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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Respectability and race between the suburb and the city: an argument about the making of 'inner-city' London

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Abstract

This article concentrates on the development of an inner-city imaginary, and a linked suburban imaginary, in the era of post-war reconstruction and post-colonial migration. It argues that these two historical processes – reconstruction and migration – need to be seen as interlinked phenomena, which bound the histories of race and class together. First, it proposes that understanding how the inner city developed and was lived as a structure of feeling requires attending to its meaning both among those who peopled its often-nebulous borders, and among those who escaped it but nonetheless measured their escape by it. Second, it proposes that understanding the popular force of inner city and suburb as imaginative spaces means recognizing how they became crucial landscapes in a revived culture of respectability, which in the second half of the twentieth century became a racialized culture. This was the other migration that defined what the inner city meant.

'Six months after I moved I saw…the boarding-house mentioned in the *News of the World*', writes Ralph Singh, the fictional narrator of V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), in a scene in which the south London boarding house he has recently escaped from reappears to disturb his newly suburban life lodging with the Mural family. The house, he reads, has been turned into a brothel.

> I cried out to Mrs Mural, my landlady, when I read the item, delighted to recognize an address with which I had been connected. It was the Murals' paper and it was the sort of item they relished. But they did not care for the connexion. The Murals were on the postwar rise; they were the breeders of boy scouts; they grew more and more grave as they grew more acquisitive.

Ralph Singh, at this point in the novel, is just on the right side of the Murals' postwar rise, but his position is precarious. A little later, the Murals' young daughter encourages him to view her 'rude drawings'. He is quickly dispatched with once

the story comes out. 'You couldn't blame the Murals then for wishing, as the saying now is, to keep Britain white.'[1]

The London of *The Mimic Men* is split between its inner and outer parts. Connecting them is the train line, from which, at one point on his journey back to the city centre from the Murals' suburban home, Singh looks down on 'the backs of tall sooty houses, tumbledown sheds, Victorian working-class tenements whose gardens, long abandoned, had for stretches been turned into Caribbean backyards'.[2] Such scenes may well have resonated for Naipaul's readers. That journey between suburb and city, passing through the expanding areas of Caribbean settlement that spilled out from just beyond the city's old medieval heart, was seen by many in the equally expanding suburbs as an index of London's post-colonial decline, and a measure of what they sought to escape from.[3] 'Before crossing the river we passed over the slums of Herne Hill and Brixton, places so compelling and unlike anything I was used to seeing that I jumped up, jammed down the window and gazed out at the rows of disintegrating Victorian houses', writes Karim Amir in Hanif Kureishi's autobiographical novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), in a scene set some time in the mid-1960s on a train travelling from Bromley to Victoria. 'The gardens were full of rusting junk and sodden overcoats; lines of washing criss-crossed over the debris. Ted explained to me, "That's where the niggers live. Them blacks."'[4]

Who knew the inner city, and on what terms? The 'inner-city' concept, borrowed from the United States but quickly taking on popular purchase within Britain from the late 1960s, described the urban areas of concentrated poverty that betrayed the failed promises of social democracy. Its residents, one assumes, might readily have recognized themselves within its reference. But inner cities were known and defined not only by their inhabitants. They were, as one report from 1977 put it, 'seen by many people…on their journey to work as they look down from the railway across the backs of terraces'.[5] These railway passengers travelled on routes designed to escape the city. In the capital, which is the focus of this article, the development of a transport infrastructure and a suburban Outer Metropolitan Area defined the London County Council's urban policy from the moment of its creation in 1889 to its demise in 1965. Their efforts to provide routes out of the city played a colossal role in the dispersal of London's population, particularly in the post-war years.[6] But the dispersed population was never cut off from what they had been dispersed from; the very infrastructure for their escape

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[1]V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London, 1967), 29–30.

[2]*Ibid.*, 9.

[3]For Edward Said, Naipaul's rising popularity as a novelist was to be understood in the context of the resonance that his pessimistic accounts of the post-colonial world had with British and American audiences 'disenchant[ed] with the third world, and with the decolonization process generally' (Edward Said in discussion with Conor Cruise O'Brien and John Lukacs, 'The intellectual in the post-colonial world: response and discussion', *Salmagundi*, 70/71 (1986), 80).

[4]H. Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London, 1990), 43.

[5]H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Change or Decay, Final Report of the Liverpool Inner Area Study* (London, 1977), cited in O. Saumarez Smith, 'The inner city crisis and the end of urban modernism in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27 (2016), 582.

[6]A. Saint, '"Spread the people": the LCC's dispersal policy, 1889–1965', in A. Saint (ed.), *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council, 1889–1965* (London, 1989), 215–35.

continued to offer them the possibility of reacquaintance as they travelled back, for work or leisure, to the old metropolis. This connection between suburb and city is important. The inner city was made by the process of out-migration. The story of its making is a story about the place of the old urban centres within expanding conurbations.

As it has entered the archives and then the writings of urban historians, the inner city has featured most prominently as a part of the vocabulary of urban planning, but it held this popular purchase too.[7] In this article, I am interested in that popular purchase and in the ways in which a popular imaginary of the inner city fed into its material realization, organizing it as a new race-class space. I make two arguments. First, I propose that we need to see the inner city as a structure of feeling as it was lived both by those who peopled its often-nebulous borders, and by those who escaped it but nonetheless measured their escape by it. We need to see the inner-city imaginary as it was lived through a relation between inner city and suburb. The inner city had considerable popular purchase for outsiders. It was given substance in small rituals like the morning and evening commute, through which its landscapes could be made intimate – even if, as the journalist Mary Grigg complained, that landscape was always partial: 'No one passing…in a train can see the clean, bright rooms inside the houses, the bowls of fruit, the flowers and wedding photographs. They cannot see the endless struggle of keeping home and children clean when the buildings are left to fall into disrepair by absentee owners.'[8] The motivations for out-migration, and the conditions under which it was able to occur, worked through visions of what the impoverished urban areas were like, and what the suburban areas promised in distinction.

My second argument is that understanding the popular *force* of inner city and suburb as imaginative spaces means recognizing how they became crucial landscapes in a revived culture of respectability, which in the second half of the twentieth century, through the experience of the great post-war post-colonial migrations, became a racialized culture.[9] As my way in here, via the prying commuters, might

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[7]There has been a substantial increase in the historical attention given to the 'inner city' in recent years. The way in to reading the inner city in these studies remains predominantly governed by the inner-city policy and planning frameworks elaborated for British cities from the late 1960s. See A. Andrews, 'Multiple deprivation, the inner city, and the fracturing of the welfare state: Glasgow, 1968–78', *Twentieth Century British History*, 29 (2018), 605–24; A. Kefford, 'Disruption, destruction and the creation of "the inner cities": the impact of urban renewal on industry, 1945–1980', *Urban History*, 44 (2017), 492–515; O. Saumarez Smith, 'Action for cities: the Thatcher government and inner-city policy', *Urban History*, 47 (2020), 274–91; *idem*, 'The inner city crisis'. See also J. Rhodes and L. Brown, 'The rise and fall of the "inner city": race, space and urban policy in postwar England', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45 (2018), 3243–59.

[8]M. Grigg, *The White Question* (London, 1967), 172.

[9]My argument, in this respect, draws a connection between historical discussions of cultures of respectability, which have focused predominantly on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and discussions of the post-war 're-racialization' of England. The historiography on respectability is discussed in more detail in the final section of this article. On 're-racialization', see B. Schwarz, '"The only white man in there": the re-racialisation of England, 1956–1968', *Race & Class*, 38 (1996), 65–78; F. Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010); C. Waters, '"Dark strangers" in our midst: discourses of race and nation in Britain, 1947–1963', *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), 207–38; W. Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945–1964* (London, 1998).

suggest, I will propose that the threat that these impoverished urban areas posed was to the possibility of dignity – a life that could not be sneered at, where one might not feel looked down upon. The promise of this escape to dignity has a long history in class politics in Britain, particularly in the urban centres, and it is pursued most forcefully through the struggle to stay within respectability. In the post-war era, that struggle – long cast as a struggle of class position – was reframed by race. The indignity of poverty and the effort to escape it in the developing inner city was lived most powerfully through the continued traction of a culture of respectability that endured precisely through a renewed emphasis on racial distinctions.[10]

Between the suburb and the city

I come to this history intimately, as a suburban boy formed by that story of migration from the emerging inner city. I hope readers will forgive me if I introduce the intersection of race and class in this history through some personal reflection – it is an intersection, as I argue in this article, that was lived at an intimate level. Like the Murals, my own family had a post-war rise, of sorts. My grandfather was an orphan. He grew up in a police orphanage in the 1920s and as a young man he set up in Wood Green. He certainly seems to have enjoyed life there, and the family is rather coy about the kind of city pleasures he may have indulged in. But he was an aspiring young man. In his mid-twenties, he got a job with a battery-making company based in Dagenham and he moved himself to Romford, a step up in the world, towards respectability, away from the stigma of the orphanage. He rose to middle management and his sons, my father and uncle, went to the local grammar school. On retirement in the 1980s, my grandparents moved to the seaside town of Broadstairs – Edward Heath's birthplace, and a town long-sure of its respectable status, though battling always with the threat of contamination from nearby Margate and Ramsgate.[11] Also in the 1980s, my parents moved to the outskirts of leafy Sevenoaks, setting up in a quite expansive Edwardian semi-detached

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[10]One consequence of the association of the inner city with racial otherness and racial conflict was that it became hard to see the inner city in terms either of its multiculture or its conviviality. If we were to take the word of those who fled the inner city because of racial otherness, this was a space that they left because it 'went black'. But, of course, the inner city never was a 'black' space. The areas designated as 'inner city' by planners and policy-makers remained mixed, and in most cases majority white, throughout the twentieth century. They have been, moreover, the forging grounds of on-the-ground cosmopolitanism, something argued convincingly by scholars like Paul Gilroy who grew up in such areas (in Gilroy's case, in Bethnal Green) and lived in the so-called inner city as a 'creole' space. See P. Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon, 2004); 'The 2019 Holberg Conversation with Paul Gilroy', www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBntPdPcQes, accessed 9 Oct. 2020. See also L. Back and S. Sinha, *Migrant City* (Abingdon, 2018); E. Jackson, 'Bowling together? Practices of belonging and becoming in a London ten-pin bowling league', *Sociology*, 54 (2020), 518–33; S. Valluvan, 'Conviviality and multiculture: a postintegration sociology of multi-ethnic interaction', *Young*, 24 (2016), 204–21.

[11]This sense of encroaching vulgarity is captured well in P. Theroux's *Kingdom by the Sea: A Journey around the Coast of Britain* (London, 1983). Broadstairs was a locale of 'Villa Toryism'. In towns like this, to borrow Peter Bailey's words, solidly lower-middle-class families 'staked out identity in an obsessive pursuit of status and respectability within a highly localized suburban milieu – keeping up with the Joneses, keeping away from the Smiths' (P. Bailey, 'White collars, gray lives? The lower middle class revisited', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), 275).

– another instance, as I see it now, of claim-making on a middle-class lifestyle that nonetheless proved elusive. I won a place at a grammar school in that bastion of conservatism, Royal Tunbridge Wells. I was inducted into the local scout troop. But when my parents divorced two years later, my dad, my sister, my brother and I were forced to relocate to a cramped house built on a repurposed scrapyard in the industrial suburbs of outer London. We fell back on exactly what my grandparents thought they had escaped.

My grandfather's story is echoed among many thousands of Londoners who left the city in the middle decades of the twentieth century, to New Towns and waystations on the way from a grimy city to a suburban, rural or seaside idyll. It is a story that can easily be explained through the language of class – its vocabulary here revolves around the long-surviving claim of 'respectability', the promise of 'betterment', affluence, aspiration, dignity; a dream fulfilled.[12] But there are other explanations that need to frame this story of social mobility. The south-east towns that my grandparents and then my parents settled in were luminously English and seemed to be as white as the cliffs of Dover. It was precisely this quality, as Elizabeth Buettner showed in her book *Empire Families*, that made such towns the natural choice of home for the returning class of imperialists relocating to Britain at empire's end.[13] Their world, as I found out many years after my grandfather's death, was also in small measure his. As a young man he had travelled to Brazil for work, a visit he seemed to enjoy. Later in his career, he spent some time in Nigeria. By all accounts, he loathed this experience. My brother remembers him uncomfortable when, on Broadstairs beach, a black family set up their buckets and spades beside ours.

As my uncle tells the story of my grandfather, he was a frightened man. Looking back on him now, I see him always cast in the role of Bernard Bligh from Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. His Englishness was forged in the experience of empire and its end, but he wished, I am sure, to escape from both. He was no doubt among the many who, as *The Times* wrote in 1968, felt that 'the debris from [empire's] falling had crashed into their own backyards'.[14] In Romford in the 1960s and 1970s, he was a quiet supporter of Enoch Powell.

It took me some time to recognize that my family's history, which I had grown up to understand as a story of class, was a story touched by race and empire in important ways. Our relationship with London remained within the imprint of that touch. Ours were the suburbs of Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*: jealously white, uneasy with difference and scared of the nearby multicultural city that many had earlier fled.

My grandfather's mid-century migration from Wood Green to Romford was one among many. From 1911 to 1971, Inner London's population fell from 4.5 million

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[12]See R. Glass, 'Introduction', in Centre for Urban Studies (ed.), *London: Aspects of Change* (London, 1964), xv.

[13]See E. Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 5. As Raymond Williams wrote of these post-colonial retirements: 'The birds and trees and rivers of England; the natives speaking, more or less, one's own language: these were the terms of many imagined and actual settlements. The country, now, was the place to retire to' (R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford, 1975), 405).

[14]Times News Team, *The Black Man in Search of Power: A Survey of Black Revolution across the World* (London, 1968), 127.

to 2.7, while Outer Greater London grew from 2.7 million to 4.6. The Outer Metropolitan Area, which stretches from Royston in the north to Haywards Heath in the south, and from Reading in the west to Southend on Sea in the east, more than doubled its population in this same period, from 1.9 million to 5.3.[15] This shift out of Inner London was a mid-century phenomenon. It began in the 1930s but was most rapid in the 1950s and 1960s. The New Towns, Expanded Towns and commuter villages that sprawled out from Central London, 'an industrial suburban penumbra of apparently limitless dimensions', as Jerry White describes them, offered modernity: 'modern homes, built for a car-owning society, with spick and span shopping centres, factories and offices'.[16] The majority of out-migration, like my grandfather's, was of skilled manual and white-collar workers.[17]

Migrants moved along the old routes out of the city set in place by the railways. From Islington, Hackney and Tottenham, they went to Enfield. From Poplar and East Ham, they went to Dagenham. From Wandsworth and Wimbledon, they went to Sutton, and from North Kensington and Fulham to Ealing, from Harrow and Wembley to Watford, from Stoke Newington and Finchley to Stevenage, from Norwood and Croydon to Caterham.[18] Substantial as the figures of out-migration are, they tell only part of the story, obscured because of the in-migration that offset it. Between 1961 and 1966, for instance, Greater London's net loss to migration was 406,000, but a total of 1,067,000 people had moved out in those five years, with almost half of them settling in the Outer Metropolitan Area. They were offset by 658,000 moving in, with nearly half of them coming from beyond Britain, from Ireland and the Commonwealth.[19] These in-migrants settled, again, in the places determined by their routes of travel. Many of the West Indians arriving at Waterloo from Southampton docks settled just to the south in Brixton and surrounding areas. Others, coming into Euston from Liverpool, settled in Islington and Finsbury Park, while many arriving in Paddington settled in North Kensington. By the late 1950s, half of West Indian settlement in London was concentrated in the four boroughs of Lambeth, Kensington, Paddington and Islington. Many Indians and Pakistanis, mostly arriving by air at Heathrow, set up in Southall and Ealing.[20]

While out-migration continued throughout the period of large-scale New Commonwealth migration into the city, few New Commonwealth migrants joined the out-migrants. By Mark Clapson's estimate, dispersal was almost wholly white until at least 1970. This was in part an economic issue. Millions of families took the opportunity to leave, as Clapson puts it, 'when they got the chance'.[21] This

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[15]M. Young and P. Willmott, *The Symmetrical Family* (1973; Harmondsworth, 1975), 41.

[16]J. White, *London in the 20th Century: A City and Its People* (London, 2008), 59–60.

[17]*Ibid.*, 73.

[18]Young and Willmott, *Symmetrical Family*, 42.

[19]S. Inwood, *A History of London* (New York, 1998), 852.

[20]Young and Willmott, *Symmetrical Family*, 59; R. Glass, assisted by H. Pollins, *Newcomers: The West Indians in London* (London, 1960), 38; J. Drake, 'From "colour blind" to "colour bar": residential separation in Brixton and Notting Hill, 1948–75', in L. Black (ed.), *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Post-War Britain* (London, 2001), 84.

[21]M. Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Postwar England* (Manchester, 1998), 50.

chance, however, was for various reasons largely restricted to white Londoners. Most out-migration was voluntary, and the voluntary migrants were largely skilled working-class and lower-middle-class families. To get houses on the new council estates, migrants required jobs to go to, and skilled jobs were most in demand. The skilled-worker migrations planned by the London County Council, moreover, were themselves outstripped by the private migrations of those who simply could afford to go.[22] The majority of New Commonwealth migrants did not fit the qualifications for skills nor have the means for out-migration. White Londoners usually believed their black and brown neighbours to be unskilled, uneducated, and poor – 'the world's riff-raff', as the *North London Press* had it – but this was hardly the case.[23] A quarter of migrants from the West Indies came with professional or managerial experience, and almost half were skilled workers. Indeed, on Ruth Glass' count, only 13 per cent were unskilled labourers.[24] But on seeking employment they were de-skilled. While only a quarter of migrants had worked in unskilled jobs in the Caribbean, almost two-thirds took such jobs in Britain. While 24 per cent of migrants arrived with professional or managerial experience, only 6 per cent found equivalent work in Britain.[25] Qualifications simply were not recognized. With meagre wages and facing the inflated rents of the so-called 'colour tax', black and brown Londoners were forced into overcrowded multiple occupation in the areas of the city long condemned as 'slums'. The LCC did, of course, also offer out-migration for those living in slum accommodation, with slum demolition schemes providing homes in the new towns as replacements for old ones lost. But slum demolition happened first in predominantly white areas, and indeed there is evidence that those areas of the city where non-white settlement was heaviest were pushed to the back of the redevelopment queue.[26]

For those few who might have been able to save the money, there were additional barriers besides the means. In the late 1950s, one property developer in St Albans wrote a covenant forbidding people of colour from either living in or visiting his estates. A public outcry led him to retract the clause regarding visiting the estates, but the clause forbidding renting or ownership remained. As Oswald Murray, the Jamaican welfare officer at the Willesden International Friendship Council observed a few years later, such restrictions suggested how districts like St Albans, with small or non-existent non-white populations, sought to prevent black and brown settlement.[27] The St Albans estate may have been an extreme example, but it is worth considering how unwelcome people of colour may have

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[22]See S. Humphries and J. Taylor, *The Making of Modern London, 1945–1985* (London, 1986), 81–92; Clapson, *Invincible*, 49–50; White, *London*, 73.

[23]*North London Press*, 8 May 1959, quoted in E. Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* (London, 1988), 23.

[24]Glass, assisted by Pollins, *Newcomers*, 24.

[25]J. Egginton, *They Seek a Living* (London, 1957), 65–6. See also W.W. Daniel, *Racial Discrimination in England: A Penguin Special Based on the P.E.P. Report* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 59–65.

[26]See, for example, the wrangling over the redevelopment of Brixton's Somerleyton Road and Geneva Road, long recognized as 'slum' streets but not redeveloped until the 1970s. See E. Burney, *Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government* (London, 1967), 137–45; 'Councils split over immigrant housing', *Observer*, 5 Dec. 1965, 12.

[27]See *Immigration to Assimilation?* (London, 1963), 8, The National Archives, London (TNA), MEPO 2/9854.

been made to feel in the suburbs. One man interviewed in John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood's *Affluent Worker* study of Luton car workers in the early 1960s shared with his interviewer the reasons he had left the town: 'it used to be respectable once but now all the coloured people live down there'.[28] Indeed, when a by-election hit Luton just after the study finished in 1963, polling revealed strong anti-immigrant sentiment.[29] The general election of the following year saw significant gains for anti-immigration candidates in other seats in the suburbs and the Outer Metropolitan Area, with Fenner Brockway losing his seat in Eton and Slough, and an anti-immigration candidate taking a large share of the vote in Southall.[30] Patrick Gordon Walker, who lost his Smethwick seat to the Tory candidate Peter Griffiths in the face of a viciously racist campaign, stood in Leyton the following year and lost again following a by-election that, despite the efforts of the leadership of all parties, was fought primarily on the issue of immigration.[31] The anti-immigration vote, in other words, made significant early headway in London's suburbs and the Outer Metropolitan Area.

The migrations from London have most commonly been described, at the time and since, through the language of class. For Ross McKibbin, a major prompt was respectability. '"Respectable" people', McKibbin records, 'wished to move from a "rough" neighbourhood and "middle-class" people from a "working-class" neighbourhood.'[32] For others, the aspiration was to reap the benefits of modern living. Michael Young and Peter Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) remains the most famous portrait of the mid-century migrations from London.[33] For them, the migrations away from the working-class communities of what would soon be termed the inner city were presented as moments of dissolution, in which community bonds broke down and life became materially richer, but in most other senses barer. What Young and Willmott made clear, however, was that these migrations were undertaken because, for many, they were the only opportunity of grasping the modernity that others seemed to be party to and that was not on offer in the inner city.

Race, however, was as much a concern as class and mobility. A decade on from *Family and Kinship*, Young and Willmott returned to the sociology of class and community for their study *The Symmetrical Family*, researched in 1970 and published three years later. Again, in this book, they emphasized that class aspiration underpinned the migrations from London. For working-class Londoners, the chance to 'move up' was synonymous with the chance to move out.[34] But this second study was more attuned to how far these short-distance migrations, from Inner London to the suburbs and Outer Metropolitan Area, were also spurred by the longer-distance migrations, from the Caribbean, South Asia, Cyprus, Malta

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[28]Quoted in J. Lawrence, *Me? Me? Me? The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford, 2019), 117.

[29]*Ibid.*, 269 n. 71.

[30]Z. Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, 'Race' and 'Race' Relations in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 1992), 77–8.

[31]'White backlash in Leyton?', *Magnet*, 1, 13 Feb. 1965, 1.

[32]R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998), 202.

[33]M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, 1957).

[34]Young and Willmott, *Symmetrical Family*, 42.

and West Africa, that remade Inner London in the 1950s and 1960s. When Young and Willmott asked former inner-city Londoners, now living in the Outer Metropolitan Area, about the reasons for their migration, some feigned reticence. 'If I was to answer that you'd report me to the Race Relations Board', one said, simultaneously performing what he took to be his oppression by this new behemoth and managing to say exactly what he wanted nonetheless. Another, more candid, confessed that he sought to escape what he called the 'creeping black tide', adding that he was 'on the side of Enoch Powell'.[35] These were common reasons given for migrations from the inner city – 'white flight', as it became known in the US context. It was a story many would feel compelled to repeat, becoming a mythic story of exodus that resonated within London's new diaspora – simultaneously an ethnic and class myth. A sociologist in Durham interviewing 250 Londoners who had moved there from Islington and Hornsey in the 1960s recorded that while her interview questions asked nothing about the impact of immigration on the decisions of these London out-migrants, nonetheless it was one of the motivations most frequently cited. 'Comments were unprompted', she wrote, 'sometimes coming after I had finished taking notes and was preparing to leave. But there is no doubt that feelings on this subject were deep – expressed in one phrase as "It isn't a Londoner's London anymore."'[36]

The fact that comments such as these came unprompted should itself give us pause for thought. Recent re-engagements with the sociological archive of the post-war decades have emphasized how it can capture the subtly changing class dynamics and the multiple and overlapping languages of class and community operating in the era of social democracy.[37] But these sociological studies, which represent one of the richest archives of qualitative data on the experiences of social class from the period, tell us little about how these knitted together with racial attitudes. The marginality of race in these archives might be best viewed as the effects of marginalization. Jon Lawrence, who has engaged most directly with this issue in his re-readings of social science archives, concedes that the infrequency with which issues of race appear may have reflected sociologists' preoccupations. In Michael Young's case, for instance, it reflected 'his broader deafness to vernacular voices which challenged his celebratory account of "community"'.[38] Sociologists studying the fate of class in the new towns left little space for respondents to speak about race and ethnicity. The *Affluent Worker* study, for example, was initially proposed to take place in Bedford, but moved to Luton because Bedford's population 'was considered ethnically too diverse'.[39] While interviews were only semi-structured, moreover, the

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[35] *Ibid.*, 60 n. 1.

[36] Cited in *Institute of Race Relations Newsletter*, Nov.–Dec. 1968, 431.

[37] See S. Todd, 'Affluence, class and Crown Street: reinvestigating the post-war working class', *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2008), 501–18; M. Savage, 'Working-class identities in the 1960s: revisiting the affluent worker', *Sociology*, 39 (2005), 929–46; J. Lawrence, 'Class, "affluence" and the study of everyday life in Britain, c. 1930–1964', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), 273–99; J. Lawrence, 'Inventing the "traditional working-class": a re-analysis of interview notes from Young and Wilmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*', *Historical Journal*, 59 (2016), 567–93; J. Lawrence, 'Social-science encounters and the negotiation of difference in early 1960s England', *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), 215–39; Lawrence, *Me? Me? Me?*.

[38] *Ibid.*, 64.

[39] *Ibid.*, 115–16.

questions were heavily focused on class.[40] They left little space to elaborate on issues of race or ethnicity. Race, when it arose in social surveys, was instead likely to be expressed obliquely and discussion of it could be readily closed down. When one of Michael Young's respondents ventured to offer the opinion that 'You have to be a foreigner before they'll give you a home', her daughter, also present at the interview, interjected: 'Don't get her off on politics.'[41] As John Davis has noted, the disclaimer 'I am no racialist, but…' was the ubiquitous preamble to public discussions of race in the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrating a degree of self-censorship premised, Davis suggests, on a sense of the vulgarity or impropriety of speaking race. When Powellism erupted with such force in 1968, it was guided by the idea of a conspiracy of silence informed by a liberal elite unwilling to allow 'ordinary' people to express their views on race and migration.[42] The fact that race as an explanation for migration came through 'unprompted' in social science surveys, in other words, might be most significant precisely because it still broke through, despite so much counting against the possibility.

I would suggest, however, that the racial and the class explanations for out-migration could easily operate as two sides of the same coin. Let us take, for example, the desire for modern living and modern amenities. Explaining the class motivations behind out-migration, Young and Willmott pointed to the issue of relative poverty in an era of rising prosperity, using the metaphor of 'a marching column': 'as the column advances', they explained, 'the last rank does eventually reach and pass the point which the first rank had passed some time before. In other words, the egalitarian tendency works with a time lag.'[43] New Commonwealth migrants were at the rear of their metaphorical column – 'the best indicators of what conditions used to be like for others'.[44] Thinking about how this sense of black belatedness was lived in white Londoners' encounters with their black and brown neighbours might help us recognize some of the threat that these neighbours were seen to represent against the promise of affluence and modernity. The poverty and dilapidation that so many new migrants were forced into could embody, for their neighbours, a return of what was supposed to be the past, and a threat to trap them in it. The countless testimonies of aggrieved white tenants in multi-racial housing given to the Milner Holland Committee in 1965 spoke to exactly this fear.[45] The assumption that it was both right and *natural* that black Londoners should be at the back of the column is also often evident in

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[40]See Lawrence, 'Social-science encounters', 228.

[41]Quoted in Lawrence, *Me? Me? Me?*, 64.

[42]See J. Davis, 'Containing racism? The London experience, 1957–1968', in R.D.G. Kelley and S. Tuck (eds.), *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States* (Basingstoke, 2015), 138–40. See also A. Whipple, 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" controversy: letters to Enoch Powell', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 717–35.

[43]Young and Willmott, *Symmetrical Family*, 20.

[44]*Ibid.*, 58.

[45]See Milner Holland papers, TNA, HLG 39. See also J. Davis, 'Rents and race in 1960s London: new light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12 (2001), 69–92. The Milner Holland Committee raised the issue of the failures of the London County Council's plans to regenerate London and fix the housing problem, but like the Profumo Scandal that prompted it, it revealed at the same time a London population fixated on race, played out here in the issue of sharing lodgings across racial difference.

the reactions of whites to any conspicuous consumption on the part of their black neighbours. New cars and sharp clothes represented some inversion of the proper order of things and were often read as evidence of ill-gotten gains. In the 1950s, the black man in a sports car – invariably a pimp – was a bogeyman constantly invoked as a rebuke that working-class white Londoners were forced to endure, and unreasonably asked to tolerate.[46] Big cars, fancy clothes, showiness: in the south London suburbs, as the Zanzibari businessman Abdul Bin Ahmed notes in a mid-1950s scene in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1973), the neighbours would complain. 'What's he doing over here in his overheated automobile? Living off our white girls, that's what, stands to reason he must be, else how it happens he can run a motorcar two blocks wide which we can't afford to do?'[47]

Markers of affluence, as Stephen Brooke has argued, became particularly charged for those who saw themselves to be missing out on it.[48] Race emphasized that missing-out: black people *were not supposed* to be enjoying the rewards of affluence first. Class and race were equally intertwined, however, as I will argue in the following section, in that second motivation for migration: the preservation of respectability.

The spatial politics of respectability

The class aspirations among London's white working class, and the threats to them that racial otherness seemed to pose, were concretized most forcefully through the spatial politics of respectability. As historians have long recognized, respectability was a formative category of class life in modern Britain. Histories of respectability have tended to focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with many claiming it to be a culture diminished by the impact of World War II and the social democratic settlement.[49] If the political languages of class shifted with social democracy, however, several recent works have pointed to how older vernacular languages of class held continuing traction into the post-war decades.[50] Respectability lived on powerfully in the organization of social space in the city, and in the relation between city and suburb. London's working-class neighbourhoods, as Mary Chamberlain remembers of the Lambeth of her childhood in the 1950s, were a 'battleground where a war of class and status was fought and defended. It mattered if you took in washing, visited the pawn shop, if shoes were unpolished and clothing torn. It mattered if you drank tea from a saucer, if the table was not laid, if the curtains were not washed weekly.'[51] Life was lived under the scrutiny of others' eyes, seen or imagined. In mid-century working-class

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[46]See Times News Team, *Black Man*, 130.

[47]K. Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (London, 1973), 92.

[48]S. Brooke, 'Revisiting Southam Street: class, generation, gender, and race in the photography of Roger Mayne', *Journal of British Studies*, 53 (2014), 473–5.

[49]See, for example, L. MacKay, *Respectability and the London Poor, 1780–1870: The Value of Virtue* (London, 2013); E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890–1940* (Oxford, 1984); A. Marwick, *British Society since 1945*, 4th edn (London, 2003), 25.

[50]F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968–2000* (Oxford, 2018), 26.

[51]M. Chamberlain, *Growing Up in Lambeth* (London, 1989), 8.

neighbourhoods like these, as Carolyn Steedman showed in her intimate portrait of her mother's class politics in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, threats to one's precarious claims to respectability could appear to lurk around every corner.[52] Even with the post-war promise of social democracy, as Chamberlain writes, 'the infinite subtleties of English class' persisted in working-class neighbourhoods much as they had done for decades. Maintaining respectability was 'crucial'.[53]

The precarity of staying on the right side of the moving frontier between prosperity and poverty, which Young and Willmott pointed to in their marching column metaphor, was matched by a precarity of staying on the right side of respectability. Here, white Londoners often felt that the arrival of black neighbours was a threat to respectability that they could not afford to risk. When Willesden social worker Joan Maizels conducted a survey of race relations in the borough in 1959, she concluded that concerns over what she called 'the coloured newcomer' were often concerns with the threat that they posed to the social status of the neighbourhood and its existing residents (although of course both the residents Maizels referred to here, and those in whose eyes they imagined themselves to be diminished, were implicitly white). In a typical example, she recorded one Willesden resident complaining of a 'Lot more coloured people – they don't do anything wrong – but they just bring the neighbourhood down.'[54] A card recorded in a shop window in Soho in 1954 made this link between respectability and white Englishness explicit. 'Respectable people only', it read, ' – no coloured – no Irish.'[55]

We need not think every Londoner was a future Powellite in order to recognize why it was that racial discrimination nonetheless made sense for them. It was the means by which a neighbourhood's respectability could be maintained, and it was undertaken even when to do so involved some personal embarrassment. As the Jamaican writer Alvin Bennett joked through the central protagonist of his 1959 novel *Because They Know Not*,

> Since I come 'ere I never met a single English person who 'ad any colour prejudice. Once, I walked the whole length of a street looking for a room, and everyone told me that he or she 'ad no prejudice against coloured people. It was the neighbour who was stupid. If only we could find the 'neighbour' we could solve the entire problem. But to find 'im is the trouble! Neighbours are the worst people to live beside in this country.[56]

Those who might be asked to take a person of colour as a lodger or tenant could displace their racism onto their neighbour in order to avoid owning it themselves. But there was a disavowal in that displacement. For the sociologist Ruth Glass,

[52]C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Women* (London, 1986).

[53]Chamberlain, *Lambeth*, 6. For a re-periodization through the 'mid-century', see B. Jones, *The Working Class in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012). For the importance of respectability in 1950s streets, see D. Chapman, *The Home and Social Status* (London, 1955), 159–60.

[54]J. Maizels, 'The West Indian comes to Willesden' (1959), London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), ACC/1888/115.

[55]Shop window card in Soho offering rooms to let, cited in 'Words of the month', *Bronze*, 1 (1954), 22.

[56]A.G. Bennett, *Because They Know Not* (London, 1959).

writing in 1960, 'The equivocal approach to race relations (the frequent statement – "I dislike discrimination but I am obliged to practice it")' was 'so common just because it is by no means *simply* an alibi. It contains an element of sincerity.'[57] The sincerity was bound up in the conviction that class betterment necessitated racial discrimination. The eyes of one's neighbours were a constant concern and, in this calculation, respectability trumped any nascent sense of multicultural hospitality. If a landlord might recognize the need to explain their own racism as a displaced manifestation of their neighbour's, this was a sideways recognition of the humanity of the person they were refusing accommodation to. But the display of displacement also allowed the disavowal *of* that common humanity. It allowed them to hide from themselves the full knowledge of what they were doing. I believe that such everyday racism could flourish among white Londoners in part because their eyes were focused always elsewhere. This accounts for the paradox of how white Londoners could profess their tolerance in the process of disavowing their own racism.

For white Londoners in the 1950s and 1960s, the proximity of blackness could easily figure as a threat to social capital – 'it might place the family's social position in jeopardy', the sociologist Kenneth Little wrote by way of explanation in 1958, in a pamphlet responding to the Notting Hill riots.[58] If this was a dynamic subject to erasure in the sociological literature on class, it was nonetheless one brilliantly dramatized in the creative works of the time. In Alexander Baron's 1963 London novel *The Lowlife*, the arrival of a West Indian family to the top floor of the multiple-occupancy house in which the novel is set is the 'last straw' for Evelyn Deaner, who lives two floors below and has endured the indignities of multiple occupation in Dalston only because her husband has always promised that they are saving to move to a more respectable existence in the suburbs. With the arrival of West Indians, the house will be transformed, Evelyn is convinced, into 'a slum'.[59] She entertains many ridiculous notions about the customs and standards of her West Indian neighbours, and each are shown to be ridiculous; at the same time, the transgressions she accuses them of are often proved to be rooted in her own disavowed desires. But for Evelyn such complexities are erased by the simple equation between blackness and the vanishing promise of a respectable life. Similarly, in Roy Ward Baker's 1961 film *Flame in the Streets*, Brenda De Banzie's character, Nell Palmer, is defined by her desire to leave Notting Hill and move to the suburbs, where she might enjoy a house with a bath, and greater material comforts. Her daughter marrying a West Indian man is, for Nell, the biggest obstacle to that dream.[60] The gender dynamics are significant here, and the dynamic that appears in these fictional representations is repeated elsewhere: women took on, and were likely expected to take on, the role of preserving the class status of the family. Wives often took on the role of guardian against the threats to respectability that black men represented. In London, as Ruth Glass noted, black neighbours were 'blamed for…deferment of hopes for improvements'.[61] Women were often the

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[57]Glass, assisted by Pollins, *Newcomers*, 110. Emphasis added.
[58]K. Little, *Colour and Commonsense* (London, 1958), 23.
[59]A. Baron, *The Lowlife* (London, 1963), 85–6.
[60]*Flame in the Streets*, dir. by Roy Ward Baker (Rank Organisation Film Productions Ltd, 1961).
[61]Glass, assisted by Pollins, *Newcomers*, 56.

principal actors in vocalizing that blame, standing at the forefront of this racialized politics of the domesticated class relations of the 1950s and 1960s.

In the dramas of Evelyn Deaner and Nell Palmer, we see how respectability was made in the relation between the emerging 'inner city' and the expanding suburbs. The desire for respectability worked simultaneously by dreaming of elsewhere and locking-in on the close texture of immediate locality. This is a double location that is specific to the mid-century expansion of London, and its connection to promises of affluence and social mobility. In the inner-city London of the mid-twentieth century, respectability operated both through its reference to a deferred promise of betterment in the suburbs, or, more modestly, in a better street nearby, and through its reference to the battle to stave off the taint of roughness that bit at the heels. Roughness was respectability's other, and a threat that operated most forcefully through physical proximity. Its terrain was less the precarity of occupation or income than the intimacy of home, street and neighbourhood.[62] And rather than a label for a particular social position, respectability therefore stood as a social relation, within which individuals struggled to place themselves, and found themselves placed by others.[63] By consequence, it was rarely safe to assume that one had finally 'reached' respectability, or escaped the accusation of roughness.[64] In this context, it is hardly surprising that aspirations to respectability were so often, as in Evelyn Deaner's case, based on dreams of escaping one's immediate locality. But it is equally unsurprising that the conflicts that respectability engendered were obsessively focused on this same immediate locality: on the next-door-neighbour's door, their front garden, their windows; on the tone, volume and accent of their voices; on the condition and style of their clothes; on the streets that backed onto one's own; on the neighbourhoods one feared association with.

Areas deemed beneath one's social standing, particularly when they became marked by racial otherness, were to be avoided. This was a task maintained through the most everyday activities. A resident of Streatham Hill told his local paper in 1957 of how he had to walk a hundred yards to post his letters in a box that would mark them SW12 – the Streatham Hill postmark – and not SW2, the postmark of Brixton.[65] Postmarks mattered for social standing in a London in which differences of class could come down to the finest local distinctions. This was made all the more urgent in the context of London's quick-shifting demography. Out-migration to the suburbs had remade London in ways that concretized in

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[62]E. Ross, '"Not the sort that would sit on the doorstep": respectability in pre-World War I London neighborhoods', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 27 (1985), 39–59; J. Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900–1950* (Basingstoke, 1995).

[63]See A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street Children in London, 1870–1914* (London, 1996), 70; Jones, *Working Class*, 132.

[64]See J. Davies, 'Jennings' Buildings and the Royal Borough: the construction of the underclass in mid-Victorian England', in D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* (London, 1989), 11–39; P. Bailey, '"Will the real Bill Banks please stand up?" Towards a role analysis of mid-Victorian working-class respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1979), 336–53; Ross, '"Not the sort that would sit on the doorstep"'.

[65]See S. Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London, 1963), 51.

social space the cultural distinctions between middle and working class.[66] But, especially for those remaining in the city, the divisions that respectability cut within and across these broad class distinctions remained far less stable. Anything that was solid one moment might melt into air the very next, an unpredictability that became doubly pronounced with the liberalization of rent control in 1957, which had major effects in shifting the London housing market. Escaping the poverty and roughness of the inner city meant escaping encroaching racial otherness. 'White residents', as one Lambeth council official observed in 1961, 'are often reluctant to continue living in a road or neighbourhood once it starts going black.'[67] In London's constant remaking, the borders of class and respectability were 'endlessly redrawn as street or area lost caste or won credit'. With an eye on the game of gentrification, Jerry White has described this unpredictability as 'an endlessly fascinating plaything for twentieth-century London'.[68] But those who had little choice in where they lived watched this endless redrawing with trepidation. In the letters pages of the local press, they read of the latest streets to have 'gone black', and prayed that theirs would not be next. White neighbours jealously policed their streets against any encroachments of racial otherness. When Jamaican hairdresser Roy Lando moved to Pimlico in 1959 to set up his business, he found his shop windows repeatedly smashed. The threat of black neighbours also became a proxy means for fighting neighbourhood disputes in the suburbs. In Hanworth on London's western edge, also in 1959, one homeowner advertised his house for sale to 'coloured people' only, in a deliberate attempt to provoke his neighbours.[69]

London's constant remaking was at once lived at an intensely local level, and as a public event, relayed in the newspapers through letters pages and investigative journalism, by news reports and topical affairs television, and in the new popularity of sociology, and the burgeoning fictional literature on black London life. In current affairs television, camera crews were sent to neighbourhoods experiencing these transformations. Talking heads were interviewed on the street about their experiences.[70] Race relations sociology, though in its infancy in the 1950s and early 1960s, was also perhaps at its height of public visibility, with sociologists a regular presence in the television coverage, and working as journalists in their own right. This offered plenty of opportunity for Londoners both to hear of the goings-on in other parts of their city, and to offer their own testimonies in response. In the lead-up to publishing her *Dark Strangers*, a landmark study in race relations sociology, Sheila Patterson wrote a series of articles on race in Brixton for the *People*, prompting a rush of letters from readers. One, a Mrs P.R. from Dulwich, who had left her Brixton home because of a 'coloured man' buying up the house, wrote in

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[66]M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840–1940* (London, 1994), 57–72; J. Lawrence, 'The British sense of class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), 307–18, at 316.

[67]Lambeth public relations officer to Lambeth town clerk, 'Race relations in the borough', 15 Feb. 1961, Lambeth Archives, London, MBL/TC/R/205A.

[68]White, *London*, 6.

[69]'Race relations in Britain: a summary of press news and comment', Institute of Race Relations, Dec. 1959, 3, LMA, ACC/1888/120.

[70]See S. Malik, *Representing Black Britain: A History of Black and Asian Images on British Television* (London, 2002), 41–3.

disgust at the 'slum' her street had been transformed into.[71] When Sir Milner Holland announced his inquiry into housing conditions in the capital around the same time, he received a mass of unsolicited evidence in response. 'Many of our witnesses, and much of the written material submitted to us', as he later recorded, 'referred to problems and difficulties related in one way or another to coloured landlords and coloured tenants.' The publication of the report afforded newspapers plenty of scope to give further horror stories in this vein.[72]

Through such reports, Londoners could follow the shifting topographies of race in the city, and map shifts that might be creeping toward their own neighbourhoods. Local newspapers provided the details on the latest surveys to be published. One could imagine, for example, how the *South London Press*'s announcement of the publication of a new 'atlas of London' showing the distribution of immigrants in London 'in comparison with housing conditions, age and other factors' may have pricked the interest of its readers.[73] Like Pepys plotting the London plague, like Booth mapping the reach of poverty, these reports provided ways of living the city's transformation.

As white Londoners could read about the transformations of neighbouring streets and districts, they also carefully monitored their own streets. A retired hospital matron, when interviewed for a housing survey in Notting Hill in 1959, reported how she kept a close eye on all the goings on of her black neighbours in her multiple-occupancy house, watching every visitor, always expecting some new slight or annoyance.[74] 'What kind of private life can you have in Britain if your skin is not "white"?', the black South African journalist Bloke Modisane asked rhetorically in 1962. In his lodgings, he found his landladies always monitoring each potentially disruptive presence – 'no gramophones after eleven; no parties; not more than two visiting friends, and so on, *ad nauseum*'.[75] The Trinidadian calypsonian Lord Kitchener made a hit record mocking exactly this kind of surveillance in his song 'My Landlady' in 1952.[76] Black lives in this period were lived under the intensive scrutiny of neighbours. As one West Indian man in Camberwell told his local paper in 1958, 'They spend half their time peering through their curtains at us.'[77] Or, as a character in Bennett's *Because They Know Not* put it, 'I think you are mistaken about the people minding their own business. I have a coloured friend and when he visits an English home the neighbours have a spy parade.'[78]

If a street was deemed to have 'gone black' it became a site for tourism, where worried white Londoners might catch a glimpse of their potential future.

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[71]Mrs P.R., letter to the editor, *People*, 20 Jan. 1963, 12.

[72]M. Holland, *Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London* (London, 1965), 6. More widely, see Davis, 'Rents'.

[73]'Immigrants surveyed', *South London Press*, 9 Dec. 1968, 9.

[74]'North Kensington I' (1959–63), Donald Chesworth papers, Queen Mary University of London, PP2/49. In the Jamaican writer Andrew Salkey's boarding-house novel *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (London, 1960), the landlady operates a 'Gestapo system'. Nothing can be kept secret.

[75]B. Modisane, 'Sorry, no coloureds', *Twentieth Century*, Spring 1962, 92–8.

[76]Lord Kitchener, 'My landlady' (Melodisc, 1952), reproduced in *London Is the Place for Me: Trinidadian Calypso in London, 1950–1956* (Honest Jon Records, 2002).

[77]'Selbourne-Rd. is dubious about those newcomers', *South London Press*, 29 Jul. 1958, 3.

[78]Bennett, *Because*, 84.

Neighbours on the street would invite others to visit and see for themselves the degradations they were forced to endure, and by this means voyeurs could guarantee the chance of some vicarious slumming. An exasperated Edwyn Price invited readers of the *South London Press* to 'take a train ride from Brixton Station to Herne Hill and look at the gardens of the houses of Somerleyton-rd' in 1961.[79] The trainline ran parallel to the entire length of Somerleyton Road, and offered a chance for passengers to peer into what fast became one of the most infamous streets in London. Anne Ley, also of Somerleyton Road, chose instead to invite local journalists to spend the night with her: 'Choose any night, just drop in. Sample it for yourself.'[80] In Islington around the same time, a Mr Stubbs of Belitha Villas invited readers of the *Islington Gazette* to visit 'on any Saturday evening – especially during the summer – to see and hear what goes on'.[81] One Hampstead resident, apparently taking up the offer, visited the street in person to view the 'eyesore' of the new basement flats, and report back on it in a letter to the paper.[82]

Conclusion: not caring for the connexion

News from the inner city provided some titillation at suburban breakfast tables, as long as it was not too close to home. Ralph Singh in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* thought that the Murals, his landlords, might enjoy a newspaper report on the sordid fate that had befallen his former south London boarding house – 'it was the sort of item they relished'. The Murals, however, 'did not care for the connexion'. It seemed to threaten the gains of their 'postwar rise' – both the boy scouts and material acquisitions.

The spy parades, the trips to Islington's 'black' streets, the peeps into backyards from the trains rolling above Brixton: these were based on a curiosity mixed with fear. This was the fear that the fragile gains of post-war reconstruction were about to be lost, or the fear that the borders of the emerging inner city were about to roll out into yet another street that had hoped it might escape them, or the fear that, even in the suburbs, the gains of respectability or affluence might only be temporarily secure.[83] These are class fears, based on the concerns of both social and actual capital, but they were formed, given meaning, through

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[79]Edwyn Price, letter to the editor, *South London Press*, 22 Sep. 1961, 12.

[80]'Somerleyton Road begins to wake up around 2a.m.', *South London Press*, 15 Aug. 1961, 4.

[81]B. Stubbs, letter to the editor, *Islington Gazette*, 10 Mar. 1961, 8. 'The Victorians would blush if they were able to walk through Islington any weekend evening', wrote one Islington resident in response to Stubbs' letter (J. Yule, letter to the editor, *Islington Gazette*, 30 Mar. 1961, 6). Post-Victorianism of this kind, as Frank Mort has argued, had popular purchase in the post-war city. It served here as a means for this letter writer to cast himself, by allusion to his Victorian forebears, as the last line of defence in the collapse of a formerly normative moral culture. As Mort says of post-war London's post-Victorianism, it 'evoked images from the Victorian city, or more precisely what was perceived to be Victorian in the 1950s, which was in reality an eclectic pastiche of images and experiences drawn from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century past' (*Capital Affairs*, 9).

[82]Frank Seton, letter to the editor, *Islington Gazette*, 17 Mar. 1961, 8.

[83]As Sarah Thieme reveals in her article in this Special Issue, the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas decided to redefine large suburban post-war housing estates as 'inner-city' areas in its 1985 study of urban deprivation.

apprehensions of race. A street 'going black' was, for so many white residents, final confirmation that the battle had been lost and that it was time, if possible, to leave. Paradoxical as it might sound, race marked out the inner city as a *class* space, just as it also marked the class status of the suburbs. It served as the index by which class advancement or class failure could be measured, and in this function it not only marked out the relation between inner city and suburb, but could be a driving force by which each took shape.

For those who moved to the suburbs and further afield, the inner city, particularly as a location of conflict in which racial otherness pressed in to challenge a respectable life, remained vivid. But the suburbs could never really afford a final escape from this racialized idea of 'roughness': respectability relied on its other to acquire meaning. When Michael Young and Peter Willmott visited Brentwood in 1970, they found that even within these new havens of respectability, a narcissism of minor differences prevailed, by which 'to offset the sameness', residents 'made even more of the differences they saw, or imagined, between people'. In one street, they found that the residents on one side of the street referred to the houses on the other side as 'the African village'. To all appearances, the two sides of the street were indistinguishable. But, as these Brentwooders patiently explained, women on that side of the street stood in their doorways as if the houses were 'huts'; they shouted across to other houses, as if in a 'kraal'.[84] The language of race, in this way, overlaid the language of respectability, and roughness in its racial register continued to frame anxieties over precarious respectability even when people of colour were, seemingly, nowhere in sight.

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[84]Young and Willmott, *Symmetrical Family*, 6–7.