional ethos (Butler & Kavanagh (1997); Labour Party (1997)). The New Labour classless brand, as acknowledged by Coulter (2014), and Bower (2016), would be forever differentiated from its Old Labour incarnation as it was borne out of this new post atomised era, an era which Post New Labour an evolving brand, is still endeavouring to characterise itself within.

Such class, political convergence is a symptom of an ever-increasing fragmentation of the traditional social class framework in Britain. An example being, where political party allegiance is far less rigid and as a result can be altered through other non-political aspects, such as shifting locational areas from urban to rural, this in relation to this study was notably emphasised within the context of North-West Cumbria. The New Labour brand and its shift from the communal class limitation of Old Labour to a modern atomised class perspective was effectual, for within North-West Cumbria the party became more palatable in once non-traditional supporting rural areas in both Allerdale and Carlisle. This sense of gaining support in unforeseen areas, and away from the traditional spatial ethos, was purported specifically in this study, where, as numerous participants outlined that Labour during the New Labour era, both on a national level and within the localised confines of North-West Cumbria, became more popular in hitherto traditional Conservative rural areas. The final outcome of this is a potential ideological and/or sociological dilution of an individual's political party affinity.

Such potential future research directions would though need to be centred within the core research objective at the heart of this research, that being in practical terms, analysing the tensions between different research methodologies and theoretical

frameworks, around the issue of class and political party affinity in modern Britain. At the heart of this in-depth research, there has been a focus on specific and unique research structures. This was achieved by placing analysis within distinctive research objectives. Firstly, through locale (primarily centring the research in North-West Cumbria). Secondly, by area (analysis of two North-West Cumbrian districts, comparing more rural Allerdale with more urban Carlisle) and thirdly with academic theory (connecting such methodological analysis through a phenomenological research structure). On a practical basis, such theoretical assertions of this kind have emerged with more robust evidence which has transformed the effect on knowledge and communication techniques within a confined localised environment. In this regard, academic practitioners may gain an additional insight as well as a possible future direction in the academic body of knowledge which is rooted in any subsequent study set within a similar research framework. The majority of the theoretical arguments achieved empirical validation through this study, which should be of interest to academic practitioners. Since a person's class and political party affiliation have been used in the literature as distinctive factors, the review highlighted that social science researchers address this issue through a variety of different contexts which inevitably will only strengthen future research in this academic field.

In summary, interviewees reflected through a broad perspective, on the relevance that such class atomisation has played in regards support for the Labour Party, both on a national level and also within the localised confines of Allerdale and Carlisle. The participants accepted that prior to Blair, the party consistently followed an ideological class structure that prioritised the concept that a communal-styled collectivist society should prevail over the rights of the atomised individual. They though, accept that since Thatcher and the rise of the New Right atomised class agenda, such an individualistic ethos has replaced the once-dominant communal structure, which had led to a clear blurring in how the new modern voter, socially atomised, and consumer-driven, determines his or her political affinity. This gradual class convergence of the parties coincides with the gradual class convergence of general British society. This is because, as broadly stated by Denzin & Lincoln (2000), and Bell (2006), and quoted by Kellner (2010), 'the majority of Britons, apart from the numerically small extremes at either side of the wealth scale, use the same social services, have the same domestic and financial predicaments, buy relatively the same type of products, and fret over the

same political issues'. It follows logically that post the emergence of the New Right they would see politicians of all parties through the same classless perspective, thus defining the clear atomised concept of contemporary political class culture (Giddens (2000); Garfield (2004)).

The general conclusion to be drawn from these participant interviews is that in the era of communal Britain, the standard Labour supporter both within a national British context and via a particular geographic perspective of North-West Cumbria, belonged to a completely different political value base which at its root was defined by social class, to the stereotypical Conservative supporter. In modern Britain, as Kellner (2010) asserts, 'with the effects of a gradual social class convergence, those above stated differences have been notably blurred. The differences in their respective stereotypical political values are still prevalent', but the traditional social class divisions have over time been eroded by the contemporary, atomised brand culture.

This less communal social structure is intertwined on an economic level where the economic emphasis is designed to benefit those of the Elite classes (Savage & Devine (2013)). In regard to the distribution of power in advanced capitalist societies there is indeed very good reason to believe that the current direction will become ever-more atomised (Castells (2000, and 2012)), with as Miliband (1989) states, 'a small number of people in the corporate world exercising effective network power over ever-larger conglomerates of economic resources. There is similarly good reason to believe that this concentration of economic power through an entrenched atomised social structure will be paralleled in the political realm, both because economic and social power spills over into political life' (Miliband, 1989, p.204), and also because of the further concentration of power in the elite class. In relation to the Labour Party or New Labour, according to the research participants both nationally and in the context of North-West Cumbria, such a loose and atomised political class concept could, because of its lack of traditional class loyalty, lead to a further rapid decline in the relevance of the party in a broad social sense. The brand being classless doubtless could provide greater opportunities to expand traditional support, but equally this could lead to strengthening a perception that the main political parties are merging on an ideological level.

It appears that for this to be analysed effectively in general terms through future research streams, Labour in its current Post New Labour pretext, must tackle the most arduous task of all, that being coming to terms with its contrasting political class positions which will enable them to gain electoral power. New Labour, as the research participants alluded to, was historicist in the sense that it propagated a particular revolutionary atomised vision of Labour history. This study has contributed to the literature by validating some of those themes in a comprehensive, analytical model. The primary interview data, as Miller & Dingwall (1997), and Richards (2014) maintain, extensively contribute to an understanding which is enhanced by knowledge and experience.

There are though outstanding questions about the study's concrete long-term impact, as the concept of 'social class' is a vital aspect of society but its contemporary categorisations are in flux and hence hard to determine in a clear and condensed fashion. Such class complexities, as confirmed by Rosen (2005), and Giddens (2006), have characterised the image of the British Labour Party with clear distinctive class concepts, Old Labour's traditional class perspective and New Labour's classless consumerism. This brand culture, as commented by Wring (2004), and Pinfold (2015), defined a post-Thatcherite political, class culture in Britain since the late 1970s which accordingly inspired New Labour to overcome traditional class barriers which had up to that point dominated the structure of British politics since the end of World War II. In view of that, the reason for undertaking such a class-based study in relation to the historical and contemporary perspective of the Labour Party occurs largely on a broad national, theoretical basis, instead of a narrow, localised outlook. This is because ideological shifts within political parties and explicitly that of the Labour Party, and the packaging which accompanies a message or a brand of that sort, is a continual evolving process, which affects the nation as a whole, and effectively is developed on a generational basis.

Such theoretical expansion could be further achieved by taking the form of questioning the relevance and subsequent impact that the contemporary atomised class has had in regards contemporary sociological and political discourse. The argument being, if this culture continues, it could have long-term electoral consequences, as with no clear correlation between class and political party affinity, the outcomes of

future elections could be less predictable and hence harder to discern and subsequently analyse. These complexities were deemed erroneous during the early post-war years where the communal class categorisations ordinarily complemented the standard political perspectives of party affinity in Britain (Savage (2015)).

Even so, with the rise of the class atomisation ethos, and with it the promotion of an individualistic brand culture, a question clearly remains in respect to the future role of class to political party affinity, both explicitly in relation to the Labour Party and also within a wider local and national context.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

The relevance of contemporary atomised social class structures to Labour support since the rise of the consumerist communications culture via a broad localised perspective is the foundation of this research study. By the same token, to fully appreciate such a research perspective, an understanding of the broad contours of urban and rural geography as well as their relevance to the specific area of North-West Cumbria is required.

Regionalisation: North-West Cumbria (Allerdale and Carlisle)

Urban and Rural

In the context of this study, a broad definition of urban and rural areas needs to be explored and outlined. Rural areas are those that are absorbed within a principally rustic landscape, that being defined as areas mainly situated in the countryside or deepest suburbia, which usually have sparse populations. This is contrasted with urban areas which are places located in either towns or cities and which by and large, are densely populated (Horton (2004); Woods (2005)). ‘Despite the continued spread of towns and cities, the geographic landscape of Britain is still chiefly rural, as whichever classification is used, less than one-third of the land area is classified as urban but these areas comprise of at least 80 per cent of the population. Rural/Urban classifications also allow differences to be identified between more and less sparse area types. An urban area is a human settlement with high population density’ (Pateman (2011)). Rural areas, in contrast, as noted by Atkinson & Moon (1994), and Agnew & Corbridge (1995), are often called ‘the country’, and ‘have low population density and large amounts of undeveloped land. In general, a rural area or countryside like for instance the locales studied in this thesis within North-West Cumbria, is a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities, hence being the opposite of urban areas’ (ONS (2015)).

Below in a series of quoted passages, is a brief historical perspective of the urban and rural history of North-West Cumbria, and a summarised passage focussing on the specific context of the districts of Allerdale and Carlisle:

Regionalisation in (North-West) Cumbria: An Historical Context

Pateman (2011) notes, both in relation to North-West Cumbria, and the whole North-West of England region generally; ‘from 2001 to 2011 the urban population grew faster than the rural’. This increased the possibility that Labour would immediately focus on generating their core geographic urban vote at the expense of the rural areas where they normally are not as successful as their social class network is weaker (Castree & Gregory (1996); Howard (2011)). ‘Where remoteness or sparsity can be shown, those who live in such rural areas are more prosperous than those who reside in urban areas across Britain’ (National Geographic Society (2016)). Areas ‘that are rural but less sparse show the highest levels of household income, and the lowest levels of poverty of any area type’ (Pateman (2011)). ‘The levels of people qualified to at least degree level or equivalent, following the cultural determinants of class through educational attainment or working in higher managerial or professional occupations, are higher than average in rural areas, but below average in urban areas’ (Savage & Devine (2013)). Within ‘the most deprived group of areas, such as in North-West Cumbria, people born in urban areas are expected not to live longer than those in rural areas, although there are rare numerical exceptions like for instance, in the prosperous urban areas in comparison to the less prosperous rural areas the opposite is found’ (Pateman (2011)).

It is important though to state the relevance of such stereotypical rural/urban perspectives with respect to a Cumbrian county context. For that to be understood clearly, a brief illustration of the county’s social class relations within a recently generic historical context is required. A productive way of elucidating the localised distinctiveness of Cumbria may lie within the shared geography and history of the territory and its impact on its specific character. ‘Sparsity of population’, as noted by Drury (1961), and Nicholson (1963), and quoted by Edmonds (2014), ‘and detachment from any major city affects the whole area as it is uniquely a blend of mild urban and rural’. In contemporary debates, it has customarily been interpreted as an opaque annex to the North-East or North-West of England executive regions (Defoe

(1974); Beckett (1982)). The County Council was created in the local government reforms of 1972-1974, replacing the hitherto historic county areas of Cumberland and Westmorland. Cumbria has, as stated by Redcliffe-Maud & Wood (1974), and Bryant (2003), with its small population of half a million, has consequently assimilated awkwardly into modern chronicles of economic regionalism and city-based devolution of political power.

In Britain, conventional county frontiers are the main perspective of localised identity but the recent noted history of the area of Cumbria, and particularly of the North-West of Cumbria, demarcates a much more nuanced outlook. Cumbria on a geo-political level, has largely been seen as a distant part of Britain. This follows the dictum, as noted by Searle (1983), and Wallenfeldt (2014), and quoted by (Aughey (2007)), ‘that regions like the North-West of England and their respective specific areas like North-West Cumbria, become more distinctive the farther they are from London. Such a perception exists broadly speaking, because of its physical location with it being the most north-westerly county of England’.

North-West Cumbria – A Geographic Perspective

‘Allerdale’s neighbours include Carlisle and Eden District to the east, and to the south Copeland and South Lakeland. The Borough is predominately rural in nature with an overall population density of 75 people per square kilometre compared to an average 480/km² in the North-West of England’ (Allerdale (2012)). This is ‘most noticeable in the north where settlements are small and scattered, while the main urban centres are located in the south. Around two-thirds of the area’s population live within the main settlements, with the remaining one-third of people living in the dispersed areas. Allerdale is a Borough of contrasts, some areas, especially in and around Cockermouth are considered to be some of the least deprived areas in the country with a high quality of life. This is compared to some neighbourhoods in the south of Workington and in Maryport which rank amongst some of the most disadvantaged parts of the country’ (Allerdale (2012)). ‘The Carlisle area is the most populated district in Cumbria (104,500). Council services are organised through the Carlisle district, with the city urban area providing the main centre both for the Carlisle locality and, to a degree, the County. In terms of skills and education, Carlisle’s average levels of standards are equivalent with the average for the North-West region

and average levels of health and wellbeing are comparatively low across the district. There are also geographical concentrations across some of Carlisle's urban wards where levels of educational achievement are low, and levels of unemployment are high. Carlisle is thus seen as an underprivileged area as there are pockets of deprivation, and this proliferation is demanding to cope with' (Cumbria (2012)).

The Distinctive Nature of North-West Cumbria

The Urban/Rural Spatial Context: North-West Cumbria – The Relevance of Class, Communications, and Industrial Isolation on Labour Support

A geographic focus to the area and county being studied in this thesis is necessary, so a map of Cumbria (Figure II – Cumbria County), with a demarcation of its six districts and its specific urban and rural demarcations (Figure III – Cumbria: Urban & Rural Demographics) is provided. This is supplemented with an extensive breakdown of the distinctive social and physical characteristics and how they are related to support for the Labour Party both in the context of the county itself and also specifically within the two North-Western districts of Allerdale and Carlisle.

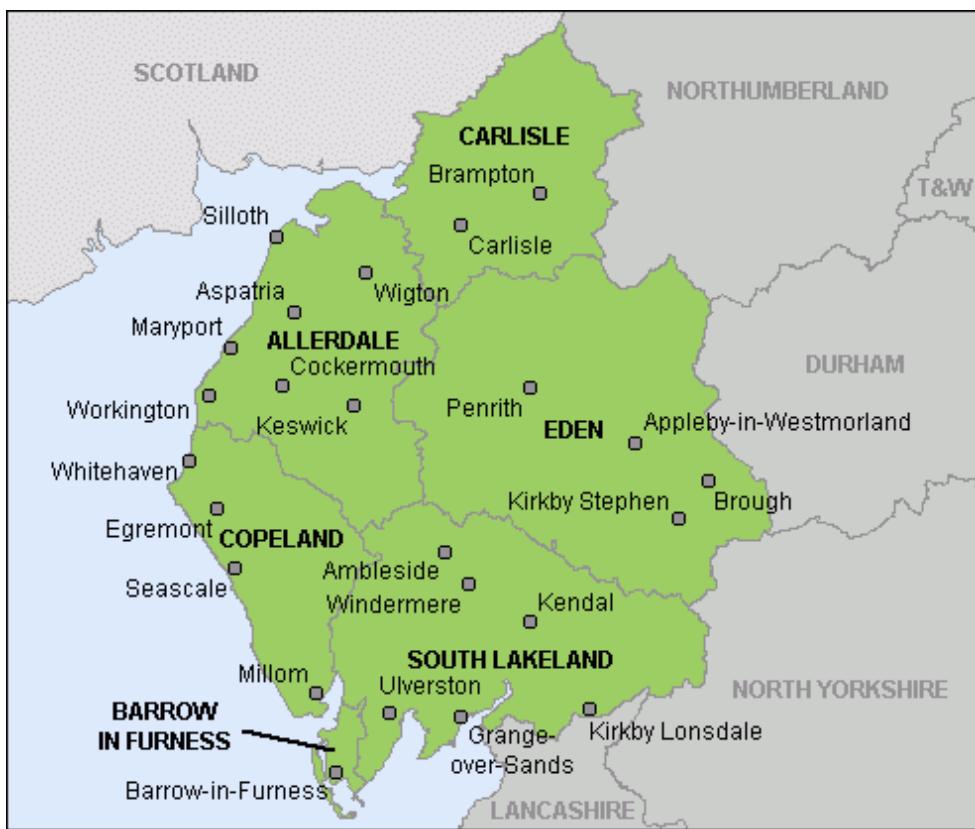
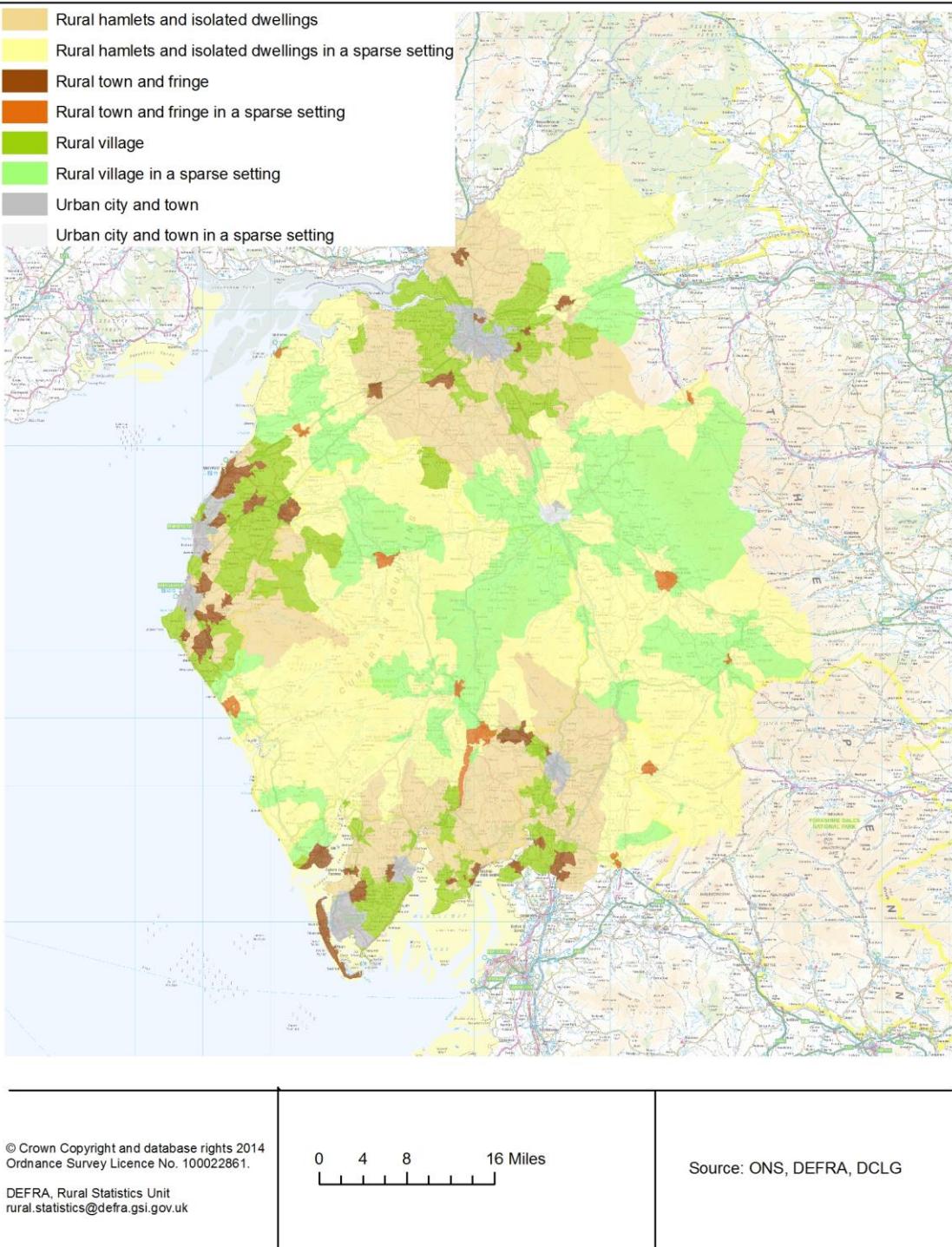


Figure II: Cumbria County

Visit Cumbria, (2015). 'Map of Cumbria and the Lake District',
<http://www.visitcumbria.com/map-of-cumbria/>.



Cumbria LEP OAs by rural / urban classification 2011



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DEFRA, Rural Statistics Unit
rural.statistics@defra.gsi.gov.uk

0 4 8 16 Miles

Source: ONS, DEFRA, DCLG

Figure III: Cumbria: Urban and Rural Demographics

DEFRA, (2011). 'Cumbria LEP OAs by rural/urban classification',

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270526/Cumbria_LEP_full_class.jpg.

The thesis though solely examines the ‘North’ Cumbrian district of Carlisle against the ‘West’ Cumbrian district of Allerdale. These two areas are not just linked geographically through a border boundary but are also connected politically as they both are chiefly traditional Labour supporting districts, albeit with a substantial number of traditional non-Labour voters as well (Winchester (1998)). Cumbria, above all North-West Cumbria, is a county which is distinct within Britain as it has a small populace over a large geographic spatial area. This arises largely, because it has a distinct mixture of urban and rural areas that have a mixture of industrial and agricultural employment sectors that affects their broad political perspective of Labour politics (Blowers (1993, and 1999)). North-West Cumbria thus is composed of both urban and rural geographic structures which define its overarching political outlook especially in relation to support for the Labour Party (Constantine (2006)). The specific area of North-West Cumbria comprises a range of small towns, which following the Marxist spatial construct (Althusser (1970); Lefebvre (1974); Harvey (2010)), are more rooted in the Old Labour communal class ethos. Equally, the rural villages are more akin to the atomised, classless perspective predicated through the New Labour era.

This is demonstrated within the context of North-West Cumbria where the district of Allerdale being by and large a rural industrial area, is consequently policy-wise, more suited to the post-Thatcherite atomised agenda. This is demonstrated for instance in regards housing tenure, where the number of owner-occupied households in such areas are more common than in their urban equivalents like Carlisle. They are for the most part, more likely to follow the privatised, atomised ethos (Bernays (1955)), developed first by Thatcher, and then by New Labour (Giddens (2000)), instead of the communal society-driven ethos which was the hallmark of the Old Labour era (Heffernan (2000)). Carlisle, contrastingly, being a small city, and in general terms more susceptible to poverty, is focused within more of an Old Labour communal working-class tradition. There is a similarity of social class classifications within both districts as both are chiefly traditional working-class within the urban heartland with a sizeable minority of middle-class mainly based in the rural outskirts (Cumbria (2012)). Carlisle is mainly urban but the district is partly rural, while Allerdale is predominantly rural in nature but does have urban areas (Allerdale (2012)). It would be practically illogical to contrast these two districts that make up North-West

Cumbria as being either urban or rural, when the dominant feature of both is that they are mixed geographic areas in this regard. The urban areas in both districts could be described as ‘blue-collar’ industrialised areas in the Weberian vernacular (Dahrendorf (1959)), which lead to a natural communal ‘spatial’ class association with the Labour party, as it is those workers who make up their core support. In contrast, as alluded to in the above descriptions of both districts, and through the Marxist socio-geographic spatial construct, their respective rural areas are areas where traditional Labour support has been harder to acquire (Allerdale (2012); Cumbria (2012)).

North-West Cumbria, similarly, from a political communications perspective, with its spread of urban and rural areas is theoretically most connected to the concept of the atomised voter. This is portrayed by the atomised social class structure in which unlike their Old Labour equivalent, New Labour and their consumerised, classless brand politics were so effective in attracting such voters to support them. Traditional broad social class stereotypes like those purported by established historical theorists such as Marx and Weber are by and large, still prevalent. It must also be stated though that the all-consuming, ever-changing concept of the atomised voter within the refined network political class structure, as stated initially by Bernays (1955), and later refined by Castells (2012), could also be relevant. There is a diverse and contrasting communications structure in North-West Cumbria, with urban areas in general having considerably more efficient technological outlets. This enables them to be less averse to the consumerised, cultural ethos promoted via the rise of the communications industry, than rural areas (Castells (2000); Griffiths (2007)).

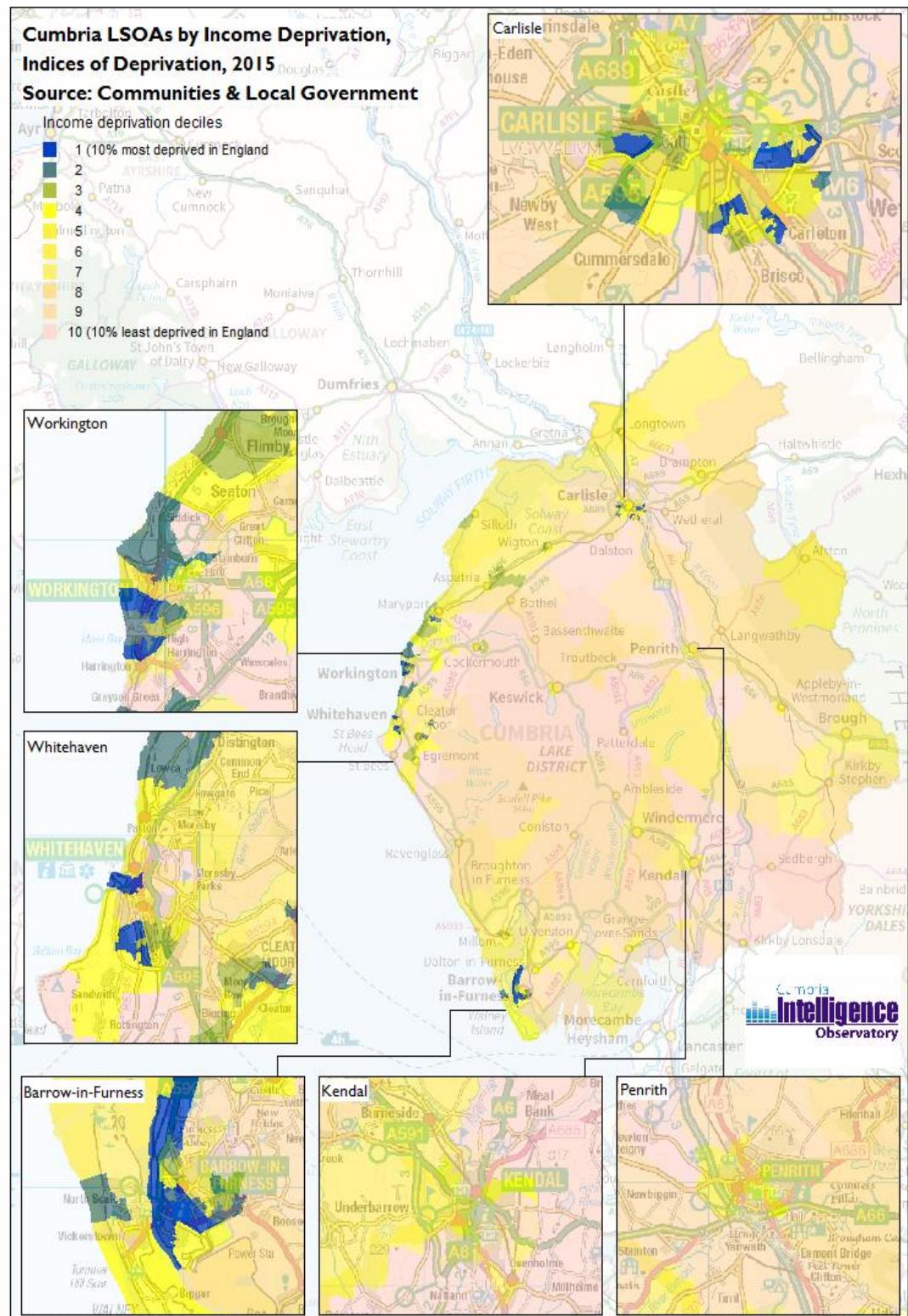
Cumbria, as the four figures below show, has a number of distinctive characteristics; its visceral size and topography, and its distributed population and geographic isolation. North-West Cumbria is a predominantly rural part of the county but with specific urban pockets such as Carlisle and Workington (Pateman (2011)). Following on from this, North-West Cumbria in particular, as noted by Breach (1978), and Constantine (2006), still has a unique sense of remoteness and a distinct cultural identity. This factor gives the areas as outlined below, a uniquely geographic perspective in regards to Labour brand politics be it ‘Old’, ‘New’, or ‘Post New’.

The geographic inequalities within North-West Cumbria contribute to its sense of uniqueness and seclusion. North-West Cumbrians manifestly saw their area as different and distinctive in regards political communications terms from the rest of Cumbria. This was conveyed, as stressed by Wynne et al. (1993), and Herring (2005), through its physical remoteness and thus lack of communication with other parts of the county at large. This though was not always the case as during the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, North-West Cumbria was an area of economic decline, a sub-region of uneven economic development, but what distinguishes it from any other area in Britain is that it became dominated by the nuclear industry which had meaningful political effects (Bolter (1996); Welsh (2000)). The new nuclear industry with its advanced technology represented a modern atomised ethos inserted into a traditional urban landscape replacing a once-dominant industrial base, rooted in the pre-war anvil manufacturing and agricultural industries (Blowers (2016)). The result being that the anchoring of the nuclear industry in its current locations in North-West Cumbria has conferred a set of ‘nuclear oases’ (Blowers et al. (1991); Blowers (1999)). The biggest communities or oases are situated in traditional (Old Labour brand) urban areas surrounded within wider (New Labour brand) rural locales (Blowers (1984); Bradley (1998)). The idea of peripheral communities such as these opens up for consideration ‘the sociological nature and political implications of the relationship between environmental quality and social inequality’ (Blowers & Leroy, 1994, p.198).

Such discourses ‘are ways of apprehending the world, shaping, defining, and constraining the way it is understood and informing the actions and choices we take’ (Hajer, 1995, p.44). Williams (1980), similar to that as quoted by Bell & Newby (1971), ‘was aware of the changes already taking shape as a result of such changing discourses, “as a result of urban culture” and writing in the early 1950s, perceives that the developments at Windscale brought in people who do not “fit in” and who have urban values’ (Bell & Newby, 1971, p.146). Soon these inhabitants, as ascertained by Blowers (1999), and McDougal (2017), had transformed both the landscape and the social relations in the area. This was achieved by introducing a substantial and divergent industrial sector, promoting atomised, classless values which became the bedrock of the New Labour brand success, whose influence spread specifically throughout North-West Cumbria. The prosperity derived from investment at

Sellafield is barely evident in the declining neighbouring small towns such as Workington and to a lesser extent Carlisle.

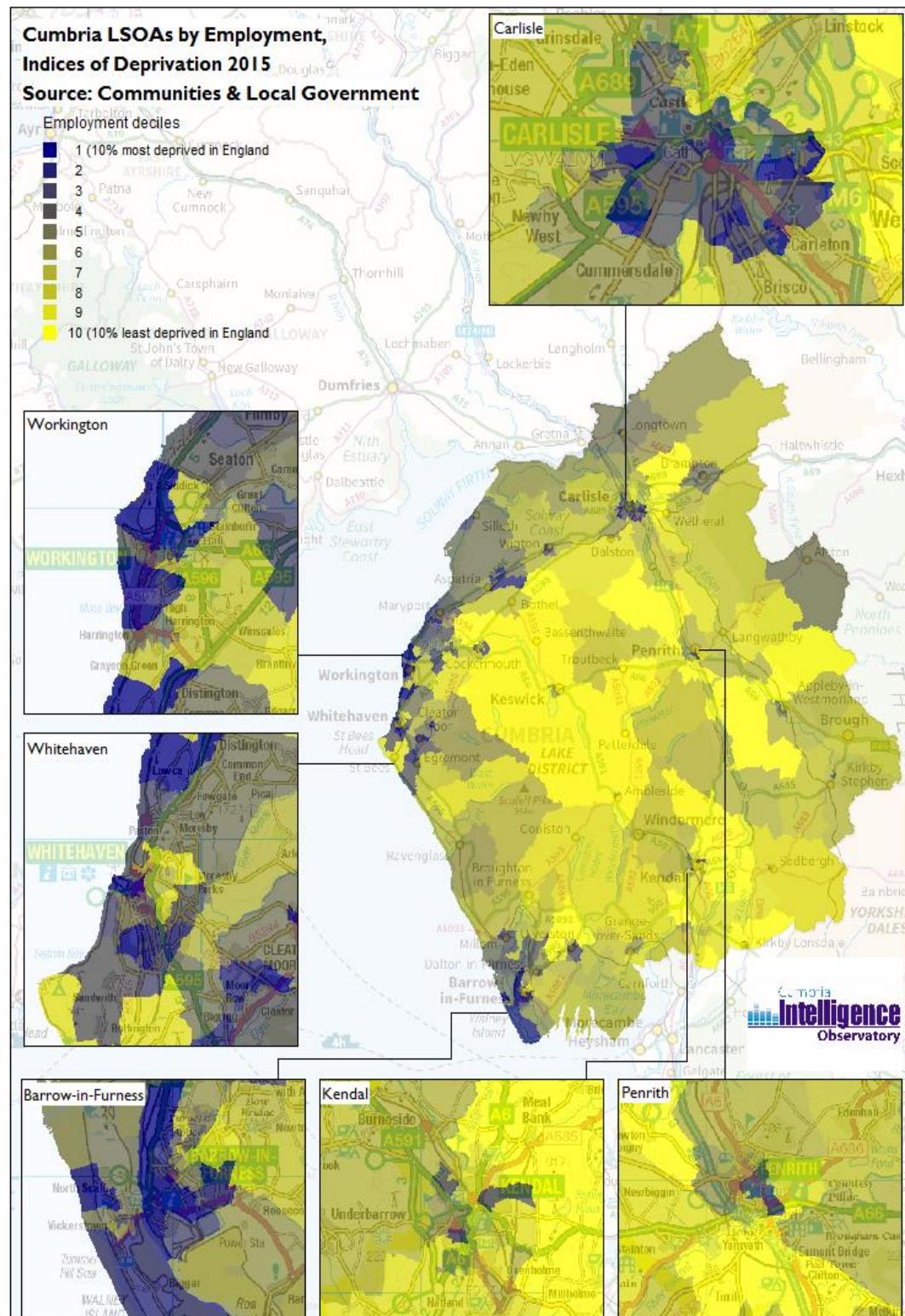
This scale of geographic economic and employment inequality between urban and rural areas is demonstrated by figures (IV-VII) entitled, ‘Income Deprivation’ (IV), whose broad demographics set the pattern for the following three indicators: ‘Employment’ (V), ‘Education, Skills, and Training’ (VI), and ‘Living Environment’ (VII). They show a varied picture in regards the county of Cumbria in general and within the two main urban areas in North-West Cumbria, they being Workington in Allerdale and Carlisle City in Carlisle. A further issue to consider, as noted by Hoggart (1990), and Caffyn & Dahlstrom (2005), is that many of the spatial methods, which are differentiated by a range of social and political analysis, refer to data sources that are merely ascertained through specific district geography. In addition, to understand such a spatial context, the four maps underneath illustrate the rural-urban morphology of Cumbria based on the ONS classification.



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Figure IV: Income Deprivation (2015). (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory)

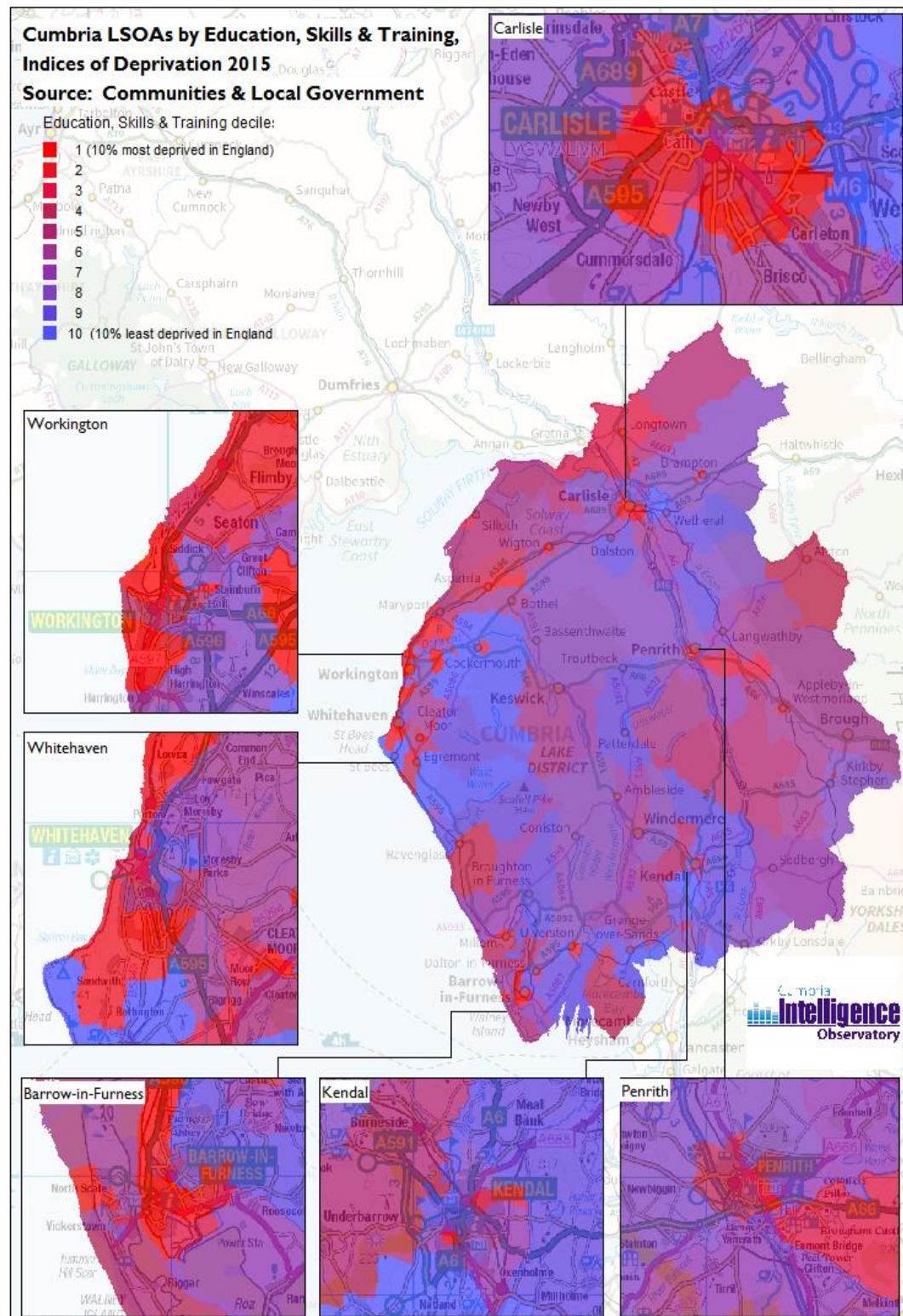
<http://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/675/1766/42310145546.jpg>



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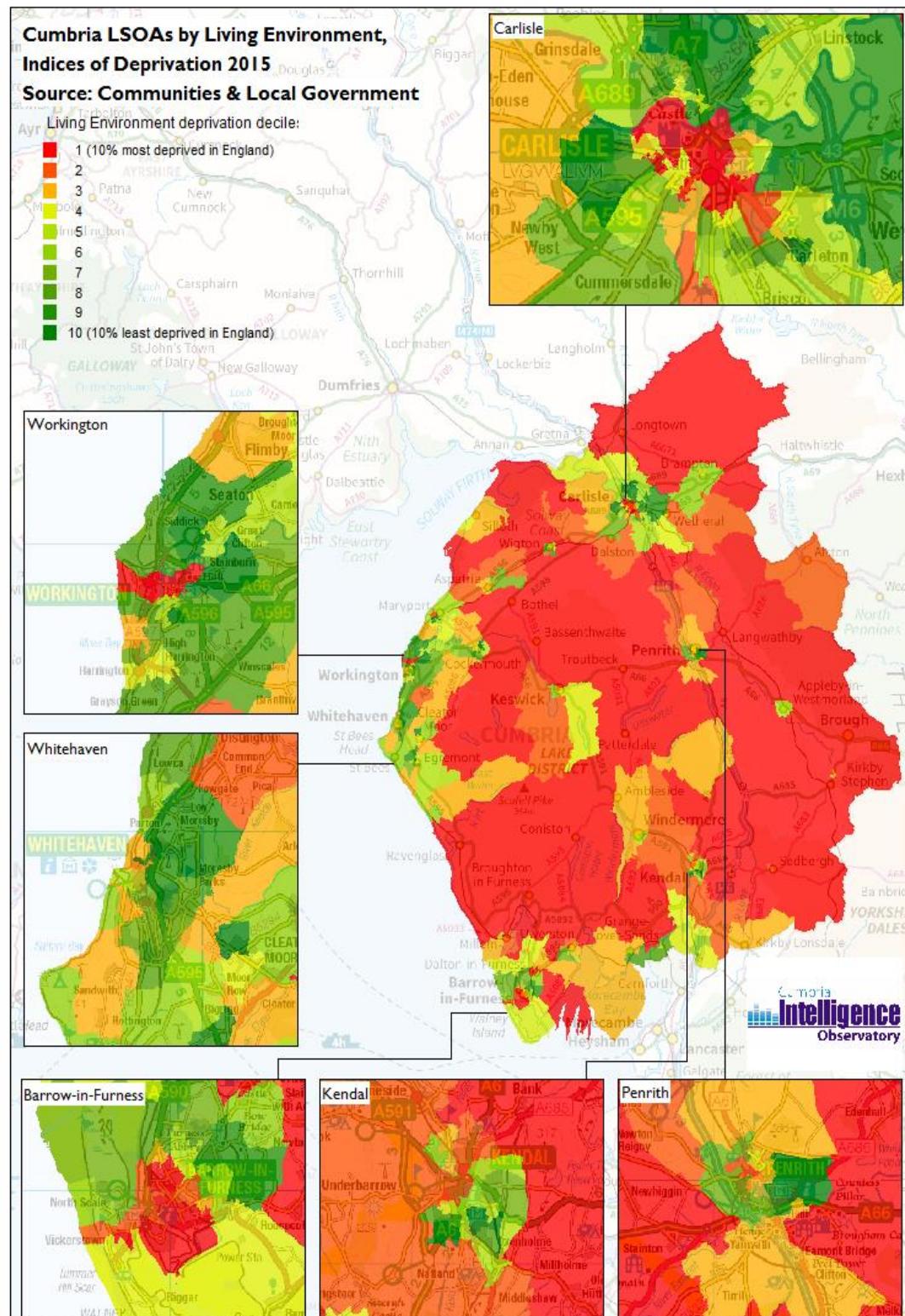
Figure V: Employment (2015). (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory)

<http://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/675/1766/42310162335.jpg>



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Figure VI: Education, Skills, and Training (2015). (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory)
<http://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/675/1766/4231015345.jpg>



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Figure VII: Living Environment (2015). (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory)

<http://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/675/1766/4231016112.jpg>

The exemplification of such economic disparities from a communal perspective within North-West Cumbria is taken as manifest because of the prominent employment status of Sellafield which in itself, dons a dominant status in the area at large. This naturally leads to an uneven progression to these imbalanced power relations (Aubrey (1993); Blowers (2016)). This has allowed for an unusual degree of geographic and wealth inequality mainly in relation to the areas in Allerdale which borders the nuclear power plant, but also to a lesser extent in more distant geographic areas such as Carlisle. The town of Workington and large parts of Carlisle City for instance, are following the political perspective of the spatial ethos (Keeble (1995); Clark (2014)). This is because they are generally economically deprived in relation to the four wealth indicators outlined in the above maps, and accordingly are more susceptible to the Old Labour brand.

This inevitably leads to a much bigger inequality gap between such urban areas and their rural equivalents. This perspective is outlined in the spatial analysis in North-West Cumbria, such as in Keswick and Cockermouth in Allerdale, and in Dalston and Wetheral in Carlisle which, by being in general economically wealthier areas, have a more even and higher distribution in relation to the four indicators and thus are more susceptible to New Labour brand politics. Despite the Sellafield influence, as stated by Blowers & Lowry (1993), and Keating & Loughlin (2004), the effects of over-dependence on traditional industries is prevalent in North-West Cumbria. Their subsequent decline during the Thatcherite 1980s, and with that the decline of the communal class system which was incorporated within that employment structure, was, and is commonly evident, particularly throughout urban North-West Cumbria, as to that of Britain in general. By this means, it must also be stated that despite it bringing a sense of distinctiveness to North-West Cumbria, the issue of Sellafield on the whole, does not play a large role in contemporary Labour or Post New Labour support in the area. Its presence was widely ignored by the research participants in regards to the relevance of social class support for Labour in the contemporary era, as it was seen as fairly minimal. This is principally because the Post New Labour era is perceived as a retraction to some extent to Old Labour communal class politics which in this manner, has only continued to solidify Labour's traditional support in the former locale, and at best only gradually improved their support in the latter.

Appendix II

Below is a general summary account of the content noted by the research participants. This data although not used in the 'Findings' section as the content in itself, was deemed too general to be integrated within the particular research phenomenon being explored in Chapter V; it does still give a broad indication of the relevance of the primary data to the secondary themes and their respective interview questions. The data is structured via the three research themes instead of the eight interview questions which comprise them, primarily because the broad content of the questions particularly in themes II, and III are merged and linked to denote relevant conclusions to the core findings in their respective theme, as outlined in the theoretical framework.

General Interview Data

Theme I - Class/Identity: Question 1

1) *What does the term 'social class' mean to you?*

In the thirty years immediately following World War II, the social class system in Britain, being communal in nature, was far more rigid (participant 1). The result being that there were clear past distinctions in relation to class categorisation, for instance the old communal class system was simple to comprehend. If a person did a manual job, such as a skilled apprenticeship or an unskilled labourer then they were deemed to be from a traditional blue-collar working-class background (participant 2). In contrast, the middle-classes in such a structure, were in the main, better educated and thus would be more likely to attain employment in the white-collar professions, such as law and medicine. In terms of broad social status categorisations, 'working-class' and 'middle-class' still tends to mean white-collar and blue-collar. There is a greater status gradation for those who work on either the ground floor or the office floor, thus in general it primarily is defined by whether a person undertakes blue-collar manual labour, or white-collar skilled work, be it professional or administrative (participant 4). A middle-class person, would consequently be someone who had a level of education and employment which would be related to a higher level of income (participant 7).

In modern times though, social class has become more complex and atomised, which has led to the opportunity for higher educational attainment to become more widespread (participant 1). There has been an increase in people progressing further educationally than their parents, and with that obtaining jobs in a higher income bracket, which naturally affects how they define social class not just in itself, but also in its relationship with wider social factors such as employment (participant 2). This sense of contemporary class complexity was stated by participant 3, who claimed that the current definitions of the classes were not as clear as they were in past history. It is more fluid, centred within a culture-driven state of mind rather than out-dated occupational stereotypes. The issue of social class is thus very complex in modern Britain, it is being defined within much more atomised terms (participant 4).

There is still though a class-orientated society in modern Britain, it is just much more nuanced and insidious and thus harder to comprehend and analyse (participant 8). In this modern atomised class culture, there are a great deal more gradations (participant 7), there are many ways in which people identify their specific class status, it is not simply defined by broad archaic terms such as being ‘working-class’, ‘middle-class’, and ‘upper-class’ (participant 9). The traditional blue and white-collar divide is more blurred today because there are more opportunities for people to gain employment into traditional white-collar professions from traditional blue-collar backgrounds (participant 14). The class structure is thus more complex because people can move into different classes because of their education and income. This had led to more opportunities to switch classes or aspire to have a better education, or to earn a better salary; there is more mobility because of the atomised nature of the broad class structure. Britain however is still a class-based society, the parameters have just become less simplistic (participant 15).

The notion of classlessness still does not exist, there is, and always has been a social class system of some kind in Britain (participant 2), it is ingrained as generally being part of the nation’s culture (participant 15). A ‘classless society’ is an almost utopian ideal which should be aimed for, but when there are such seismic levels of inequality, where children are living in poverty, any kind of classless future seems unattainable’ (participant 1). It would thus be unrealistic in modern Britain ‘to declare anybody as “classless”, a person might want to declare themselves as “classless” if that is the sort

of life that they are trying to lead, but such a life would be to some extent, disjointed from society', as its broad contours are very much still based on some form of class divisions (participant 3). In 'one sense there is such a thing as a "classless" society because people do not break down into these homogenous blocks, it is much more atomised, so it is more difficult to see any kind of commonality between people in these different situations' (participant 4). It 'does not necessarily have a connection to what people ultimately achieve, what is certain is that at the lower end there is a massive set of impediments of one kind or another', and they are more pronounced in the post-Thatcher era than during the Old Labour years, 'so the notion of a classless society, is a fallacy' (participant 7). Social class categorisation is endemic within the British body-politic and unless institutions such as the House of Lords, and the Monarchy, which are still centred on class patronage, are eradicated from British society, then the concept of a classless society is unrealistic (participant 9). It would thus be difficult to realistically promote a classless society on a broad societal level because such divisions be they communal or atomised, define a person's economic, social, political, and cultural outlook (participant 14).

Theme II - (Labour) Party: Questions 2-5

2) *Is there such a definition as 'Old Labour' and 'New Labour', or even 'Post New Labour'?*

3) *Do you consider Labour to be a class-based political party?*

4) *What relevance do you think class plays on Labour's support base?*

5) *Do you believe that communication techniques are effective in contemporary political party campaigning?*

Old Labour 'were more focussed on the needy, the most vulnerable in society' (participant 2). Old Labour is 'where the Labour Party came from', as it was created by the communal working-classes (participant 3). The party in 'those times promoted the broad class interests of the traditional working-class people, who prioritised improvements to social conditions, all centred within a strong economy' (participant 5). From a class level Old Labour was also routed in and led by the trade unions (participant 6). Its trade union roots were very clearly set within historical events through the twentieth century in terms of the overarching ambition to improve the lives of the communal working-classes (participant 7). Old Labour 'reflected the society that it was in, people just voted Tory or Labour according to their social class,

thus the working-classes believed that Labour was the only party that would advance their political interests' (participant 15).

In terms of changing the party, the shift from communal centric Old Labour to the classless focussed New Labour did not start with Blair, but with his predecessor, Neil Kinnock. Kinnock was the first to recognise that the party had to move beyond Old Labour traditional class politics. 'The image of the party had to shift and change in some really fundamental ways, partly because they needed to be more televisual, as they needed to be more modern and credible to the wider electorate' (participant 8). The image of Labour effectively portrayed by the Conservatives in the Thatcherite 1980s, was of a party which was anti-aspiration at home, and anti-patriotic abroad. The party also suffering from bitter internal ideological divisions, and a leader in Kinnock who was not seen as particularly strong or trustworthy, thus lacked the coherence required to be seen as an alternative government to the formidable Thatcherite administration. Kinnock was in the long run, unsuccessful, as he lost two general elections, John Smith followed him, and continued the modernisation process, as he realised the post-Thatcher atomised reality had to be embraced if the party was ever to gain power in the future (participant 7). Kinnock though started the journey because he recognised that Labour in its original form was becoming less electable. Kinnock though never got to enjoy the electoral benefits, and it was not until Blair and the emergence of New Labour that electoral success arrived. Kinnock though by making the required changes laid the electoral foundations for the future success of New Labour (participant 8).

This shift was thus essentially an attempt to broaden the class appeal of the party, because after four consecutive election reverses, the Old Labour message of promoting the interests of a communal working-class electorate was not relevant in the Post-Thatcher era, where such constructs were deemed in practical terms, obsolete. Blair in recognising and supporting the policy priorities of the new atomised, consumer-driven, electorate, that kept Thatcher in power a decade earlier, realised that by promoting the core Thatcherite philosophy of low taxes and individual liberty, that such an electorate would be more attracted to switch to New Labour. This allied with the loyalty of their traditional Old Labour voters which was entrenched because they would never desert the party for their traditional Conservative opponents, further

solidified New Labour's electoral support base (participant 2). New Labour thus endeavoured to attract people who considered themselves as being on the broad ideological left but had during the Thatcher years moved beyond old communal class restrictions where in such times they had benefitted both educationally and economically (participant 3). The party expanded its social horizons and courted those generally perceived to be better educated and higher income earners, so as to make the party more universally appealing on an electoral level (participant 1).

The concept of social class though became a matter the party found hard to discern on a political level. The issue, particularly in its traditional collectivist sense, placed the party in an awkward position, as the realisation dawned to the membership and activists that if Labour were realistically ever to regain government office, they had to accept that the traditional class divisions between the white and blue-collar had become eradicated and replaced with much greater atomised divisions which were harder to define. This followed the post-Thatcherite meritocratic rhetoric that anyone can succeed through diligence and dedication, so the whole concept of social class was seen somehow as old fashioned. Labour political figures consequently shied away from the broad communal class categories in the post-Thatcher era, as such divisions were seen as outdated and irrelevant. It 'was classlessness in a sense, it was breaking down barriers of social status but where New Labour went wrong was that it tipped over into pretending that the economic classes did not exist anymore. New Labour became a kind of moderate liberal party interested in identity-styled politics which made them almost indistinguishable from the Liberal Democrats, but every political party, no matter their ideological stripe, has to have a motivating force of legitimating myths, which gives it validity and legitimacy that people can recognise what it stands for' (participant 4).

They were appealing more to the political middle-ground. New Labour recognised that the old collectivised relationship between class categorisation and political party affinity had been replaced with a more fragmented atomised structure, and it was within such a structure that the party endeavoured to be seen as electorally viable (participant 9). It was more of an aspirational middle-class party. They aimed to appeal to people in the Midlands, East Anglia, South-East, and South-West, rather than those in Scotland, Wales, the North-East, North-West, Yorkshire & Humberside,

and London, and so on a geographic level, they concentrated their efforts to appeal to such voters who in the 1980s, were termed 'Soft Thatcherite Tories' (participant 11). New Labour though, with their classless image, made such perceptions difficult to comprehend. Society post-Thatcher had changed, people had more educational opportunities, so New Labour did reflect to some extent, the new atomised prosperity, but by promoting a classless philosophy they inevitably became politically weakened because in such a class centric Britain, be it communal or atomised, any party not reflecting such sociological divisions can be seen as unprincipled (participant 15).

It was assumed that Post New Labour although hard to define, must relate to the party in its current guise; a broad medium between its past Old Labour and New Labour incarnations (participant 2). Since the general election defeat of 2010, there is a confusion as to what, and who Post New Labour stand for on a class level (participant 3). Ed Miliband tried to recalibrate the party back to the communal left but not to become as far left as it once was; a combination of Old and New Labour values (participant 8). The reason he failed to convince was because he tried to speak left to the party and moderate to the country and was thus deemed politically unprincipled (participant 12). He did not outline a new vision, be it New Labour like Tony Blair or Old Labour such as Harold Wilson, he did not have the skill to stamp his own Post New Labour identity (participant 15). The election of Jeremy Corbyn, generally considered to be on the ideological left of the party, as leader, will inevitably lead to Labour in their Post New Labour guise, to promote communal class centred policies (participant 11), such as income redistribution, and an increase in business taxation, an approach which is very different to the dominant atomised Thatcherite ethos (participant 7).

Labour still garner most of their support out of a sense of class identity. Its core support still 'feels that it is the party that looks after ordinary working people' (participant 4). The traditional working-classes 'see the Labour Party as their beacon' (participant 13). If there is no working-class element to the Labour Party image then the party is notably weakened, as it still is such a big part of its ethos. This was demonstrated through a range of progressive policies which past Labour governments have enacted such as the minimum wage, and the living wage. The Labour Party in that sense exists primarily to protect those in society that are economically most

vulnerable, and such people are still defined by the class position they occupy (participant 15).

Its original purpose as hitherto noted, was to represent working-class people via their industrial representatives the trade unions, and their broad class interests in parliament. It thus became the party of the working-class, as it is identified with broad working-class interests, but that class post-Thatcher has been eroded as a coherent political entity, the party in the New Labour era endeavoured to define a new class position which was relevant in the modern atomised era (participant 6). The party consequently now is much less communal class-conscious than during the pre-Thatcher Old Labour era, as the party in the new atomised age, shifted and shaped into a more classless party so as to ensure electoral success. There was a strong class connection in the Old Labour era, and that began to be eroded during the New Labour years, but the party still represents a core facet, which by its nature is primarily class-based. It is still fundamentally centred within core communal class values which promotes the aspirations of the working-classes, but as well recognises that it also had a broader responsibility to support such an electorate by making themselves electorally more viable in modern Britain, where the issue of class post-Thatcher had become more complex. The consequence being that such a class structure would mean that the party by promoting archaic traditional class perspectives would be in the main, deemed irrelevant to a much-dispersed electorate who see class and the relationship with political party affinity through more atomised terms, where the concept of the brand has replaced communal class divisions (participant 7).

Communications techniques by their nature are quite striking in this atomised brand-orientated age, which is dominated by the visuals of multimedia; the younger generation especially take note of such messages (participant 5). A political party thus has to in the modern era, have a set of values and policies, and an approach, and tone, which has some resonance to these more brand-orientated political times. They also have to have the disciplines that coincide with such a modern communications strategy so as to create a clear identity which promotes certain key strengths that will be attractive in the broadest possible sense. In political terms, Labour given its history, also has to recognise that they must not appear ideologically threatening to potential swing-voters (participant 7). In the New Labour era, the party had shifted

ideologically to the atomised Thatcherite agenda via promoting a new classless Britain, where old communal social class divisions were generally seen as irrelevant. They consequently were courting the swing-voters borne out of the Thatcher era, via a sophisticated communications strategy, which proved electorally successful (participant 2). The New Labour brand was thus marketed effectively, their position on broad pragmatic terms, was, ‘if we want to have our values and we want to deliver on them, we will package ourselves up so that we’ll get elected and we can start changing things’ (participant 5). They came across as slick and ideologically non-threatening in the sense that they were not promoting any communal class-centric perspectives which were traditionally associated with the party during the Old Labour era (participant 6). The party ‘seemed to have shaken off’ much of their old communal class limitations (participant 15).

It ‘was the essence of the brand that they were putting across, this idea that it is not just for the traditional working-classes anymore, but it was for anybody, it was classless’ (participant 14). The general election victories in 1997, 2001, and 2005, demonstrated that the hitherto noted electoral strategy of New Labour, that being the combination of the skilled working-classes, and small-business owners, in conjunction with their traditional blue-collar core electoral base, proved an effective electoral combination. The Labour Party was aware post-Thatcher that to stay electorally viable they had to appeal to a wider class electorate, New Labour was the construct which both on a political and communications level, illustrated that such a shift had occurred (participant 7). It ‘was very much selling it to people, emphasising that it was a very different Labour Party now’ (participant 8), one that embraced this more atomised class reality.

Theme III - Geography (North-West Cumbria): Questions 6-8

6) Does your sense of class play a significant role to how you live?

7) How does your location affect your political viewpoint?

8) Do you think that a change of location from Allerdale/Carlisle would affect your class or political perspective?

Class perception both on an individual level and within a broad political perspective post-Thatcher, has morphed into a more classless perspective (participant 5).

Working-class people largely, ‘tend to think “I’m very working-class”’, but when

such initial perceptions are explored they might think, ‘well actually no, you know maybe I am more middle-class’”, in this post-Thatcher atomised era, such class perceptions are harder to classify (participant 14). An example of this is when the former Labour Party agent for Workington went electioneering and asked a constituent who they considered to be a past Labour supporter, if ‘you’ll be voting in the election for us’ and received a reply, ‘oh well I can’t now as I’ve bought my own house. The question that should be asked is why a person has moved location, could it be because they would like to shift their perceived class perception’ (participant 4).

Such class perceptions, be it communal or atomised, are broadly rooted in British societal culture, as classes have their own traditions and stereotypes which still makes the issue relevant in contemporary Britain (participant 15). Although where a person is born and brought up can have a notable effect on what political party they may decide to join and feel a natural affiliation with, there is in these more complex class times a greater sense that hitherto traditional class, political allegiance have become to some degree, merged. For instance, ‘Rotherham used to have one Tory and eighty Labour councillors, consequently to get anywhere in local politics in Rotherham being in Labour was essential. There are similar very strong Tory areas where if a person wished to be active in local politics then they would have to join them’ (participant 1).

This type of political merging can affect people if they are not ideologically aligned to a particular political philosophy, and thus their motivation is primarily to play some role in local politics. Traditional political allegiance that existed in the communal class era between Labour and the Conservatives are in this post-Thatcher era, definitely blurring (participant 2). There are political representatives in North-West Cumbria that have joined Labour to get elected in the ward where they live so as to satisfy their desires to be politically active in their local area, but the consequence of which being, that they are possibly pursuing in their local ward, policies that are contrary to their own or their party’s ideological perspective.

There are people who will thus promote such a narrow perspective of political allegiance, this clearly demonstrates that ‘some people’ in post-Thatcher atomised Britain, ‘have a very different view of their role within local politics’ (participant 3). Such potential ideological convergence tends to blur political party allegiance at a

local level; for instance, if one party is hegemonic in one area there is a danger that the opposition party could become a catch-all people's party in response so as to stay electorally viable by appealing to a broader class section of the electorate. There are several Labour members, and even some Councillors in North-West Cumbria, who are primarily in the party because it allows for them the best opportunity to become active in local politics and as a consequence, serve their local area; their belief though in Labour values is at best, limited. People thus join the party without actually believing in its core, class-centric values. If a person moves to a specific place though, there would be pressure on them to conform to the culture of that specific place, and consequently socially conform to a stereotypical mind-set that defines such a community. It would on a general level, probably reinforce each other though, so if a person is a Labour voter in an urban area and they are surrounded by many other Labour voters then that will also reinforce their opinion' (participant 4). If they move out to a small village and their neighbours and friends may be less inclined to vote Labour, 'then they might find that their own attitudes' are to some extent, questioned (participant 6).

This is just a reflection that this whole notion of political allegiance has become less rigid and that is a reflection that British politics and its relationship with class perception, has post-Thatcher, become less class structured. It 'happens in parliamentary terms as well, for there is always the suspicion that Tony Blair could easily have been a Tory rather than a Labour politician' (participant 7). Some people certainly might naturally feel the need to hide their personal political convictions, be it nationally or locally, because they perceive it to be a potential burden in attracting a broad range of support. In rural Allerdale therefore, an area which following traditional geographic stereotypes, is not particularly electorally profitable for Labour, candidates of a Labour mind-set may elect to stand on an independent basis, so as to dispel any stereotypical fears that they, being associated with the party and its socialistic traditions, could alone, cost them support.

There is a definite possibility in North-West Cumbria in such a mixed urban-rural area, where there is both a clear divide of traditional and non-traditional Labour support, that prospective political representatives may become 'Independents' so as to disguise their real political party loyalties (participant 11). There 'was a Conservative

Councillor in North-West Cumbria who admitted openly, “I’m more in keeping with the Labour Party but I want to be a Councillor in the ward I live in”, which was a Tory area, so the only practical way of achieving their ambition was to join the Conservative Party. In the end he decided to become an ‘Independent’ and eventually lost his seat, but he primarily just aspired to be a local political representative for his area, but he was not comfortable being in such a position’, as he had communal social class loyalties associated with Labour politics (participant 8). In conclusion, many representatives aim only to serve their community; they are not interested in the broader political debate or have particularly strong ideological allegiances, they simply aim to be involved in local politics, and so they will thus join whatever party that will most help them achieve such an aim (participant 9).

POSTSCRIPT

Post New Labour: The Corbyn Effect

The analysis in this thesis has generally focussed upon the relevance of the past Old and New Labour brands in regards to the phenomenon being studied. This, to some extent, fails to analyse the relevance that the current ‘Post New Labour’ brand plays over such factors, this occurs primarily because it is an evolving brand, and thus is naturally harder to define and evaluate in comparison to its two historical predecessors. It is though important that this analysis is explored in its current context thus, in the form of a ‘Postscript’, so as to outline both a contemporary Labour perspective in its relationship with the research phenomenon, as well as offering potential future directions which may potentially arise that could determine its future direction.

The interviews confirm, a view that social class in its historic communal sense, as portrayed by first Marx and later refined by Weber, prominent since the end of World War II, is thus simply not any longer the crux of political discourse. Since the late 1970s, it has plainly been surpassed universally as a relevant entity by the rise of the atomised ethos. The communal, socialised society gave way to an atomised state that was regarded as ‘enabling’ the right of choice to the individual citizen. Such major sociological and political changes were, as remarked by Giddens (2002), and Rosen (2005), to have equally seismic effects on the future image of the Labour Party as they realised that it had to adapt to such a new landscape or become as irrelevant as the collectivised class structure which had proceeded it. The interviewees recognised that this style of politics, as noted by Evans (2013), and Veldman (2015), was the bedrock of the Thatcherite ideology derived by the New Right and was evolved by Tony Blair and New Labour’s Third Way classless brand ethos. Such evolution as hitherto noted, involved creating an atomised communitarian structure, which was concerned with creating better communities through empowering the role of the atomised citizen, a position which proved electorally successful from 1997 until 2010.

In 2010, Ed Miliband became leader at a time when the party was at an ideological crossroads. The discourse of key Labour elites at the time, particularly that of Miliband himself acknowledged the need to form a new Post New Labour narrative and electoral strategy. New Labour had by following a post-Thatcherite atomised ethos, eventually lost its appeal. They, by abandoning communal class politics, which defined their electoral successes in the Old Labour era, led to the party being seen as unprincipled, and as a consequence caused widespread disenchantment to their traditional working-class support, which historically were the bedrock of their supporter base. Twenty years later, as Giugni (2014) stated, ‘all British parties seem to compete within the ideological and political bounds set by New Labour (and arguably by Thatcherism). Inside Labour, no innovative paradigm has emerged from the 2010 removal from office, the New Labour era was over and a new chapter in the party’s history began in a post-New Labour framework’. Despite his gradual shift away from New Labour’s post-Thatcherite ideals towards a more collectivist Old Labour agenda, Miliband in developing the Post New Labour brand, still shied away from promoting traditional class policies such as reducing wealth inequality, advocating defence cuts, and implementing tax rises for the financially more prosperous. Post New Labour thus on a broad basis, whilst giving greater credence to traditional leftist policies of poverty and inequality, also acknowledged that the social structure of Britain had become atomised, and so in balance, offered a compromise between both Old and New Labour.

Miliband’s ‘five years as Labour leader was an incremental move away from assessing the limitations of New Labour towards a new Post Labour narrative’ (Hasan & Macintyre, 2011, p.294). Miliband was by and large supportive of such thinking and embraced the Post New Labour concept as a way of defining his leadership tenure. His ‘inability to communicate to a mass audience and failure to target the beneficiaries of his policies’, limited such a perceived move to the left towards an Old Labour trajectory (Gray (2017)). Such issues did not affect his more radical successor, for whether as Gray (2017) continues, ‘by serendipity or by design, Corbyn has brought together some of the most vital forces on the contemporary scene: the anti-capitalist radicalism of young people who are innocent of history, a bourgeois cult of personal authenticity and naked self-interest expressed as self-admiring virtue. Nothing could be more exotically modern than Corbyn’s hybrid populism’. By

electing Corbyn, the party decided to continue with the promotion of the Post New Labour brand by emphasising a balance between Old Labour's communal economic policies combined within New Labour's atomised social structures. The relative success of the party in the 2017 general election appears to suggest that such a decision could be in keeping with a notable part of the British electorate. Corbyn showed, defying all the established pundits during the election, that he could build a conducive Post New Labour brand similar to that of Miliband, albeit on a more radical scale. He voiced Old Labour communal style rhetoric of standing up 'For the Many [and], Not the Few' but within that, he carefully did not purport any communal class-war discourse, such as using terms like 'working-class', and 'middle-class', as this type of old-fashioned class dialogue was clearly eradicated during the era of the New Labour brand (Labour Party (2017)).

Labour in the 2017 election produced one of the most surprising performances in contemporary British political history. The party at the election's outset started out more than twenty points behind in the polls, but Jeremy Corbyn's enthusiastic campaign dramatically reduced this Conservative lead within a few weeks. Even more important than the moderate thirty seat gain, Labour much more considerably increased their vote share by nearly 10% up from their disappointing total achieved by Ed Miliband in 2015, Gordon Brown in 2010, and even by Tony Blair in 2005, the last time the party won an election. Corbyn's campaign was exceptionally effective in generating great interest within the youth vote who ordinarily would have a much lower voter turnout rate. 'Among 18-to-24-year olds', according to a YouGov poll stated by SAEB (2017), 'Corbyn enjoyed support of 71% compared to 15% for the Tories'. The reason for this was Labour's clear mix of Old and New Labour, that being to promote the economic interests of the working masses within an atomised social class structure devoid of anachronistic, communal attachments. This youth surge, as Rye (2017) denotes, in Labour's electoral support has been replicated in the party membership which may be an important base from which to build for the future.

The success of Corbyn in enthusing the youth vote was mainly instigated by the party's effective use of modern communication techniques. This view is summarised by Van Loon (2017) who stated, 'Labour has gained 1.3m fans/followers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, versus just 848,000 for the Conservatives.

Moreover, on Facebook, the largest platform for both parties, Labour has seen a 61% increase in followers since the election was called (from 540,000 to 868,000), compared to just 6% for the Conservatives (from 564,000 to 596,000). Also, Labour talks more to its supporters on social media, with more than 30 posts a day in the last week across its social platforms combined (versus 10 to 20 posts a day for the Conservatives). Labour thus attracted a greater amount of interest in regards user-engagement across social media. The party attracted a daily average of almost 100,000 engagements in the final week of the election campaign, which was more than double the hits for the Conservatives. The contradiction of Corbyn's traditional, collectivised Old Labour message in regards policy is that his main surge was with the liberal middle-classes; white-collar metropolitan professionals, which was primarily fostered through the youth vote, who embrace a new social media reality that promotes an atomised focus through individual Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. This atomised class surge has come at the expense of traditional Old Labour support, principally that of the former heavy, manual industries, where the use of social media is not so pronounced and the collectivised structure is still prominent, and hence their attraction to the Post New Labour Corbyn message has been much more limited (Allington (2017)).

Corbyn effectively demonstrated during the campaign that the communal-styled socialist agenda was in accordance with the needs of large sections of the electorate. At the same time, he recognised that the old communal class divisions had been dismantled and replaced in this post-Thatcher, post-New Labour era, with a more atomised and classless structure which is harder to define and thus harder to categorise in clear political terms. Corbyn's election campaign had similarities in style if not in specific political substance, with Donald Trump's populist presidential campaign in the United States, and the 'Vote Leave' campaign to remove Britain from the European Union the previous year. Both of these to a large extent achieved their respective victories by successfully promoting an anti-political establishment perspective through engineering populist emotions and perceptions.

There is though, a cultural contradiction to Corbyn's surprise electoral appeal as although he is deemed as promoting old-fashioned, communal working-class interests, his success primarily occurred because he managed to gain the allegiance of a

substantial number of those who lived in what would be termed traditional middle-class areas. Labour's success in taking long-standing Conservative constituencies such as Canterbury in Kent, and Kensington in West London could well be considered as a defining event in regards the Post New Labour brand's broad class appeal. The fact that Corbyn's Post New Labour Party could win two of the safest Conservative seats in two of the richest constituencies in the country is testimony to the potentials of such an extraordinary shift. The success of Corbyn's Post New Labour brand is also the culmination of a social transformation which has transformed the party electorally over the past two decades. Corbyn, although generating Old Labour domestic policies such as rail nationalisation and the scrapping of university tuition fees, has though solidified a potentially atomised supporter base for the party, begun by Tony Blair and New Labour (Gray (2017)).

The rise of Corbyn has brought into sharp focus the notable ideological divisions between Labour and the Conservatives, who together, now account for more than 80% of the vote, an electoral phenomenon not seen for nearly fifty years. The Conservatives post-Brexit, with their insistence on promoting a greater level of public-sector cuts, are moving further to the ideological right. Such a shift has left Corbyn's Post New Labour brand being regarded as possibly more radical than it really is, as his policies on an ideological level did not markedly differ from those of his predecessor, Miliband. 'This political polarisation is a reflection of a growing polarisation between the classes in British society' (SAEB (2017)). The future for the Post New Labour brand under the continued leadership of Jeremy Corbyn is like Old Labour, to remain committed to reducing economic inequality, and improving the living conditions of the communal working-classes, while accepting the atomised social structure which was embedded in the Post-Thatcherite, New Labour age. Rather than being pulled to the ideological right by the Conservative government, as such was the position of the New Labour brand, Jeremy Corbyn and the Post New Labour brand must be prepared to promote and renew their own brand identity if they are to achieve future success. This is achieved by promoting collectivist social policies whilst accepting that communal class structures have been forever fragmented and atomised (Allington (2017); Gray (2017)).

This view is outlined by Salisbury (2016), who argued that ‘a progressive anti-establishment Labour Party must be proactive rather than reactive: this would mean reframing the terms of political and popular debate. If Labour should learn one thing’ from the rise of Corbyn, ‘is that the centre-ground is crumbling: “the lesser of two evils” is no longer a viable political stance’. Corbyn’s success, Rye (2017) alluded, has opened up an opportunity to realign politics on the left. ‘A re-engagement of the Labour mainstream with the wider left would help to reinvigorate and refresh the party’s policies and approach by developing not only new appeals in terms of policy but also new ways of organising by building a deeper presence in communities and in so doing, reinventing the party for the future’. Corbyn has also patently been triumphant in stimulating new support as well as reawakening old support that had become disenchanted with the atomised New Labour brand which were in their opinion, deemed not to be satisfying the communal class interests of their traditional working-class supporter base. He, as Rye (2017) further commented, ‘has certainly been successful in drawing the wider left into his tent. Then again, at present at least, much of this appears to be entirely based on his leadership rather than reflecting any common inclination to support the Labour Party. Were he to step down, it is difficult to see how that broad alliance would hold together’. Such sentiments if borne out or not in the near or long-term, could to some degree, act as a factor for future academic research in this particular field.

Due to time commitments though there were notable constraints placed upon the study. In regards the research interviews, they were undertaken from the summer of 2015 until the early winter of 2016 when the Corbyn leadership was just beginning to take shape. The subsequent Conceptual Analysis used such events as the basis for understanding where the party was heading in relation to the research phenomenon, spanning up to and including the 2017 general election. The close time-proximity between that election and this thesis submission means on a practical level it is simply not feasible for this thesis to analyse effectively the Post New Labour brand beyond such a time period. It would appear though that the possible future direction of the party under Corbyn’s leadership is still in flux in relation to the phenomenon outlined in this study, and is thus still hard to clearly define, hence any future post-doctoral research with the natural benefit of a greater historical context could be beneficial.

There was an assumption that Corbyn would promote a more traditional class discourse and by such means, reject any hint of classless New Labourism. This fear that he would automatically retract to an Old Labour communal outlook was a common perception amongst the research participants, but it must also be stated that its relevance was limited in regards this study for two reasons. Firstly, as hitherto noted, timing in relation to the research being undertaken condensed the relevance of the point, as Corbyn was only elected as party leader three-quarters of the way through the Interview process, and so for the first four interviews, the issue was not raised as he was considered at that time to have next to no chance of success. Secondly, as Corbyn's first leadership election victory in September 2015 coincided with the practical research, it consequently led to the participants giving an assumed interpretation of his future intentions in regards how the Post New Labour brand under his leadership would take shape. It was inevitable, as Corbyn was well known for his Old Labour traditional, class-based politics, that the participants' views would be coloured by suppositions of this kind. Before the 2015 general election there was not a great deal of ideological difference between the Conservatives and Labour; they, like that espoused by Giddens in the New Labour era, were not far apart, a stance which correlated with Miliband's confusion over where he would place the party in connection with its long-standing divergent position to the issue of class. Since the election of Corbyn as Labour leader, there has been a perception that, that gap on a broad level, has become immense (Seymour (2016)); Labour are now policy-wise, back with a clear Old Labour social class narrative which is clearly distinct from New Labour; a general shift which is noticeably electorally viable.