Poplar Stories:

Whiteness, Class Loss and the Affective Infrastructure of Urban Regeneration in East London's Former Docklands

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Declaration of Authorship I, Robert Deakin, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

Examining the entanglements of heritage and urban regeneration in Poplar, east London, this thesis advances an intersectional and multimodal approach to the study of gentrification and resistance. After heavy bombing in the Second World War, the docklands district of Poplar was rebuilt according to a modernist masterplan. Today it is undergoing another round of intensive redevelopment – one that risks displacing many of its working-class residents. In this context, 'heritage' has emerged as a key point of contestation, deployed by a range of actors – from residents and housing activists to architectural enthusiasts and housing developers - to make claims on urban space. The class-focused concept of 'gentrification' remains the dominant framework for analysing processes of displacement and resistance amid urban regeneration. Yet attention to urban regeneration's entanglements with heritage in this setting reveals a need to consider how class-based displacement pressures overlay and reanimate longer intersecting histories of race, class, and nation.

Through chapters exploring a project to re-establish a pub on a social housing estate, contestation around the redevelopment of a dilapidated but architecturally renowned retail market at which most traders are of Bangladeshi ethnicity, and a film project I developed with Jimmy – an unemployed white-British, male, working-class man in his early sixties – I draw attention to the 'affective infrastructure' of urban regeneration. This brings into view urban regeneration's complex and nonlinear entanglement with processes of gentrification: not simply imposed from above through a single logic of neoliberal political economy these projects are importantly shaped by residents' practices and imaginaries of place, across multiple axes of inequality. I show how the affective infrastructure of urban regeneration in Poplar often works to reproduce place-based histories of racial and class inequality, but also explore – through a multimodal approach - how inventive engagements with affective infrastructure might work towards more egalitarian urban futures.

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List of Acronyms

- ABL – Aberfeldy Big Local
- CPO – Compulsory Purchase Order
- GLC – Greater London Council
- LBTH – London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- LCC – London County Council
- LDDC – London Docklands Development Corporation
- Poplar HARCA – Housing and Regeneration Community Association
- RTB – Right to Buy

Introduction

0.1 – The Dockers Sydney Harpley (London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, LMA/4218/01/025))

In September 1962, in a small, newly created park within the Lansbury Estate adjacent to the East India Dock Road, *The Dockers* was unveiled to a crowd of journalists and local people. Standing eight-foot-six-inches tall, the fibreglass sculpture depicts two muscular men, bodies merged, straining under a heavy load. The work of the sculptor Sydney Harpley, *The Dockers* was one of seventy such works of art purchased or commissioned by the London County Council (LCC) as part of its Arts Patronage Scheme between 1956 and 1964 - many by leading contemporary artists. Amidst an urban landscape transforming through modernist post-war redevelopment, this program sought to use art to “bind” residents to their new urban environments (West, 2016). For its leader, Isaac Hayward, the LCC had “both a cultural and an educational responsibility… to encourage and assist in the provision of works of art” for citizens of the new LCC estates (West, 2017). Although media coverage from the unveiling reveals that the abstract figures were not to everyone’s tastes,

the well-known communist Trade Union leader, docker and housing activist, Jack Dash, celebrated the sculpture as “a tribute to our physical labourers. I’m pleased that our services to the community are being recognised” (ibid.).

At around the same time that *The Dockers* was unveiled, a few minutes’ walk east, the internationally renowned architectural duo Alison and Peter Smithson were awarded a site by the LCC for new council housing (Powers, 2010, p. 27). In 1965 the site was expanded, and the architects began work on Robin Hood Gardens - an estate comprised of two mid-rise concrete “slab blocks” orientated around a landscaped, secluded central green space complete with a children’s playground. Here, too, notions of creating community and neighbourliness through art and architectural design - or what the Smithson’s called “building for the socialist dream” - were central. For example, the provision of extra-wide elevated access decks - “streets in the air” - designed such that “[two] women with prams can stop and talk without blocking the flow,” sought to recreate the sociability of the Victorian East End terraced street in a new era of “vertical living” (Highmore, 2017, p. 63). Meanwhile the Smithson’s ensured that the kitchen window would look down upon the green space below, giving mothers the confidence to let their children roam free while still being able to keep them under a degree of supervision.

0.2 – Robin Hood Gardens (Sandra Lousada/Mary Evans Picture Library.)

Yet before Robin Gardens had even been completed, the Smithsons were already full of doubt - not just about their designs but the whole enterprise of new-build housing estates. In a BBC film on the project, broadcast one year before its opening in 1971, the Smithsons oscillate between, on the one hand, confident pronouncements that Robin Hood Gardens is "a demonstration of a more enjoyable way of living" and "an exemplar of a new mode of urban organization" and, on the other, fears about what will become of the scheme once the residents move in. "Society at the moment *asks* architects to build these new homes for them", reflects Alison Smithson:

> "But… this may be really stupid, we may have to rethink the whole thing, it may be that we should only be asked to repair the roofs and add the odd bathroom to the old industrial houses and just leave people where they are, to smash it up in complete abandon and happiness, so that nobody has to worry about it anymore." (*The Smithsons on Housing*, 1970).

Peter Smithson continues, gravely:

> "We still feel under an obligation… to provide the best possible quality, irrespective of what people expect, and what treatment it's going to get" (*The Smithsons on Housing*, 1970).

Indeed, within weeks of its opening the estate's communal facilities were "vandalised and forced to close" (Smithson, 2010, p. 78) seemingly realising the Smithsons' worst fears.[1] Meanwhile, at the Lansbury Estate *The Dockers* was receiving similar treatment. Drawing on local news reports, Rosamond West (2017) describes how, during the 1970s, the sculpture was persistently attacked with chisels and drills before, in 1981, kindling was stuffed in the holes and it was set alight, the blaze becoming so big that the fire service had to attend. Over the next years bits of the statue continued to be chipped away, until only the legs were left. Eventually these too were removed and today only an empty plinth remains.

[1] Ben Highmore (2017) provides a longer consideration of this television programme, including the Smithson's fears of vandalism, in the epilogue to his book *The Art of Brutalism.*

● *Firemen damp down all that remains of the dockers.*
Photo — M. C. Lee.

Seems like someone's got it in for the two figures in this statue.

For in the past ten years or so, the fibreglass work of art depicting two dockers, which stands in Trinity Gardens, East India Dock Road, has put up with people poking holes in it with chisels and drills. ELA 4/9/81

But last Saturday was the final straw. Vandals stuffed some rubbish into one of the holes and set it alight. Result — two dockers with melted heads.

The statue, completed by Sidney Harpley, was commissioned in the early 60's by the GLC.

"Since 1970 when we took over maintaining the statue it's been damaged three times," said a Tower Hamlets Council spokesman.

"Now we've got to find someone who can restore it — and that's likely to take a long time."

0.3 – Newspaper clipping, 4th September 1981 (East London Advertiser, courtesy of Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives and Rosamond West)

0.4 – Social and Functional Analysis of London's Communities from the 1943 County of London Plan (Abercrombie et al., 1943). Poplar (circled) is classified as a "central [community] with a high proportion of obsolescent property".

Conceptualisation

Neoliberal Urbanism

The fate of *The Dockers* and Robin Hood Gardens are testament to an abrupt reversal that took place between the 1960s and 1970s – with these optimistic projects for creating new, modern, egalitarian urban environments and neighbourly relations apparently rejected by some of the very people they were supposed to benefit. This reversal took place in the context of an equally dramatic transformation in the local and national economy. While in the immediate post-war period the London docks experienced a boom, with trade peaking at above 61million tonnes in 1964 (PLA, n.d.), a period of rapid decline followed, largely precipitated by the opening of a deep-water dock at Tilbury, Essex in 1967 (facilitating a less labour-intensive form of containerised shipping). The East India Docks closed that same year and other nearby dock closures followed in quick succession over the next fifteen years. Between 1978 and 1981 alone, local employment fell by 27% (Church, 1988). Rising unemployment coincided with a rapidly depleting population, falling 28% between 1961 and 1981. One could argue that, amid these transformations, the white, male industrial worker-as-breadwinner represented in *The Dockers* was quickly becoming an anachronism. The same could be said for the social-democratic ideas of planned, egalitarian communities that such public art projects were embedded within: during the 1980s and 1990s a set of environmentally deterministic architectural and urban planning discourses took hold which advocated the redesign or demolition of modernist social housing estates. These discourses argued that inherent flaws in the estates' design made them harbingers of crime and anti-social behaviour (Newman, 1972; Coleman and Team, 1985).

'Urban regeneration' emerged in this context, proposing a new approach to urban development. While urban development and planning in the post-war era saw the state taking a central, managerial role in financing and planning urban space - including through the direct ownership and management of commercial enterprises, infrastructure, public services etc - private finance and enterprise now step in to take a leading role (Harvey, 1989; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Critiques of urban regeneration as a form of neoliberalism have demonstrated how, with the increased centrality of private capital and logics of enterprise, it is no longer possible to pursue the kinds of egalitarian social objectives associated with the post-war welfare state, while important social gains made during the twentieth century are "rolled back" (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

This “neoliberal urbanism” (Smith, 2002) continues today. Take, for example, the ongoing ‘estate regeneration’ of Robin Hood Gardens, where the original 214 homes are currently being demolished to make way for a much denser, high-rise development across a much larger site. Whilst Robin Hood Gardens provided one hundred percent low-rent council housing, with open access communal facilities and all units on the scheme of comparable quality and status, the majority of units on the new site will be for private sale, with clear distinctions between blocks of ‘social’ and ‘private’ housing.[2]

Gentrification, understood as “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area… into middle-class residential and/or commercial use” (Lees et al., 2008, p. xv) is an important dynamic within neoliberal urbanism. Indeed, Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales (2015, p. 444) argue with regard to the contemporary transformation of British social housing estates that “urban regeneration *is* gentrification” and that it is important for analysts to state as such so that residents “can fight it for what it is, not what it is pretending to be”. Critiques of urban and estate regeneration in terms of gentrification call attention to the physical displacement of existing residents from a neighbourhood and their replacement with new residents from higher socio-economic strata. But these critiques are equally concerned with how gentrification transforms the urban landscape – transformations of place which mutually reinforce the physical displacement of people.

A strong tendency within this literature emphasises how histories of place, and the people that once inhabited it, are erased through urban-regeneration-as-gentrification. For example, a recent edited collection on contemporary urban regeneration in the east London highlights a promotional film called “London’s Regeneration Supernova”, made by Newham council to be screened at the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 (Duman et al., 2018, p. 11). The film describes how Newham are “offering regeneration opportunity on a global scale” and is taken by the authors as symptomatic of the sorts of “placemaking strategies” employed by within urban regeneration through which “places are turned into simple stories for packaged investment opportunities” (ibid: back cover). In her chapter, Anna Minton (2018, p. 47) puts “London’s Regeneration Supernova” in the context of thirty years of urban regeneration in east London, beginning with the 1980s “*tabula rasa*” redevelopment of the West India Docks and its surrounding area into the Canary Wharf financial distinct. Describing a walk over the

[2] It is worth pointing out that in this case there is at least a net increase in social housing overall – something which cannot often be said for London estate regeneration projects. As Minton (2017, p. ix) states: “According to a London Assembly report, between 2005 and 2015 around fifty estates with over 30,000 homes were subject to estate regeneration schemes which almost doubled the number of homes and increased the number of private homes tenfold but entailed a net loss of 8,000 social rented homes”.

dual carriageway which separates Canary Wharf in the south and Poplar in the north, Minton considers how Poplar is now subject to similar forces of neoliberal urban development which will “reconfigure and reimage the area” (ibid., p. 48).

Re-framing Urban Regeneration

Minton usefully critiques the ways in which Poplar’s landscape is subject to economic and social processes which far exceed this territory, seeking to reconfigure it according to a generic “placemaking” model in line with other regeneration projects across London and beyond. However this thesis starts from the contention that, while there is much to be gained from such critiques, it is important not to overlook the ways in which the specificities of place still matter in terms of how urban regeneration is practised and contested. But what if, rather than merely paving the way for neoliberal urban regeneration, the breakdown represented by the fate of Robin Hood Gardens and *The Dockers* in fact continues to impact upon it? Place, I argue, is not merely submerged or erased within processes of urban regeneration but represents a more recalcitrant object and site of “friction” (Tsing, 2005). Specifically, I examine how urban regeneration is entangled with practices of heritage and the - broader, deeper, contested - histories of place from which such practices draw.

Indeed, questions of ‘heritage’ - and particularly architectural heritage - have become central to how urban regeneration is practiced and contested in Poplar. This can be illustrated with reference to the ongoing regeneration of Robin Hood Gardens as well as that at two other post-war modernist estates: the Balfron Tower on the Brownfield Estate and Chrisp Street Market on the Lansbury Estate. Between 2008 and 2015 a campaign to have Robin Hood Gardens “listed” as a site of significant architectural interest by Historic England - thereby preventing its demolition - was mounted by heritage organisations, housing activists, members of the architectural profession and local residents. Although unsuccessful in its main aim, the campaign resulted in a number of exhibitions, publications and media coverage, contributing to the decision by the large, publicly funded Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) to controversially acquire a three-storey section of the estate for display at their new east London gallery space.

The 28-storey modernist Balfron Tower has been listed since 1996. Here Poplar HARCA (Housing and Regeneration Community Association) - the housing association responsible

for its regeneration[3] - has sought to commoditise its heritage status, emptying the building of its resident social housing tenants and leaseholders and partnering with developers to convert it into luxury apartments. Before the residents' removal the building was host to multiple forms of protest and artistic critique which sought to 're-recuperate' the socialist principles behind its design in the service of anti-gentrification campaigns (Roberts, 2017; Harling, 2012). Meanwhile, at Chrisp Street Market on the Lansbury Estate, Poplar HARCA's regeneration proposals pledge a "greater focus on our heritage", promising to refurbish and restore public access to the 1951 centrepiece clock tower and partnering with the V&A to establish a temporary "Lansbury Micro Museum" in a disused shop unit at the market.

0.5 – Balfron Tower undergoing refurbishment in 2020

[3] Poplar HARCA was established in 1998, taking ownership of 2,100 former council properties in a process known as "stock transfer" (Poplar HARCA n.d.). It now manages over 9,000 properties and is the biggest social landlord in Poplar, not only managing the housing stock but also taking over other functions from the local authority in terms of the provision of public services. Stock transfer was central to a policy agenda of demunicipalisation of Britain's vast council housing stock pursued by governments of different parties since the late 1980s. In some cases council housing stock was transferred to existing housing associations and in other cases new ones were created. Stock transfer is closely tied to regeneration projects, with central government making access to funds for regeneration dependent on it (Watt, 2009).

Admittedly, much of the above could be seen as merely the *superficial* mobilisation of histories of place in the service of gentrification. This is how they have been analysed: the instrumental use of arts and heritage practices by developers within regeneration schemes has been critiqued as a form of 'art-washing'. For example, the geographer Oli Mould (2018a), one of many academics with an interest in Robin Hood Gardens, responded to the V&A's acquisition of a fragment of the estate in these terms, arguing that the V&A were using "cultural practices to soften the harsh realities of accumulation by dispossession". In these critiques, arts and heritage practices are positioned as a cloak for forms of violence and dispossession which have their ultimate causes within overarching political-economic structures.

Yet while I have political sympathy for this critique in its attempts to draw attention to the power relations at play in processes of urban regeneration, it proposes a theory for how heritage works divorced from any attempt at empirical understanding. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if no empirical investigation is necessary; that to attempt such an investigation would be hopelessly naive and a failure to understand the structure of causality at play. Within both such 'art-washing' critiques and the tendency to describe urban regeneration as a "*tabula rasa* model of development" there is a perverse danger that the ways in which place matters within regeneration processes - the ways in which place *matters* urban regeneration (Haraway, 2016) - gets written out of the picture.

Part of the problem here stems from our habitual ways of conceiving urban regeneration as an object of critical inquiry. For good reason, critical approaches to the study of urban regeneration have called attention to the political-economic forces at play in redevelopment processes. That urban regeneration is situated within such political-economic structures and forces is inescapable. But this is not to say that urban regeneration is *reducible to* these structures and forces. As the anthropologist Anna Tsing (2015, p. 61) writes:

> "Like a giant bulldozer, capitalism appears to flatten the earth to its specifications. But… this only raises the stakes for asking what else is going on - not in some protected enclave, but rather everywhere, both inside and out"

To attend to "what else is going on" I propose a re-framing of urban regeneration. Rather than simply a *product* of neoliberal, capitalist political economy I define it as a *practice* taking form across multiple sites and scales. Urban regeneration, then, is not just bricks and mortar redevelopment (although I attend to this too) but comprises a wider-range of projects, activities and practices which are concerned with re-making place - understood as

simultaneously a material, semiotic and affective terrain (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Feld and Basso, 1996; McCormack, 2013; Stewart, 1996). Thus, I consider practices of regeneration with respect to large-scale estate regeneration schemes but also smaller scale projects including a pub/community cafe and a film-making collaboration.

Assemblage Urbanism and Critical Urban Theory

My attempt to re-frame urban regeneration as a practice taking place across multiple sites and scales is importantly influenced by "assemblage" approaches in urban studies (Farías and Bender, 2010; Blok and Farías, 2016). These propose Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, as well as adjacent concepts from Actor-Network Theory, as alternatives to "critical urban theory" approaches which draw heavily on Marxist frameworks. For Ignacio Farías (2011, p. 369):

> "Perhaps the major advantage of introducing the concept of assemblage into the field of urban studies … is that it allows us to move away from the notion of the city as whole to a notion of the city as a multiplicity, from the study of 'the' urban environment to the study of multiple urban assemblages."

Thus, whereas critical urban theorists' regeneration critiques are generally concerned with uncovering the underlying political-economic logics through which urban regeneration - singularly conceived - takes form, urban assemblage approaches address urban regeneration as a "multiplicity". A multiplicity does not conform to the ontological schema of parts and wholes, identities and essences, but is instead porous, provisional and constituted through difference (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

However, while I take inspiration from urban assemblage approaches, I retain a concern with questions of 'structure'. In their critique of urban assemblage approaches Brenner et al (2011, p. 232) worry that urban processes are "conceived as a huge collection of human and nonhuman actants within a flat ontology devoid of scalar or territorial differentiations". Indeed, urban assemblage theorists explicitly state their move away from concepts of structure (e.g. Farias, 2011). For Farías (2011, p. 370), the concept of assemblage is an alternative to that of structure, and he regards the latter as in danger of turning urban space and scale into "products that somehow become independent from the practices and processes originating them".

I agree that it is important not to reify social structures in this manner. But, in practice, the adoption of a flat ontology often deemphasises questions of embedded social inequalities and their associated forms of contestation. For example, in one of the few attempts to explicitly apply an assemblage approach to the study of urban regeneration processes – an urban placemaking project in Newcastle, Australia – Sweeney et al. (2018, p. 575) state how their:

> "political interest in these projects… does not stem from grounds of contestation but from assemblage thinking's concern with 'the capacity of events to disrupt patterns, generate new encounters with people and objects, and invent new connections and ways of inhabiting everyday urban life."

They justify this lack of emphasis on contestation for the empirical reason that such projects "did not involve contestation on race, class or other social grounds" (ibid., p. 575). But the empirical and the conceptual are hard to fully disentangle. One's conceptualisation of a piece of research importantly determines the questions one asks, the route that one follows through those questions, and thus importantly what it is that is being studied. There are ways in which I could have pursued a 'flatter', assemblage approach to this research. But for reasons simultaneously empirical and personal I chose to make questions of race and class central to the conceptualisation of this research.

But while I depart from assemblage approaches in my central concern for questions of race and class, I also diverge from the usual deployment of these categories within critical urban theory. The latter has an essentially 'economic' understanding of urban processes, in which social relations of class play a primary role, but finds itself struggling to make room for those of race. The lack of an adequate examination and theorisation of race has been highlighted within the literature on gentrification (Lees, 2016; Fallon, 2021) but attempts to integrate a concern with race within the concept of gentrification run up against the concept's inherent privileging of class. For example, Adam Elliot-Cooper, Phill Hubbard and Loretta Lees (2020a) attend to the ways in which leaseholders from "minoritized ethnic groups" subject to displacement from three London estates articulated this experience both in terms of class-based power inequalities – for example in describing themselves as "poor people" – and in terms of their racialised ascription as "black". In conclusion they state:

> "leaseholders argued that they and their neighbours are facing discrimination that is inherently class-based, but experienced through their ethnic identity as a form of racism".

While this helpfully highlights how the dispossession of leaseholders cannot be understood in class terms only, it ultimately reproduces the analytical hierarchy between class and race that is so deeply embedded within gentrification research agendas: one in which "displacement pressures" rooted in a "class based" political economy are separated out from the ways in which this is "experienced" by leaseholders in racialised terms.[4] Through attention to the ways in which race and class are not only economic but also historical formations, I endeavour to account for the ways in which practices of urban regeneration are constituted in and though structural inequalities of race as well as class.

Whiteness, Class loss and History

When I talk about the ways in which race shapes urban regeneration in Poplar I am talking about whiteness more specifically. Indeed, for my late-to-middle-aged white working-class interlocutors, 'regeneration' is only meaningful in relation to their retelling of the story of the 'decline' of the predominantly white, industrial working-class, communitarian, post-war Poplar with which I began.[5] For this group, regeneration entails an emphasis on the prefix "re", with *re*generation conceived of as having the potential to re-create or re-habilitate the forms of community, social solidarity and class power that they remember and/or imagine as characteristic of the post-war period. This group's practices of urban regeneration are a central concern of this thesis. I examine how these practices shape - and have the potential to shape - the contemporary urban transformation of Poplar in materially significant ways.

However, to highlight this group's agency with respect to urban regeneration does not imply an uncritical endorsement of it: enactments of urban regeneration premised on white memories and imaginings of the history of place are clearly liable to create their own forms of exclusion. In his discussion of "memories of whiteness" and memories of "class loss" in Newham, east London, Malcolm James (2014) emphasises how such forms of remembering simultaneously enact powerful forms of forgetting while producing and re-producing forms of racial hierarchy. I too show how whiteness, as it is entangled with projects of urban

[4] To develop this point, they turn to Stuart Hall's famous dictum "race is 'the modality in which class is 'lived'". However, their use of it is not in keeping with Stuart Hall and colleagues' original use of it (Hall et al., 2013). In my reading, the point was not to suggest that race merely 'coloured' the experience of inequalities which, at a more fundamental level, were class-based, but to insist on the "structural position of race" within capitalist social formations and the ways in which class relations themselves are always already "structured by race" (ibid., p. 216).

[5] Ben Campkin (2013) shows how images of decline are central to the visual culture of regeneration in his book "*Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture".*

regeneration, can enact forms of racial exclusion and hierarchy - most notably in my analysis of contestation around the aforementioned Chrisp Street Market redevelopment.

At the same time, while always keeping whiteness in the frame, I endeavour not to reduce my interlocutors and their practices of urban regeneration to their whiteness. Instead, I take seriously the forms of loss which they articulate and attempt to open an analytical, ethical and political space for consideration of urban regeneration practices which, while importantly conditioned by memories of whiteness (of a certain kind) are not necessarily invalidated as a result.[6]

One way to take seriously these expressions of loss is to interpret them not only as forms of memory, but as also as a kind of historical evidence. This is not to propose downing our critical tools so as to interpret memories as if they were the same thing as history - as straight-forward evidence of historical events and processes. Rather, it is to suggest we try to keep in mind the ways in which memories relate to real events; how memories of class loss, for example, relate to real and ongoing forms of class injury. The persistently vandalised sculpture *The Dockers* is one potent symbol of this: testament (in my reading) to the class-based humiliations suffered amidst the dramatic collapse of industrial employment in east London across the second half of the 20th century. The forms of class power and working-class community that have been 'lost' were themselves striated with forms of racial exclusion and inequality, but this does not remove this fact of class injury.

Affective Infrastructure

I attempt to grasp the relations between histories of place, practices of heritage, and contested processes of urban regeneration through a concept of 'affective infrastructure'. Affective infrastructure is a composite concept and therefore to unpack it we first need to consider what I mean by 'affect' and what I mean by 'infrastructure'.

The concept of affect has become a popular analytic within the humanities and social sciences over the past decade or two and has been put to many uses. While it is sometimes

[6] Ana Carolina Balthazar's (2017; 2021) work on ethics in relation to the question of "nationalist populism" in Margate on the south coast of England is an influence here. While Balthazar does not engage with the question of whiteness specifically, her research with white people from working-class backgrounds and their concerns for questions of "character" opens an important ethical and analytical space for a consideration of how histories and memories of class inequality inform contemporary nationalist formations in Britain in the context of the Brexit vote.

used interchangeably with emotion, it is better understood as distinct from it, describing instead those "forces of encounter" from which emotions - as discrete, individual bodily states - then arise (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, p. 1). I draw principally from a strand of work which uses affect in a psychoanalytically inflected manner to examine how experiences of the present are 'haunted' by the past (in all social contexts, but arguably some more than others). It is in terms of haunting and the phantomic that the anthropologist Yael Navaro (2009; 2012) engages with the concept of affect in her study of the "affective geography" of post-war northern Cyprus. Here the Turkish state's attempts to remake the territory so as to erase the presence of that which was there before are in tension with Turkish Cypriots' experiences of the objects left behind by Greek Cypriots who fled their homes. Navaro shows how objects lost amid violence and destruction - but not properly mourned as a result of the state's efforts to remake the territory - become associated with a melancholic affect.

Haunting and melancholia are also the terms through which Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan (2012) develop their anthropological rendering of "post-Fordist affect" - a concept that they borrow from the late cultural studies scholar Lauren Berlant. The transition from Fordism to post-Fordism has entailed a dramatic reorganisation of social and economic life in post-industrial settings around the world. But strong affective attachments to former modes of living persist in post-Fordist environments. Muehlebach and Shoshan draw on Gramsci for whom:

> "Fordism was a 'psycho-physical nexus' generated out of 'the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and a new type of man" (ibid., p. 320).

In this analysis Fordism is "inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life". It is buried deep into material, urban environments as well as that of the "nervous system" itself (ibid., pp. 322-321). Owing to Fordism's embeddedness as a way of life, Muehlebach and Shoshan call attention to the ways that it continues to "linger" today in "variegated modes of remembering, forgetting, grieving and longing for these past horizons" in which "people's attempts to recover or at least approximate Fordist forms and feelings of stability and belonging… all too often appear uncannily akin to the melancholic condition" (ibid., p. 318).

These anthropological contributions to the study of the relationships between affect and history are very helpful in situating my interlocutors' sometimes-melancholic orientations to urban change and regeneration. Muehlebach and Shoshan's concept of post-Fordist affect is

of particular relevance, allowing us to grasp how my interlocutors' yearnings are importantly conditioned by the "psycho-physical nexus" that was (and is) the Fordist welfare state. It is precisely these structures of affect and feeling that I have in mind when I refer to place as a recalcitrant object and site of friction in the context of urban regeneration.[7] But, in order to refine my empirical analysis of this recalcitrance, I find it necessary to combine an analysis of affect with that of infrastructure.

My use of the concept of affective infrastructure gestures to the important relationship between affect and materiality. For example, in Navaro's work her interlocutors' engagements with material objects left behind by displaced Greek Cypriots are what generate their melancholic interiority. But infrastructure has a further specificity beyond this. Alice Street's (2012) use of the concept of "affective infrastructure" calls attention to the specificity of hospitals as "modern spaces of improvement" within the postcolonial context of Papua New Guinea. She writes about how the material ruination of this "monument to modernity" impresses affects of disappointment and dismay on those who inhabit it - affects which are only accentuated by the contrasts perceived between the crumbling public hospital building and its newer, private wards. Similarly, in Poplar I attend to the ways in which practices of urban regeneration are entwined with specific material infrastructures - for example, council housing, pubs and a traditional retail market – examining how their affectivity pertains to the particular ways they function (or *used* to function) within this urban milieu.

But I also employ the concept of affective infrastructure in a manner which diverges from the ways in which questions of affect, materiality and affective infrastructure have generally been engaged by other anthropologists. These analyses tend to engage with affect in an exclusively diagnostic register, with affect presented as evidence of the relationships between the lives of the people studied and broader social, economic and political processes (see also Muehlebach, 2011). I am interested in a somewhat different engagement with affect. Indeed, for Berlant, from whom Muehlebach and Shoshan borrow the concept of post-Fordist affect, affect is not merely a historical product of shifting structural forces but also a space of "adjustment" and "improvisation" (Berlant, 2011, p. 6). Berlant's analysis of post-Fordism's "affective present" in their book *Cruel Optimism* thus seeks, on the one hand, to diagnose the attrition of the dominant fantasies of the "good life" to which the subjects of

[7] Also relevant here is a body of work on post-socialist settings (Collier, 2011; Nicolescu 2018; Murawski, 2018a; 2019; Schwenkel, 2013). Deakin and Nicolescu (2022) attempt a comparison of such structures of feeling across western European and eastern European contexts through a concept of "socialist fragments".

post-Fordism are affectively anchored. On the other, it attends to what emerges in this space, asking through their analysis of cultural objects “what thriving might entail amid a mounting sense of contingency” (ibid., p. 11).

It is this dual sense of affect - as both cultural-historical product and site of indeterminacy - that I am interested in engaging through my concept of affective infrastructure. When I talk in terms of the *affective infrastructure of urban regeneration*, then, I mean to draw attention to all the ways in which practices of urban regeneration are affectively entangled with specific material infrastructures. But I also want to gesture to the ways in which practices of urban regeneration are themselves infrastructural – and in a broader sense than just insofar as they work to build bricks and mortar projects. Here I draw on Berlant’s own use of the term affective infrastructure, deployed in her latter work. For Berlant (2016), infrastructure encompasses not only “material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space” (as per Brian Larkin’s [2013, p. 327] useful and much cited anthropological definition) but more immaterial and less tangible forms also. Berlant writes that infrastructures include “[roads], bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, districts, norms”, all of which, they argue are “systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation” (Berlant, 2016, p. 393). According to this definition, essays, poems, film, gesture - indeed all forms of communication - can be included within her conception of infrastructure, or what she calls more specifically “affective infrastructure”. Berlant articulates this expanded understanding of infrastructure alongside a proposal that, rather than only offer “judgement about positions and practices in the world” cultural analysts, as “makers of critical social form”, might also offer “terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself” (ibid., p. 394).

The building of “affective infrastructures” for Berlant is therefore a question of how to find ways of reconnecting to the world and to one another amid scenes of “infrastructural breakdown”; not in the form of a repair that might reproduce “the problem that generated the need for [repair in the first place]” but as an extension of sociality which is “non-reproductive, generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis, and alternatively to it too” (ibid., p. 393). Thus, while I demonstrate how urban regeneration in Poplar often works to reproduce forms of class and racial inequality with a long history in this place - with heritage practices playing a role in this - I am also very much concerned with the potential for urban regeneration and heritage practices to generate affective infrastructures which offer forms of relatedness that instead combat and ameliorate social inequalities.

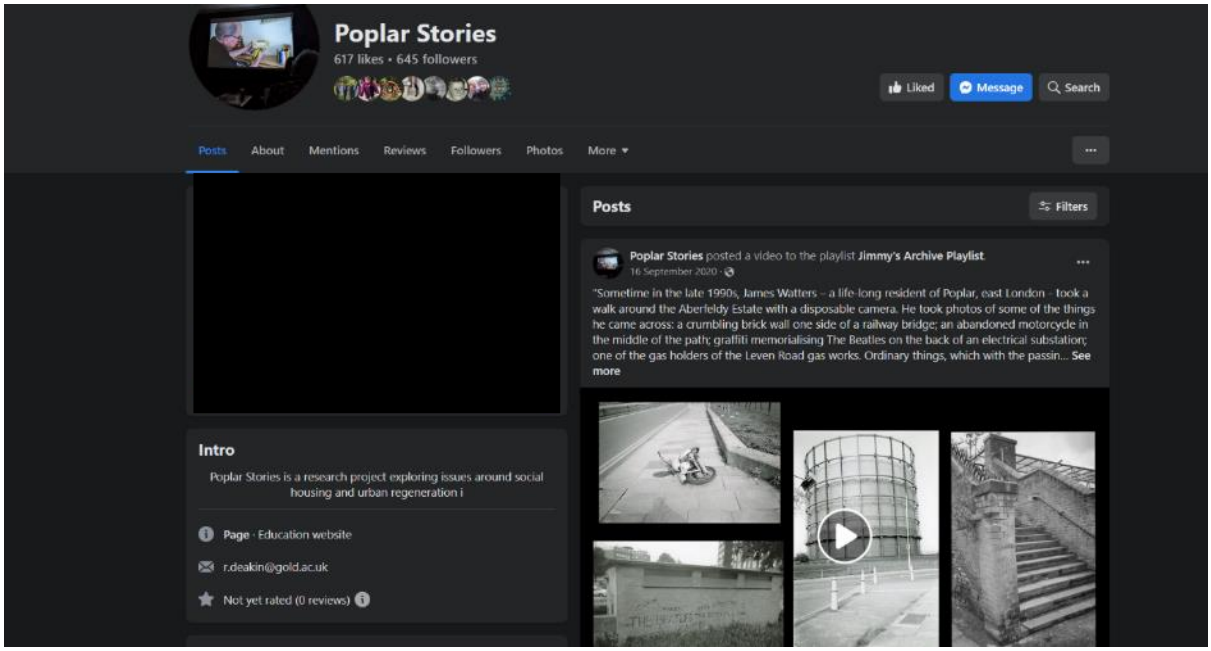
Here the question of affective infrastructure dovetails nicely with recent discussions in anthropology around “multi-modality”. This has called for a decentring of the “finished, reified products of fieldwork or labwork” (Collins et al., 2017, p. 142) and for an increased attention to the analytical, ethical and political potential of various collaborative and multimedia projects that contemporary anthropological fieldwork often co-produces. In their contribution to this discussion, Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2019, p. 226) advocate for a “rewiring” of anthropological practice around what they call a “politics of invention”. “[Rather] than attempting to capture pre-existing ideas or relations through representational techniques”, they state, this form of anthropological engagement “[aspires] instead to contribute to enacting new entities, new relations, new worlds” (ibid., p. 221). The writing of this thesis, pulling together various strands and outcomes of my own multi-modal fieldwork practices, has been guided both by Berlant’s call for the building of affective infrastructures and such attempts to open up new modes of anthropological inquiry and invention through multi-modality.

Methodology

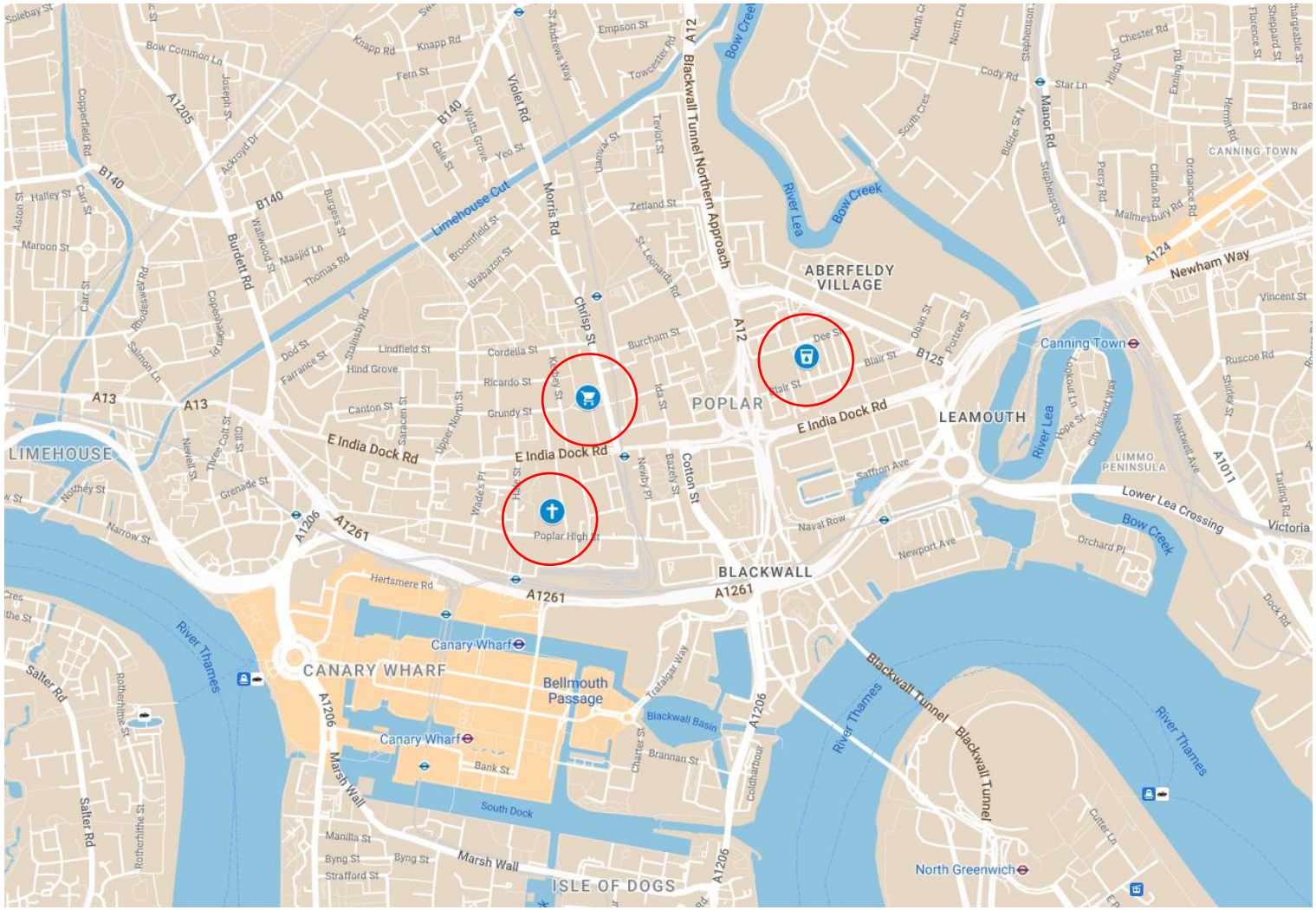
The empirical research on which this fieldwork was based was gathered between 2015 and 2022, with a period of intensive anthropological fieldwork taking place over 15 months between 2019 and 2020. This fieldwork involved participant-observation at three main sites – 1) Chrisp Street Market, 2) St Matthias Community Centre and, 3) the Tommy Flowers Pub / Tommy’s Tea Rooms. I also conducted archival research at the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives – particularly during the time that I was based there on a CHASE-funded work placement with their public engagement team between January and March 2020.

I introduced my research participants to my research using a flyer that I had designed and printed, giving my project the name “Poplar Stories”, creating social media account to go alongside it. In line with ‘multimodal’ research approaches introduced above, I was interested in giving my interlocutors opportunities to see their responses take on a published form in a non-academic context and in what avenues of enquiry this might open.

0.6 – 'Poplar Stories' flyer



0.7 – 'Poplar Stories' Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/poplarstories



0.8 – Map showing 3 main research sites (top left, Chrisp Street Market; bottom left, St Matthias Community Centre; top right, Tommy Flowers Pub / Tommy's Tea Rooms)

Research sites

1) Chrisp Street Market:

A street market during the 19th century, Chrisp Street Market was redeveloped as a pedestrianised retail market in 1951 as a flagship project within the LCC's post-war reconstruction of London. Designed as Poplar's "district centre", Chrisp Street Market consists of a range of grocery shops, hairdressers, butchers, cafes, food stalls, furniture shops, charity shops, a credit union, money remittance services, a welfare office, a library, and hardware stores. These are housed within the shop units which line the pedestrianised market square and the access routes connecting it to the East India Dock Road to the south and Cordelia Street to the north. Above these shop units are blocks of ex-council housing. Within the market square itself, daily stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables, fresh fish, household items, clothing, and phone accessories, among other things, are gathered beneath a market canopy. The vast majority of shops are independent businesses; a Greggs bakery and a Co-operative supermarket the only two exceptions. Market traders and users are ethnically diverse, with the two largest groups represented being of British Bangladeshi and white British ethnicity. Traders and users are overwhelmingly working-class.[8] In 2019 the market was awaiting redevelopment (and still is) with planning permission granted for proposals which sought to demolish and rebuild large sections of the buildings around the perimeter of the market to build new housing (the majority for private sale). New retail units are also planned, with Poplar HARCA aiming to create a new "retail mix" to cater for a more affluent social demographic. The plans promise a "greater focus on our heritage", with the Lansbury Micro Museum established in a disused shop unit and running a series of exhibitions on the history of the estate and other topics between 2016 and 2019.

My research at Chrisp Street Market can be divided into "preliminary fieldwork" (2015-2018) and "official fieldwork" (2019 – 2020) periods. Preliminary fieldwork involved participating during the summer of 2015 in a campaign – "Our Chrisp Street" – which sought to survey market traders, users and residents in the surrounding housing blocks about their awareness of, and feelings about, the proposed redevelopment with a view to contesting the proposals. My participation in this group stemmed from an interest I had at the time in conducting

[8] In the 2021 census, in the "Poplar Central" Middle Super Output Area (MSOA) in which Chrisp Street is located 44.2% of residents were of Bangladeshi ethnicity with 19.6% White British (ONS, 2022). Tower Hamlets as a whole has the worst poverty rates in London, with 39% of people (2019/20) and 51% of children (2020/21) living in households with an income of less than 60% of the UK median after housing costs have been subtracted (Trust for London, 2022).

research with housing activists – something I will expand upon below. Having been introduced to the estate through this activist group I began to take greater interest in other aspects of the regeneration project, particularly the ways in which the discourse of regeneration connected to discourses and practices of heritage at the market. Thus, when I heard that the Lansbury Micro Museum was to open in 2016, I signed up to volunteer as a museum and tour guide, undertaking ten or so shifts in this capacity between 2016 and 2017.

In 2018, now registered on the Goldsmiths PhD program, I visited Chrisp Street a few times: once to attend a protest held by traders against the redevelopment proposals and another time to interview one of the traders involved in this campaign. During my official fieldwork period (2019-2020) I visited the market almost every time I travelled to Poplar from my home in north London; the market was a good place to get something to eat, drink and use the bathroom and I would also often sit and write up my fieldnotes in the library. As such I was always making observations about what was happening there. In the summer of 2019 I also conducted 15 interviews with shopkeepers, stall holders and users of the market regarding their perspectives on the upcoming regeneration, attempting to be representative in terms of the age and ethnicity of my respondents.

0.9 – Chrisp Street Market

2) St Matthias Community Centre:

A few minutes' walk south of Chrisp Street Market, on the other side of the East India Dock Road, is St Matthias Community Centre. A former church built by the East India Company in 1652-54, St Matthias was converted into a community centre in 1993 with funds donated by the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) - the planning body responsible for overseeing the development of the Canary Wharf financial district (1981 - 1998). In 2019 it hosted numerous activities including: a day-care facility for young children, regular events for older people including a weekly Friday lunch; a weekly homeless shelter, and community meetings concerning, for example, local regeneration and redevelopment. It also serves as a base for broader activities such as leisure trips to the seaside and activities for school children during the school holidays.

At the heart of much that happens in this space is Sister Christine MBE - an Irish nun and community activist who has been working in Poplar for almost 50 years. Working alongside Sister Christine in paid and voluntary capacities are people from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds – African Caribbean, Somalian, Bangladeshi, Irish and white British, among others – a diversity which is also reflected in the users of the space. St Matthias is characterised by a strong social justice and anti-racist ethos, with Sister Christine having been involved in long-running campaigns for local people to receive a fair deal from regeneration initiatives going back to the days of the LDDC.

At St Matthias I volunteered at the weekly homeless shelter, sometimes staying overnight, and participated in the incipient Poplar Neighbourhood Planning Forum that Sister Christine was working to establish. I attended meetings of the Planning Forum in St Matthias and elsewhere, including at the Tower Hamlets Council offices, and assisted Sister Christine with background research on matters of local planning and development. St Matthias was in many ways my community 'base' at the beginning of my intensive fieldwork period, allowing me to build relationships with a broad range of local people. It was through St Matthias that I came to know and interview Faruk and Jamal, two of the committee members of the Poplar Shahjalal Masjid next-door, who in turn invited me to further events and helped me in setting up interviews with Bangladeshi traders at Chrisp Street Market.

0.10 – St Matthias Community Centre with Canary Wharf in the background

3) The Tommy Flowers Pub and Tommy's Tea Rooms:

A fellow volunteer at the St Matthias homeless shelter introduced me to the Tommy Flowers – a pub which also doubled up as a 'pay-what-you-want' non-commercial cafe known as Tommy's Tea Rooms (during the time of my fieldwork). The Tommy Flowers is a heritage and regeneration project which seeks to re-establish a pub on the Aberfeldy Estate, five years after the last pub on this and its adjacent estates permanently closed. I developed my closest and most intense research relationships at this research site, with a group mainly comprised of white, working-class men in their late fifties and early sixties. Although the space was used by people of a much broader range of ages and ethnicities, with many women also using the pub/cafe, it was this group of men who were most regular daytime visitors to Tommy's Tea Rooms and who were most invested in the 'heritage' component of the project.

My research methods in this space went beyond participant-observation as traditionally practiced and understood in anthropology, going in more collaborative and experimental directions. This involved my adopting the role of something like a resident oral history

researcher, for example – carrying out interviews and writing them up as blog posts for a dedicated “Poplar Stories” Facebook page. With one collaborator – Jimmy – this developed into a film-making project exploring Jimmy’s affective relationship with his urban environment alongside that of his “archive” of historical memorabilia relating to Poplar and his life there since his birth in 1958. I give a much fuller account of these spaces and the methods that I employed in them within the thesis chapters themselves.

0.11 – The Tommy Flowers / Tommy’s Tea Rooms. (Adrian Lee)

Positionality

The proposed redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market first brought me to Poplar in 2015, as I was interested in developing a PhD research project engaged with housing activism in London. Between 2012 and 2013 I had worked as a community organiser across three estates in Camden, north London, and it was these experiences, alongside the effervescence of London housing campaigns during this time, which shaped my interest in the politics of housing, and particularly that of council and ex-council estates.

I did not grow up living in council housing but in a suburban detached house, owned by my parents, on the outskirts of Northampton in the English midlands. Neither did either set of my

grandparents live in council housing; although my grandparents on my mum's side who emigrated from Ireland in the 1950s might well have done so had they been able to access it (the politics of immigration and access to council housing one of the issues that I engage in this thesis). Instead, they went from renting a room as lodgers in a house in Willesden, northwest London, to buying a small house near the rail station in Harrow and Wealdstone before eventually moving to a more spacious three-bedroom house with back garden a little further up the road. While the post-war period was one of massively increased public housing provision, it was also a time of accelerating home-ownership for sections of the working class, with my maternal grandparents able to access this form of class mobility on the back of my grandfather's wages working as a painter and decorator.

On my dad's side, my grandfather was born in east London but grew up in a care home in Warwickshire after the breakdown of his parents' marriage. While he remembered this as an unpleasant experience for the most part, he too was able to benefit from the post-war economic boom. At the age of 16 he was found an apprenticeship at the de Havilland Aircraft company, eventually working his way up to become chief engineer at the huge Rolls Royce factory complex in Leavesden, Hertfordshire. My dad, the first in his family to go to University, followed in his father's footsteps by training as an engineer and also working at Rolls Royce for a time. My mum, on the other hand, did not have the opportunity to go to University, failing her 'eleven-plus' exam and therefore attending a 'secondary modern' school at which the prospect of attending university was not offered. In any case, as a woman from a working-class background, her parents did not have any aspirations for her to attend higher education and pursue a career.

My own class trajectory involves moving from a comprehensive school in rural Northamptonshire to the University of Oxford. Based on the material security of my upbringing and present circumstances I do not claim to be "working class". But my experience of attending Oxford as an undergraduate was that, unless you came from the upper-middle or upper-class, it was easy to be made to feel like a class inferior. My experience at Oxford shaped my understanding of class - not as merely as academic, but also political and *affective* concerns and importantly conditions how I have approached researching and writing this thesis.

Yet while my interest in - and experience of - class was something I was very cognisant of when I embarked on my fieldwork, my appreciation of whiteness and my own positionality as white was much less developed. I began my research with the idea, not so much explicitly formulated but very much present, that I would be able to approach urban regeneration from

multiple points of view, ideally giving equal weight to those from different ethnic backgrounds and particularly people of British Bangladeshi and white British ethnicity who are the largest ethnic groups in Poplar. But, in practice, the research relationships that I was most able to cultivate were with people of a very specific - white - demographic. This caused me some anxiety during the course of my fieldwork, where I made repeated efforts to broaden my group of interlocutors in order to try and be more 'representative'. I worried that in focusing my time on this group of interlocutors I was in danger of reproducing representations of the East End as inherently white (Wemyss, 2009). However, over time and with much difficulty, I managed to understand that a focus on this group was only a weakness to the extent to which I did not make whiteness a central theoretical concern. What I had perceived as a weakness could be turned into a strength; my 'access' to the lives of this group of people allowing for an in-depth consideration of whiteness as it intersects with class in contexts of urban regeneration.

That I resisted making whiteness central for a long time was, I think, because I was worried that to do so would be to lessen or undermine the extent to which my white, working-class interlocutors were subject to class inequality and class-linked forms of displacement in the context of urban regeneration. But perhaps at a deeper level it was because I'd never really been forced to think about my own whiteness in much depth previously (itself an aspect of how power relations of whiteness function, as argued by Sara Ahmed [2007]). I hadn't (yet) done the reading. This meant I struggled to engage with the question of whiteness as anything other than 'racism' as a kind of individual moral failing, rather than in structural terms.

In contrast, my Tommy Flowers / Tommy's Tea Rooms interlocutors were quite clear with me about the fact of their whiteness. This was in evidence in their persistent identification of themselves as "white, working class", something which for a long time I - with my socialist political orientation - could only see as a kind of political failing: why, I thought, did they put an emphasis on the fact of their being white - why not just 'working class'? But while on the one hand I was right to be mindful of the investments in whiteness (conscious or otherwise) that identifying oneself as "white, working class" could imply, on the other this was just an objective assessment of their structural positionality. If there was an element of ideological obfuscation at play here it was therefore in my reluctance to recognise my whiteness rather than in their naming of it.

Ethics and Anonymisation

Since place in its historical, cultural, and geographical specificity is at the heart of this piece of research it was not realistic to pursue a strategy of full anonymisation - for example, by coming up with a pseudonym for the place in which I conducted research and changing key identifying details. This thesis is about Poplar, a real place, as I encountered it through my fieldwork.

In terms of individuals, when I am referring to public figures I have used real names. Regarding everyone else, I attempted to contact everybody mentioned in the thesis, providing details of the context in which I was describing them and asking their preference regarding anonymisation. The vast majority of people who I followed up with expressed a preference that I use their real names. I believe this trend is partly related to the fact that many of my interlocutors shared their stories and perspectives with me desiring to see them recorded for posterity. Where I have not been able to follow up with people I have used pseudonyms. In a few cases I decided to anonymise based on my own judgement of what the potential detrimental risks are to the individuals concerned.

In the case of Jimmy, my film-making collaborator who appears in front of the camera in all of the videos that we made and who is also in many ways the 'main character' of this written thesis, anonymisation was clearly not an option. Given the extent to which Jimmy shared so much of his life with me, I felt a great deal of responsibility to ensure he had a say over how he was represented and a chance to feedback on what I was writing. I therefore shared drafts of all of the thesis chapters with Jimmy leading up to submission. I also shared drafts of chapters two and three with Wayne, another key interlocutor. I have integrated feedback from both Jimmy and Wayne into the final text.

Note on terminology

In this thesis I frequently refer to people as being "Bangladeshi" or as being of "Bangladeshi ethnicity". I use the term Bangladeshi to refer to people who themselves either migrated to Britain from Bangladesh or who trace their ancestry to people who migrated to Britain from Bangladesh (sometimes via an intermediate country, such as Italy). In some cases, I use the term "Asian" to refer to a broader group of people who trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent (encompassing Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives). Bangladeshi is the term used in the census data and a term that many of my interlocutors used to describe themselves. But in my experience Poplar residents of

Bangladeshi descent also self-identify as ‘Bengali’ - a term of identification which refers to a broader region encompassing present day Bangladeshi (formed in 1971) and the Indian state of West Bengal. ‘Bengali/Bengalis’ is also the term often used by white Poplar residents to refer to Bangladeshi people or the “Bangladeshi community”. It is also the case that Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets mostly trace their ancestry from the Bangladeshi region of Sylhet, speak the Sylheti language and identify with this region alongside, and in some cases instead of, Bangladesh.

While I use the term British Bangladeshi in this introduction I switch to using the term ‘Bangladeshi’ in the rest of the thesis as this was the term my interlocutors most often used to talk about themselves. One potential drawback of my use of the term “Bangladeshi” is the way it could be said to contribute to the propagation of a “migrant imaginary”, in which the ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ of those who trace their ancestry to Bangladesh is downplayed. In her writing about British Asian people in Leicestershire in the English midlands, Katherine Tyler (2012, 5) uses the term “BrAsian” – a compound term of British and Asian – “to provide a reminder of the imperial and contemporary relationships that bind South Asian settlers and their descendants to England and Britain”. However, my interlocutors did not use the term “British Bangladeshi” with me and so it would feel strange to impose it. It is also the case that not everyone of Bangladeshi ethnicity in Poplar holds British citizenship.

“White working class” is another term I use frequently, although this is not an official census category. It is a common term of identity among working class people of white British/Irish ethnicity in Poplar. The term “white working class” as it was used by my interlocutors serves to distinguish this group from “middle class” white British people (like myself) and non-white people of all social classes. I use this term as this is the term that my white working-class interlocutors most often used to describe themselves. “English” was another common form of self-identification among this group.

Outline of the chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first, “Jimmy’s Lament”, introduces Jimmy as a key interlocutor and provides a taste of our multi-modal research practices. Using an improvised video recording of Jimmy talking about his feelings of loss regarding the redevelopment of local pubs as an entry point, the chapter evaluates the dominant frameworks used to analyse processes of urban change, displacement and inequality in east London. It searches for a way to take account of Jimmy’s whiteness, and the ways in which Jimmy’s Lament is enmeshed within whiteness as a power relation, while being mindful not to write Jimmy’s sense of loss out of the picture in so doing. I argue that this requires a historical analysis of “class loss” – a term that I take from James (2014) – and attempt to situate Jimmy’s lament in relation to historically shifting structures of race and class. By interspersing material stemming from our multi-modal fieldwork practice amongst my theoretical and historical arguments I attempt to go beyond “the closures of a symptomatic reading” (Berlant, 2011, p. 15), situating Jimmy’s lament as an opening onto the complex and ambivalent affective landscape of urban regeneration in Poplar.

A concern with questions of white working-class ‘displacement’ and the pub as urban and affective infrastructure continues in chapter two - “From Pub to Pad, and Back Again?”. This chapter introduces Wayne – another key interlocutor – and examines his efforts to resist his displacement from the Aberfeldy Estate due to the compulsory purchase of his three-bedroom maisonette as part of the ‘Aberfeldy Village’ regeneration project. Specifically, I analyse how this took form through attempts to “create some community cohesion” through the use of Tommy’s Tea Rooms as an informal community organising base. I show how the location of these efforts within a pub/café/heritage project characterised by nostalgic concern with forms of community remembered as having once existed on the Aberfeldy Estate limited the extent to which these efforts were able to build forms of solidarity across the estate’s ethnically diverse population. But, in a setting in which frustrated agency exists alongside forms of loneliness, isolation and depression, I suggest that these efforts comprised a form of resistance to dominant neoliberal forms of control nonetheless. Here I also engage with broader discussions about nostalgia as it pertains to projects of progressive political change.

While chapter two is concerned with my white, working-class interlocutors’ attempts to build forms of solidarity and companionship amid displacement, chapter three – “Selling Off Your Heritage” - changes tack, examining some of the barriers to solidarity among this group. Here I analyse the affective infrastructure that is council housing, specifically in relation to the legacies of the ‘Right to Buy’ (RTB) legislation introduced in 1980 - the very policy that

allowed Wayne and others now threatened with compulsory purchase the chance to become leaseholders in the first place. Marxist critiques of the RTB have drawn attention to how this policy formed part of a neoliberal remaking of Britain which required attempts to weaken the collective institutions of the working class (council housing being one). In line with this critique, I examine how the RTB continues to cause those living on estates to diverge in terms of their material interests. But I analyse how this plays out specifically through the breakdown of a moral economy of council housing - one which was highly racialised, distributing housing according to moral criteria such as kinship affiliations, length of residence, and perceptions of community contribution. Thus, while the question of property relations is central here, I show how the senses of justice and injustice my interlocutors feel about the transformation of council housing through housing policies such as RTB, and the ways these feelings translate into action, cannot be reduced to a public-private binary nor orthodox Marxist formulations of base and superstructure.

Chapter four – "Urban Restoration" - transitions from a primary concern with excavating the histories of whiteness and class loss informing my white, working-class interlocutors' relationship to urban regeneration and heritage, to consider how questions of heritage and whiteness are entangled within larger-scale redevelopment projects in Poplar. Through an examination of contestation around the redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market - the biggest live regeneration issue during the time of my fieldwork - I show how the decaying materiality of the market, practices of heritage, and discourses of "decline" all entwine to generate a form of urban regeneration premised on the exclusion and erasure of Bangladeshi claims on the market and the East End more broadly. Thus, I argue that Chrisp Street Market as an "affective infrastructure" is not only a means through which enduring racial and class inequalities are experienced by its users (Street 2012) but is actively involved in the perpetuation of these inequalities. My analysis in this chapter challenges scholarly attempts to claim traditional retail markets as distinctive sites of "convivial multiculture" (Gilroy 2004). It also challenges the tendency in writing about resistance to gentrification in Britain to divide the terrain of contestation into two homogenous sets of actors: property developers and their municipal enablers on the one side, working-class residents at risk of displacement on the other.

Chapter five – "Experimenting with Exposure" – circles back to my multimodal research collaboration with Jimmy. In light of chapter four, it returns to the question of class loss and nostalgia introduced in chapters one and two, asking: How might nostalgia and a concern for heritage be channelled in such a way that, rather than contribute to the forms of racial and class inequalities associated with urban regeneration, it comprises a resource against them?

Here I attempt a modest and partial answer to this question through reflection on a collaborative film-making project I developed with Jimmy. I discuss how this film project was not primarily motivated by a desire to 'represent' Jimmy's affective relationship with his urban environment but rather functioned as an anthropological "encounter" as articulated by Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019), creating a space where Jimmy was able to 'work through' his feelings of loss and nostalgia. Jimmy participated in the contestation around Chrisp Street Market in favour of the regeneration proposals but later came to express regret regarding its outcomes. Drawing on Deleuze's writing on affect, vitality and health, I examine how, through our film collaboration, Jimmy experimented with the production of affect, attempting to find new ways of relating to urban change and regeneration. I show how our film-making collaboration provided an outlet for Jimmy's nostalgia that steered away from resentment.

Note to the reader on use of video clips

Chapters one and five contain links to videos hosted on Vimeo (three per chapter). The links are in the text and indicate when a video should be watched. They are intended as integral to the chapters rather than supplementary material, and therefore the reader is encouraged to take the time to watch them.

Interlude One: Aberfeldy Estate 1990s – 2019.

Photos by Jimmy Watters

0.12

0.13

0.14

0.15

0.16

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Chapter One: Jimmy's Lament

The video opens with a shaky shot looking east along Brownfield Street. Jimmy, just out of frame, is recalling his memories of two pubs that were once here. A new five storey block of flats occupies the right side of the frame. A woman wearing a hijab passes, pushing a pram and accompanied by two young girls wearing brightly coloured bows in their hair.

Me: I'm just going to do a bit of video, do you mind?

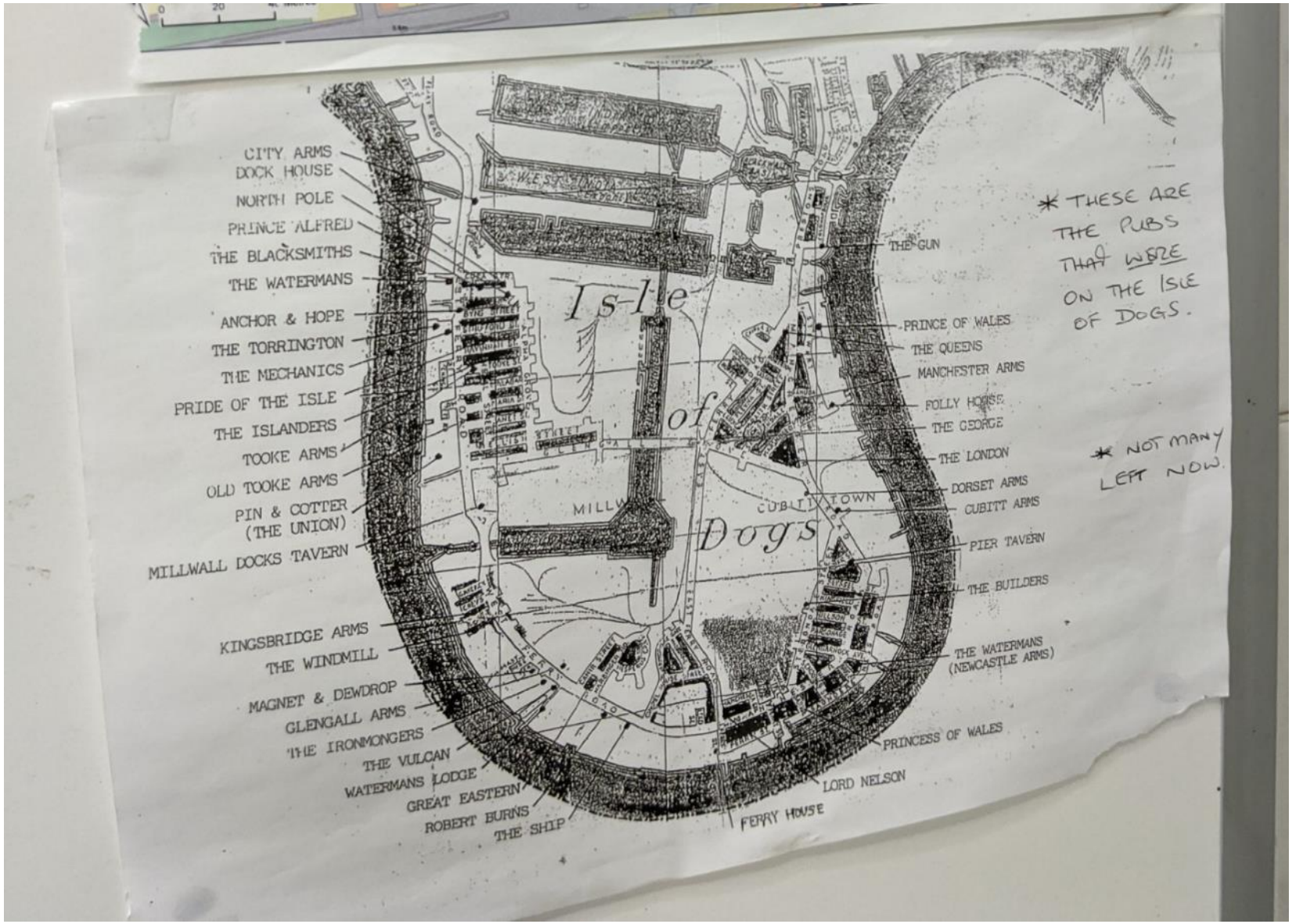
Jimmy: Yeah sure

Me: You can talk. Carry on. Do you mind?

Jimmy: No, I don't mind, I'll try and be natural.

WATCH*: https://vimeo.com/474353444/59ef30d513*

1.1 – Jimmy's Lament Vimeo Page



1.2 - An annotated map stuck to the interior wall of ‘East Enders Pie and Mash’, East India Dock Road.

Gentrification?

Gentrification is the dominant framing in contemporary media and academic discussions of urban regeneration in Poplar. The proposed redevelopments of Chrisp Street Market, the Balfron Tower and Robin Hood Gardens - to name just three contested ongoing projects - have all been analysed and interpreted in this way (Harling, 2017; Mould, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; Minton, 2018; Pritchard, 2020). And for good reason: in a part of London which has been overwhelmingly working class since its first development alongside the London docklands in the 18th and 19th centuries, and where there is an acute need for more social housing, the vast majority of additional housing units being built as part of contemporary regeneration programmes are out of reach of most of the local population. Meanwhile small business owners and traders are facing rent rises and are being told by their landlords that they need to adapt to a new, more affluent customer base, and residential leaseholders are confronted with the stress of compulsory purchase without guarantees of being able to find equivalent properties locally with their compensation. Although there is a diversity of opinion among long-standing residents about the merits of contemporary urban regeneration - and some have fared better than others depending on, among other things, the particular tenancy agreements they have with their housing providers - Poplar is undoubtedly going through a long-term transformation that puts at risk the ability of long-standing residents to remain living in the area and will dramatically alter its *class demographic* composition.

But is gentrification the best concept for understanding Jimmy's sense of loss regarding local pubs? Is gentrification the best frame for making sense of Jimmy's lament? It is certainly possible to make a case for yes. Most tangibly, one might point to the fact that so many of the pubs Jimmy used to frequent, which had an overwhelmingly working-class clientele, have been closed down and replaced with residential accommodation - a large proportion of which is for private sale. Both the Builders Arms and the Princess of Wales were turned into flats - the former by the local housing association Poplar HARCA in 2006 (albeit to build social housing) and the latter by a private commercial developer in 2002. This was repeated more recently on the other side of the A12 dual carriageway, on the Aberfeldy Estate, where Jimmy has lived in a one-bedroom socially rented flat since the 1980s; there, the Aberfeldy Pub ceased operating in 2013, and in 2015 was demolished to make way for a three-storey block of private flats. Such developments can be understood as a form of 'new build gentrification' - a phenomenon identified in the gentrification literature as an alternative to the classic form of gentrification

which involves the renovation of existing dwellings (Davidson and Lees, 2005). Presenting the case of the Thames riverside (an ongoing site of intensive development since the 1990s, stretching from Brentford in the west to the Thames estuary in the east) Mark Davidson and Loretta Lees (2005) argue that although these developments often did not directly displace residents, being primarily built on 'brownfield sites', they were likely to bring about forms of 'indirect displacement', for example through contributing to a trend for rent increases in the area or - most pertinent to this case - changing the local mix of community facilities.[9]

It is the loss of pubs as a place to socialise that seems of most concern to Jimmy. "I do think we've lost, that what you might call social infrastructure: places to go to meet people." This has left him feeling increasingly socially isolated and emotionally estranged from where he lives. Rather than merely a by-product or symptom of political economic processes, recent writing on gentrification has stressed the ways such affective and emotional states are integral to how gentrification-induced displacement progresses. Elliot-Cooper et al. (2020b, p. 492), at the core of gentrification induced displacement is a process of 'unhoming' which entails the "rupture of the connection between people and place". Such a definition of gentrification-induced displacement can encompass both forms of displacement which directly threaten one's housing tenure - for example the affordability of rents and mortgages - and forms of "indirect displacement" whereby:

> "existing residents might not feel at home anymore in a changing neighbourhood because of the general decline of working class culture and identity" (ibid:495; emphasis in original).

[9] Zooming out, such instances of new-build gentrification formed part of the evolution of gentrification into a "global urban strategy" (Smith, 2002), as surplus capital increasingly became absorbed within global property markets and gentrification became integrated within public policy (see also Harvey, 2008). The investment of capital in London property has only accelerated in the intervening period, with inflation-adjusted prices rising steadily since 1997 with just a brief respite after the 2007/8 Global Financial Crisis and more recently since Brexit: Between December 1995 and December 2021 the increase in the average house price in London, adjusted for inflation, was 224% (HM Land Registry, 2023). This has been facilitated by local councils under severe financial constraints from central government and under pressure from the Mayor's London Plan to deliver new housing: the result has been the conversion of land to private housing development, mostly for sale at market rates (Beswick and Penny, 2018; Minton 2017).

While Jimmy is not himself at any immediate risk of direct displacement due to the ongoing redevelopment of the Aberfeldy Estate (although he has friends and acquaintances who are) he does have an acute *sense* of displacement. “I've lost my sense of place, my sense of ownership of where I live, that almost belonged to me”. This has led him to consider moving away voluntarily, to be closer to family in Essex. And it is perhaps the decline and closure of local pubs that most elicits these feelings: “There are times when I decide to take a different walk if I’m going to the market, not to walk along here, because it just fills me with sadness”.

The concept of gentrification also points to an uneven geography in the loss and transformation of retail units and community facilities. In Britain over the past 20 years, small ‘local’ pubs in the urban periphery have been more likely to close than larger pubs in urban centres with more “revenue generating potential” (Keenan, 2020 p. 1305). This trend has been driven, in part, by changes in dominant forms of pub ownership, with the shift from a brewery-owned model, where regional ownership of pubs was designed to ensure the consumption of the brewery’s production, to a financialised Pub Company or ‘pubco’ model where profitability and property values are prioritised over proximity to a brewery (ibid., p. 1302). This fits with the local picture in Poplar. Small pubs, such as those mentioned above with a predominantly working-class clientele, have shut down permanently, while larger pubs have been more likely to remain operating, perhaps now converted into more expensive ‘gastropubs’. Contrast the fate of the three pubs already introduced with The Star of the East, a large Victorian pub on the border of Stepney and Limehouse. Reopened in 2019 by the Old Spot Pub Company, this grade 2 listed building now caters to a more upmarket clientele, its website advertising the availability of “a gorgeous Private Dining space to change up your office meetings or for any special occasion with friends & family” (Old Spot Pub Co., n.d.).[10]

The analytical framework of gentrification, then, is clearly of use in making sense of Jimmy’s Lament; at once able to identify a set of structuring economic and class-based determinants of urban change while also attending to the interconnected affective and phenomenological

[10] Between 2001 and 2016, the number of pubs in London fell by 25%, from 4,835 to 3,615. Tower Hamlets, along with Croydon and Westminster saw the largest absolute decrease in pub numbers over this period, losing 75 pubs each (although in relative terms outer London boroughs, such as Barking and Dagenham and Newham, saw greater decreases) (Wickham and Cominetti, 2017, p. 5). The period since has seen a modest increase in the number of pubs in Tower Hamlets, rising from a low of 120 in 2017 to 140 in March 2022 (Ljubijankić Kutasi, 2023). Notably, while the number of pubs operating in Tower Hamlets has reduced by 32% between 2001 and 2022, the number of employees working in pubs has increased by 50%, reflecting the shift in the pub market towards larger pubs and a greater focus on serving food (ibid).

unfolding of displacement processes as a form of ‘unhoming’. However, to interpret Jimmy’s lament in these terms would be to ignore the predominant theory held by local white working-class people themselves for the decline of pubs; demographic change, not in terms of class but rather in terms of ethnicity and religion. Regardless of the strength of the evidence for such a theory, the fact that ‘displacement’ is articulated in such racialised terms means that gentrification, in foregrounding of questions of class, largely disarticulated from questions of race, only provides a partial picture of the urban and affective dynamics at play in Jimmy’s lament, and of its wider political stakes.[11]

[11] An article in The Economist claims that “after controlling for house prices, a one percentage-point increase in a borough’s Muslim population is associated with a roughly 1% decline in the number of pubs” (The Economist, 2017). In contrast, research which focuses on the city-wide and national trend of pub closures - declining in absolute terms since the 1960s - has emphasised causes such as increased costs of running pubs due to taxation and regulation, decline in drinking habits (particularly beer) across the whole population, the ‘pub co’ business model, and a relaxation of permitted development rights allowing pubs to be converted for residential use (Keenan, 2020; Mayor of London, 2017; Snowdon, 2014)

1.3 The Aberfeldy in December 2006 Source: pubshistory.com Image credit: Stephen Harris & Di Parsons

1.4 The Aberfeldy in 2014 Source: pubshistory.com Image credit: Tris

White working class ‘displacement’

It was in fact a remark on ‘demographic change’ of this sort that prompted Jimmy’s remembrance of the two pubs on Brownfield Street. In his early sixties and having recently given up working as a London Black Cab driver of thirty years, Jimmy was one of my primary interlocutors during my fieldwork in Poplar and an enthusiastic participant and collaborator in my research. After meeting in a community cafe/pub project on the Aberfeldy estate (which will be more fully introduced in the next chapter) Jimmy and I started a regular habit of taking walks around Poplar, often followed by long conversations over cups of tea at Jimmy’s flat. Suffering from difficulties with his mental health over the past few years since stopping work, these conversations were often dominated by negative affects - loss, anxiety, despondency - regarding urban change and his life in Poplar more generally. The process of talking to me, and being listened to, seemed to be helpful to Jimmy in processing these thoughts and feelings, and it is these thoughts and feelings, and our shared efforts to examine them, which form the primary ethnographic material for this chapter. These conversations inevitably dwelt upon the ongoing redevelopment of the Aberfeldy Estate - now renamed ‘Aberfeldy Village’ - where 297 former council homes are being replaced by a ‘mixed’ development of 1,176 homes, alongside new retail, workspace and community facilities. But they also stretched further back in time. On this occasion we had been out on a walk around the Aberfeldy Estate with a DSLR camera. (A selection of photos from this walk, along with three photos Jimmy took of the Aberfeldy Estate on a disposable camera in the mid-1990s are presented above).

After spending our time taking photos of the Aberfeldy Estate, amid and awaiting redevelopment, we crossed the A12 dual carriageway to the newly redeveloped Brownfield Estate where Jimmy lived as a child and a young adult. Jimmy’s mood changed. Passing me back the camera he said:

> “Rob, the changes in the past thirty years have just been so drastic. Forty or thirty years ago the population of the area would have been 98% white working class. There would have been two pubs here with people outside. But I haven’t said hello to a single person yet.”

In keeping with the other white working-class residents of Poplar I encountered during my fieldwork, Jimmy associated the decline of local pubs – and therefore an aspect of his feelings

of ‘displacement’ - with the dwindling of the resident white working-class population of the area over the past several decades. Since the post-war period there has been several waves of outmigration of - predominantly white - working class people from east London to more suburban Essex and Kent.[12] This has taken place through a complex mix of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, from slum clearance and resettlement in the immediate post-war period (Wilmott and Young, 2007 [1951]), deindustrialisation from the late 1960s onward, and the ‘Right to Buy’ (RTB) since the 1980s. The RTB, which Jimmy did not exercise, allowed council tenants to buy their London homes at a significant discount from the council and then sell them on the open market without any penalty after five years, dramatically increasing the mobility of these former council tenants.[13] In more recent years this history of white-outmigration has interacted with the difficulties younger people (of all ethnicities) have found trying to access council housing in London; unable to find an affordable place to live in Poplar, and perhaps starting families of their own, young people who have family and friendship connections in the suburbs often choose to move out.[14] (The percentage of residents in Tower Hamlets identifying as white-British in the census fell from 43% to 31% between 2001 and 2011 [LBTH, 2013a], and to 22.9% by 2021 [LBTH, 2022].)

The steady outmigration of white working-class residents to the suburbs has been paralleled by in-migration by people from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. (Although it is important to acknowledge that non-white residents of the East End have also made similar migratory journeys to the suburbs). In Poplar over the last thirty years the fastest growing demographic has been those of Bangladeshi ethnicity. While in the 1991 census less than 10% of the population of Lansbury and East India Wards (where the Brownfield and Aberfeldy Estates are located) declared themselves of Bangladeshi ethnicity (Dench et al., 2006, p. 55), this increased to 30% in 2001 (ibid.) and 39% by 2011 (LBTH, 2013b). The percentage of residents declaring themselves Muslim in the 2011 census was 42.9% (ibid.). This reflects the presence of a large

[12] This has established an East End or “Cockney diaspora” of predominantly white emigres who still strongly identify as being from the ‘East End’ (Watt et al., 2014).
[13] The discount was between 22% and 50% depending on length of residency (Murie, 2016, p. 34)
[14] Such demographic trends are in keeping with those taking place in other working-class areas of London and other cities. Sometimes the term ‘white flight’ has been used to describe this process in the East End (Back, 1996; Farrar, 2008). However, in a contemporary context where processes of gentrification are at play, this term risks underplaying the complex mix of push and pull factors at play in these population movements. For further discussion see Watt et al. (2014).

Bangladeshi population as well as Muslim residents tracing their ancestry from other parts of the world such as Somalia and Somaliland.[15] In 2011 the percentage of white-British residents in the East India and Lansbury ward was 27.5% (ibid.)

The local Bangladeshi population have made their mark on the urban landscape of Poplar in many ways, including constructing mosques and establishing specialist grocery stories and halal butchers. Many white working-class residents, Jimmy included, draw a correlation between the rise of Bangladeshi spaces and the decline of pubs. Muslims do not tend to drink alcohol or go to pubs and - the theory goes - therefore there is less demand for pubs, and it is more difficult for them to be profitable businesses. Sometimes - although not for Jimmy - this theory takes on a more conspiratorial hue, whereby pubs are said to be under threat from Muslims who are deliberately trying to close them down, even to turn them directly into mosques.

Such conspiracy theories underline the fact that the pub is a highly racialised space (not to mention a highly gendered one too). The loss of Poplar's working-class pubs condenses a set of anxieties about *white* working-class displacement specifically. This becomes clearer upon examination of archival images of the Aberfeldy Pub prior to its demolition. An image taken in 2006 on the entry for The Aberfeldy on "The Lost Pubs Project" website (which on its homepage states its dedication to "Archiving The Decline Of The English Pub") shows a large St George's flag attached above the front entrance. In a later photograph taken in 2014, showing the pub now closed, two smaller St George flags hang from the metal railings next to boarded up windows. Such flags are displayed in other spaces around Poplar – in windows and hung from balconies – but pubs are one of the places one is most likely to see them, demarcating them as sites of 'Englishness'. Here Englishness and the St George flag connote whiteness but should also be understood in relation to anxieties about Islam and a sense that a formerly majority white, Christian, 'English' Poplar is disappearing or already has disappeared, with 'Bengalis' now perceived as the majority ethnic group.[16]

[15]These non-white residents are overwhelmingly working class: for example, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2012) reports that 78% of local Bangladeshi residents live in households in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (a means-tested benefit for those on low incomes) compared to 33% of non-Bangladeshi residents.

[16] Concerns about this transition are not, in my experience, limited to white residents of Poplar only. One of the people who expressed a fear that his pub was going to be turned into a

Any discussion of the forms of ‘displacement’ surrounding the pub and its transformed status within the urban landscape of Poplar therefore needs to grapple with questions of race alongside class. Indeed, once whiteness is brought more explicitly into the picture even to talk in terms of ‘displacement’ here becomes highly questionable. Who is ‘displacing’ who, exactly? The language of white displacement carries uncomfortable resonances of white nationalist discourses with a violent local history. More broadly, this framing risks amplifying what Les Back (2007, p. 83) has called the “victimology” of certain contemporary media discourses on the ‘white working class’. This discourse pitches the ‘white working class’ as in direct competition with ethnic minorities; as having lost out through government policies of multiculturalism and racial equality by means of their whiteness. In so doing it cultivates attachments to a politics of wounded white identity and, as Kjartan Páll Sveinsson (2009) notes, while adopting the language of class, often occludes discussions of class in any materialist sense.

Whiteness and class loss: from memory to history

How, then, might it be possible to be mindful both of the class dynamics at play in Jimmy’s lament, and the contemporary reality of whiteness as a relation of power which structures the affectivity and politics of urban space? As we have seen, the analytical framework of gentrification is able to draw out some important class-based determinants of the sense of displacement Jimmy feels about the loss of local pubs but does not allow for consideration of the ways in which the affectivity and politics of urban space in Poplar are also structured through the power relations of race and whiteness. What then might the literature on whiteness and urban change in east London contribute to our analysis of Jimmy’s lament?

While gentrification might be the dominant frame for contemporary media and academic discussions of urban change in east London, in the early 1990s the wave of capital inflow that has so modified the area during the intervening period was only beginning to build. Rather than luxury high-rise apartments the area was more generally characterised by deindustrialisation and high unemployment and had a reputation for racist violence and fascist activity. In 1993 the fascist British National Party (BNP) won a council by-election in the Millwall ward on the Isle of Dogs. The same year, a 17-year-old boy, Quddus Ali, was attacked by white racists outside a

mosque was a middle-aged man of African Caribbean – most likely Christian - descent. Chapter four will engage with these questions of Englishness and Islam in more detail.

pub in Shadwell, leaving him permanently disabled (Goodchild, 2000). Both events were met by a robust anti-racist response by East End Bangladeshis and their allies (Stevenson, 1993).

Research on urban change in east London emerging from around this time enquired into the dynamics of this racial hostility. One dominant tendency, drawing on the post-structuralist concerns with discursive construction in ascendancy in the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s, foregrounds the ways in which logics of racial exclusion and hierarchies of belonging are enacted and reproduced through the discursive construction of the East End as inherently white. For example, Phil Cohen (1996) analyses interviews with white working-class residents of the Isle of Dogs about their sense of home, place and belonging. He notes their strong tendency to present an idealised image of the past whereby 'Islanders' or 'East Enders' form an extended kinship group, rooted in place and closely tied together through networks of mutual aid and trust. Cohen argues that this mythology functions to strongly demarcate those who truly belong to place from those who don't - namely "'the immigrants', 'the ethnics', or 'the coloureds'" (ibid., 187). Meanwhile, Les Back (1996, p. 45), writing about two docklands council estates on the south side of the river Thames analyses how discursive constructions of community in the form of a "golden age discourse", a "death of community discourse" and a "white flight discourse" are "used to define insiders and outsiders… [affecting] the way in which racism gets expressed".

Such critical perspectives on whiteness encourage an attentiveness to the ways in which everyday speech, memory practices and the institutional curation of history comprise identifiable 'discourses' structured through and reproducing racial power relations and hierarchies. For example, Georgie Wemyss (2009), who also began her fieldwork in 1993, takes a wider view, analysing the "dominant white discourse" that organises the ways in which the history of the 'East End' is constructed and represented - not just in everyday speech but through the media and institutionalised writing and telling of local histories. She shows how this discourse works to exclude histories of the London Docks' relationship to the British Empire and its associated forms of violence and displacement, while privileging histories that present east London as intrinsically white. In one chapter Wemyss contrasts the fanfare which greeted the four-hundred-year anniversary of the 1606 departure from Blackwall of the first English settlers of North America with the relative silence surrounding the two-hundred-year anniversary of the 1806 opening of the East India Docks, half a century after the onset of the East India Company's dominion over Bengal. Such an erasure of the dockland's colonial histories, she argues, enacts an "unstable hierarchy of belonging" with white people at the top and east London residents

“whose ancestors were subject to British rule in the Asian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean remain[ing] near the base” (ibid., p. 26).

Other research has shown how this discourse persists even as those identifying as ‘white’ no longer form the majority of the population. Malcolm James (2014) explores the memory practices of youth workers and working-class young people in Newham - a borough immediately to the east of Tower Hamlets. In 2001 Newham had “the largest proportion of non-white ethnic groups in the country” at 61 per cent (ibid., p. 655) and yet, despite white people no longer forming the numerical majority, James shows how “memories of whiteness” continue to provide a powerful modality through which people construct claims of belonging to place. Memories of a previously more ethnically homogenous, white, ‘Golden Era’ of the East End were common among white youth workers but this also extended to some youth workers and young people who were not ‘white’. James shows how people of different ethnic backgrounds use memories of whiteness to make “claims for historical belonging” (ibid., p. 660), with the demarcation of who is included within the category of whiteness porous and adaptable while still ultimately establishing hierarchies of belonging along lines of race.

We must acknowledge, then, that while within one frame of analysis Jimmy’s lament is the heartfelt testimony of someone who is experiencing a classed form of displacement amid urban regeneration and gentrification, it can also be ‘read’ as the performance or enactment of a locally specific form of whiteness - one which, through its hegemonic circulation in everyday speech and media discourse, enacts hierarchies of deservingness and belonging to place. I want to be mindful of these power relations. There is a danger that, in privileging Jimmy’s voice in my writing without a critical attention to questions of whiteness and the discursive construction of place, I might unwittingly reproduce these dynamics.

But if the problem with gentrification frameworks is that they struggle to integrate an analysis of race alongside class, dominant frameworks for the study of whiteness in anthropology and sociology present the inverse problem – for my purposes here - of not being able to satisfactorily integrate an analysis of class alongside race. For Wemyss, Cohen and Back, class in the broad Marxist or materialist sense is not a central concern: Wemyss (2009, p. 69) engages the term ‘working class’ only as a discursive construct and a “subcategory of whiteness” whose racialised meaning is contested. And Cohen (1996, p. 195) explicitly eschews consideration of class, contrasting his account of “white working class nativism” as a “specific,

racialised, articulation of the East End" with accounts which would see racism as a product of "disadvantage or as the expression of a generalised false consciousness within a historically declining manual working class culture". James (2014) *does* consider class in his discussion of "memories of whiteness"; what he calls "class loss" refers to memories of the dislocations brought about by post-war slum clearance alongside "the collapse of local industry and soaring unemployment", starting in the 1960s and continuing through the 1970s and 1980s. However, James' emphasis is not on how class and class loss *per se* shapes subjectivity, but rather how *memories* of class loss function within racially exclusive constructions of place and belonging. Class loss is not explicitly discussed as a historical event but rather stands as a fictive element in the broader hegemonic discursive formation that is "memories of whiteness" in which memories of class loss are "overlaid" by or "equated with" immigration (ibid: 658, 661). Thus, while James usefully analyses the link between memories of class loss and memories of whiteness, the relationship between memory and class loss in a more materialist sense - unemployment, hunger, and dislocation as *historical events* which leave their mark on the present – is left unexplored.

It is an examination of such an *historical* process of "class loss" and its intersections with whiteness which, I suggest, Jimmy's lament invites. Rather than approach Jimmy's lament - and the questions of whiteness, class, class loss and nostalgia that it throws up - primarily as a practice of memory, I propose approaching it through the lens of *history.* To approach it as a 'performance' or 'enactment' of whiteness primarily would be to miss what Jimmy is trying to convey. And while anthropologists and ethnographers should not simply uncritically reiterate and amplify the concerns of their interlocutors, the kind of anthropology that I am interested in practicing takes these concerns as a starting point while also recognising our interlocutors' own capacities for critical inquiry.[17] The challenge, then, is to unpick the ways in whiteness and class are intertwined within this process of class loss. This means moving beyond a more narrowly discursive approach to race and whiteness to a broader historical conception of how processes

[17] Attempts to recognise and involve anthropological interlocutors in processes of critical inquiry include contemporary engagements with questions of epistemic collaboration (Estalella and Sanchez-Criado, 2018; Marcus, 2010; Rabinow and Stavrianakis, 2014). However, as Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2018, p. 223) argue there is a tendency for such collaborations to be carried out with "professional, elite, highly educated subjects – designers, hard scientists, and so on". And while these "naturalized affinities… might be fruitful in terms of the kinds of projects that can be endeavoured, [they] can reproduce a logic of exclusion that limits who we might imagine as theoretical provocateurs on the grounds of gender, race, class, age or ability."

of racialisation function within capitalist social formations or what, more broadly with regards to race, Stuart Hall (2018[1980]) called “societies structured in dominance”.[18]

Another way of putting this is to say that I am interested in Jimmy’s Lament as symptomatic of historically shifting structures of race and class – shifting structures which I argue are fundamental to my fieldsite and to the line of enquiry that I take in this thesis.[19] But in what follows, while I situate Jimmy’s Lament symptomatically, I try to avoid the limitations of what Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 15) calls a “symptomatic reading” which would reduce complex ongoing sociality and subjectivity to a set of static structural determinants. Following Berlant, then, I position Jimmy’s Lament and the other ethnographic vignettes that I present in this chapter as evidencing forms of adjustment and improvisation amid a sense of contingency and breakdown; contemporary urban regeneration serving to further compound anxieties relating to the longer-term erosion of the forms of social security associated with the post-war welfare state. I wish to highlight how Jimmy himself grappled and struggled with what I call his “affective displacement” through our research collaboration. Ultimately, I am interested in an exploration of Jimmy’s lament as something more affectively ambivalent and open-ended than dominant analytical frameworks allow, engaging with his affective struggles as ongoing rather than only the symptom of this or that structural framework.

[18] In this article Hall (2018 [1980], p.172) attempts to refine Marxist approaches to the origins and persistence of “racially structured social formations”, through readings of Marx, Althusser and Gramsci among others. Attempts to engage with such questions through a broad Marxist approach continues today under the umbrella of “racial capitalism” (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Virdee, 2019) a term originally employed by Cedric Robinson (1983).

[19] My concern with history is therefore distinct from recent anthropological attention to “historicity”. Charles Stewart (2016, p. 79) defines historicity as encompassing “cultural perceptions of the past” in contrast to an academic discipline of history concerned with “factuality”. This concept of historicity is closely related to memory in its emphasis on the “fundamental relationality of knowledge of the past” (80) but aims to also “embrace deeper time spans where the personal storage of and retrieval of experience does not arise as a possibility” (89). In contrast, my concern here is less with the ways in which knowledge of the past is socially and culturally mediated and more with how Jimmy’s lament, as an articulation of Jimmy’s experience of the past, might be analysed as a cultural form within what Berlant (2011) calls our “historical present”. Berlant’s notion of a historical present, in a broadly Marxist fashion, attempts to attend to present experience and culture as both reflecting and responding to ‘structural’ shifts corresponding to the “retraction, during the last three decades, of the social democratic promise of the post-Second World War period in the United States and Europe” (Berlant, 2011, p. 3).

The rest of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, putting Jimmy's own archival materials in conversation with academic literatures, I discuss two approaches to the question of class loss and the 'problem' of the white working class as it developed in Britain from the 1990s to the present. The first, established in the anthropological literature by Gillian Evans' (2006) book *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, and later popularised by the left-wing journalist Owen Jones (2011) in his book *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class* (in which Evans is interviewed as an expert) argues that the rise of the white working class - as both an image of abjection and a contemporary political constituency - should be understood in relation to the decline of class politics in Britain. This is arguably the dominant account of class loss and its relationship to questions of race and whiteness in Britain. However, a critical examination of Evan's text shows that, with respect to questions of whiteness and racism, it is symptomatic of the historical erasures and amnesia highlighted by the literature on whiteness above. In contrast, the second approach, exemplified by Robbie Shilliam's (2018) book *Race and the Undeserving Poor*, published in the wake of the 'Brexit' vote places the question of 'class loss' in relation to longer genealogies of race and whiteness, connecting the history of the island of Britain to its often more invisible history of Empire. This, I suggest, provides a better basis for situating Jimmy's lament in relation to historically shifting structures of race and class. But while Shilliam presents the contemporary re-emergence of a white working class political constituency in the context of the Brexit vote in relation to a dominant affective condition of "melancholic racialised nationalism" I attempt, by interspersing material stemming from my multi-modal fieldwork practice with Jimmy amongst my theoretical and historical arguments, to attend to more open-ended and less dogmatic affects, situating Jimmy's lament as an opening onto the complex and ambivalent affective landscape of urban regeneration in Poplar.

Jimmy's Archive

"Do you mind if I take a photo?"

"Please do!"

I'm sitting on the sofa in Jimmy's living room. Jimmy has made us both cups of tea, but while I sit and drink mine Jimmy won't sit still. He keeps getting up to show me things stashed away in various cupboards and sideboards, or presented proudly on window sills and bookcases: a set of drinks glasses previously owned by his aunt Ginny; books on art, literature, history and architecture bought from second hand bookshops while on breaks from driving his cab; a set of Andy Warhol philosophy pencils (unopened); an empty laundry detergent tin from the 1960s; a piece of art he has made from an old tin of Pringles;... Jimmy hands me each item to photograph using my phone before disappearing again into a walk-in cupboard next to the kitchen. He emerges with a bundle of papers under his arm. "I'm becoming a real bore now" he jokes apologetically, as he hands me a series of newspaper cuttings from a plastic folder. "This is my archive".

THE WORKING CLASS IS DEFEATED

The first cutting is of a feature article in the Guardian from 27 February 2007. The authors are two women playwrights "born into the working class" who have set out to write a "feminist 'state of the nation' play that would connect with class". As they put it, "[the] working class no longer has any strategic presence in British politics - it was defeated in the 1980s and has no parliamentary party champion". They describe how their resulting play, 'Blame', set in the working class and multi-ethnic London borough of Hackney, grapples with a situation where "blame has been projected onto the powerless". They observe that "there's an obsession with 'low life' in reality television" and, against this trend, want to try to represent working class lives in their "authenticity" and complexity.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKERS? - IF YOU THINK WE'RE ALL MIDDLE CLASS NOW, YOU'RE NOT LOOKING IN THE RIGHT PLACES

"Even then I was obsessed Rob - look", Jimmy says, as he passes me the next article, taken from the 13 December 1998 edition of The Observer Review. The article analyses the evacuation of 'class' from political discourse, "[now] that the class war is officially over". Jimmy has marked several lines with a yellow highlighter. It's a quote from a Daily Telegraph columnist reacting to an opinion poll in which 55% of respondents declared that they (still) identified as 'working class'. It reads:

> "Can't everyone else see… that there is nothing in the least bit admirable about the idle remnants of the proletariat, that dwindling few with their hideous clothes, revolting food, trashy newspapers, filthy children, disgusting manners, vile wallpaper and violent, dishonest dispositions?".

WE'RE NOT TRYING TO PUT YOU OFF YOUR SUMMER HOLIDAY BUT THE IKEA SALE ENDS SUNDAY

I don't manage to ask Jimmy why he highlighted this passage as we're already moving onto the next cutting which he describes as "probably my favourite piece, which I'll have to get framed".

It's an advert for Ikea, featuring what is easily recognisable as an image of an overweight British white working-class man, standing on a beach. He is holding a bottle of beer, wearing nothing but a pair of Union Jack patterned swimming shorts. A tattoo is prominently displayed on his upper arm bearing the inscription "mum" and "dad", either side of a love heart. Gold bracelets adorn his neck and wrist.

"An Englishman abroad, isn't that fantastic?!" Jimmy says, laughing. "Go on, photograph that Rob. Very much an idea of - 'I go to Spain and all they do is foreign food!'".

ArtsTheatre

'The working class is defeated'

Who is really to blame for the widening gaps in British society? Playwrights **Beatrix Campbell** and **Judith Jones** turned to London's Hackney to find out

Who would have imagined that Britain would end up like this? That life expectancy for men in parts of Glasgow would slump below 60; that almost half of Hackney would be living on income support; that Britain's children are at the bottom of the

– one of us had already revisited Orwell's trek into the hinterland of proletarian poverty during the 1930s, and he is, after all, the iconic figure in the canon of Britishness; he dominates our popular literature of class. But he extends his sympathy to the working class as a distant object, a lump.

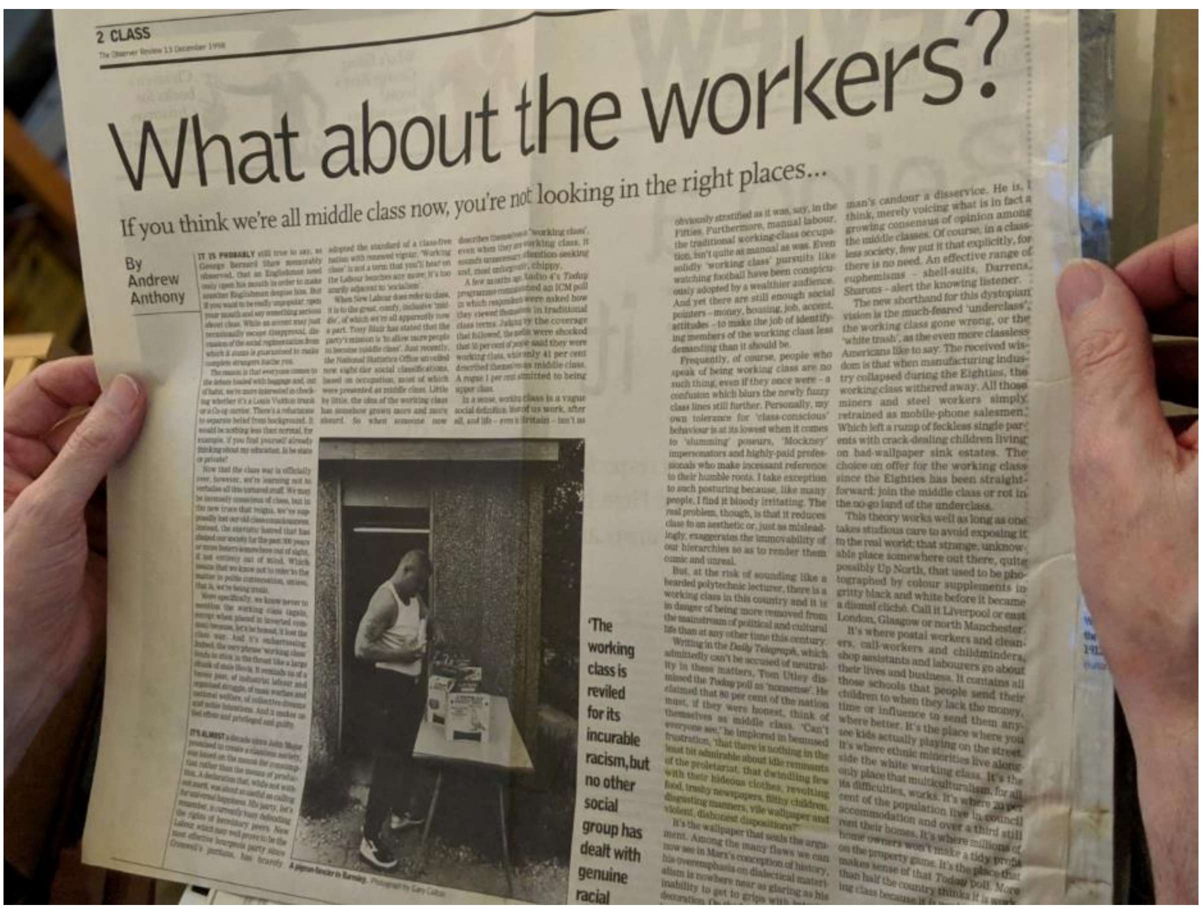
We considered, too, his contemporary, JB Priestley, who wrote a perfect

Authentic voices ... Lindsey Coulson and Nicholas Beveney rehearse Blame

culture by white people. London is talking black – it isn't the only place – and Hackney embodies the readiness of white people to allow their traditional culture to be transformed and black people's Britishness.

We also wanted the play to address childhood. Children's movements across social space are an index of public safety and danger; they test the generosity or abusiveness of a society.

1.5 – Guardian newspaper clipping



2 CLASS

What about the workers?

If you think we're all middle class now, you're not looking in the right places...

By Andrew Anthony

'The working class is reviled for its incurable racism, but no other social group has dealt with genuine racial

1.6 – Observer newspaper clipping

1.7 – IKEA advert

An Archive of Class Loss

Taking Jimmy's lead, and drawing on his personal archive, how can we further flesh out the notion of class loss as a historical and affective condition? And how should we conceive of the relationship between class loss, race and place therein?

Jimmy's newspaper cuttings assemble one historical account of class loss in Britain since the 1980s. The articles he gives me - "What about the workers?", from 1998, and "The working class are defeated", from 2007, provide strikingly similar analyses of the changed place of class within British culture and politics over this period, roughly bookending the years of New Labour governments in Britain (1997-2010). Both reference the 1980s as a decisive moment of "defeat", encompassing the political defeat of the last bastions of trade union power - most notably the miners - and the related economic demise of those industries around which the organised working class consolidated itself. Both pieces also highlight the rightward shift of the Labour Party in the intervening period which, under the leadership of Tony Blair, came to define its mission in terms of allowing "more people to become middle class" rather than primarily representing and advocating for the working class. And the diminished ability of people to take pride in, or be valued as, working class is also at the heart of both pieces. Whereas the institutions of the Labour movement and Labour party had previously provided opportunities to take pride in being working class, the articles attest to how, from the 1980s onward this became increasingly difficult. As the Observer piece puts it: "The choice on offer for the working class since the Eighties has been straight forward: join the middle class or rot in the no-go land of the underclass".

What were the racial dynamics of this process of class loss? The two articles are not explicitly framed in terms of race and whiteness, but in terms of class. Yet on closer inspection - particularly of The Observer article - the implicit whiteness of the 'working class' under discussion becomes apparent. For example, the 'pull quote' reads: "The working class is reviled for its incurable racism, but no other social group has dealt with genuine racial integration" - a sentence which only makes sense if we assume that by 'working class' the author is more specifically referring to the 'white working class'. The author's mention of "white trash" as an alternative - American - term for the "much feared 'underclass', the working class gone wrong" also suggests that the stakes of what is being discussed concerns the 'white working class' specifically.

This becomes much clearer in relation to the Ikea advert - a good example of the images of abject whiteness which regularly circulated in Britain at this time. In the New Labour period

and carrying on into the years of David Cameron's Conservative governments (2010-2016), the 'underclass' became a prime focus of social policy interventions in Britain, identified as a source of social and moral degeneration. This included the 'Respect Agenda' which sought to reform the morals and manners of the underclass (or what the New Labour governments liked to call the "socially excluded") through a focus on policing "anti-social behaviour" (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012). What was distinctive about this period, as opposed to, for example, the moral panic around 'mugging' in the 1970s (Hall et al., 2013 [1978]) or 'race riots' in the 1980s (Gilroy and Lawrence, 1988), was the way in which the *white* working class became a figure of disgust and focus of social policy interventions. This is perhaps best captured by the word 'chav' - a derogatory term for people considered part of a white underclass - which came into widespread use in the early years of the new millennium to such an extent that, in 2004, the Oxford English Dictionary made it their word of the year (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012).

Writing at the same time that these articles were published and reflecting some of their concerns, Evans (2006) provides an anthropological contribution to the debate around the transformation of class in Britain and the emergent 'problem' of the whiteness of the (white) working class. Drawing on fieldwork on white working-class attitudes to education in Bermondsey – another London docklands neighbourhood, but on the south side of the river Thames – Evans argues that a process of class loss is responsible for increasing investments in whiteness among the white, working-class people that she encountered in Bermondsey. Their predicament, she argues, needs to be understood in relation to how "the political and economic struggles which have historically defined what it means to be working class in Britain were forced into the background and concealed" and the requirement of "learning 'to have a cultural identity' in order to compete in a multicultural social climate" (ibid., p. xv).

Evan's book is very often cited in the anthropology of Britain, but I have yet to come across a published critique of the very serious flaws in her arguments.[20] These flaws are important to

[20] Evans' work can be seen to reflect a broader lacuna around questions of whiteness in anthropology - and particularly British social anthropology - from around this time. This contrasts with the bodies of contemporary literature on whiteness produced by British based scholars in the adjacent disciplines of sociology and cultural studies (Ahmed, 2007; Ware, 1996; Ware and Back, 2002) as well as by anthropologists beyond Britain (e.g., Hage, 1998). Les Back's (1996) landmark text "New Ethnicities and Urban Culture" is in fact based on research conducted while a PhD student in the Goldsmiths Anthropology department but is not normally considered part of the anthropological canon (with Back going onto become a prominent sociologist). This lacuna in British social anthropology has been addressed by more recent work, for example that of Wemyss (2009), cited above, and Katherine Tyler

highlight here as Evan's book demonstrates how arguments about "class loss", if they do not have a sufficient theorisation of whiteness and coloniality, can lead to analytically dubious conclusions while also working against the important work of decolonising the discipline of anthropology. The central problem in Evan's book resides in how she erases long histories of whiteness in London's docklands in making her argument that investments in whiteness in Bermondsey are a relatively new phenomenon. Part of how this is achieved is through a distinction that she makes between racism and what she calls "placism". Discussing the racially discriminatory language used by Sharon – one of her white, working-class interlocutors – she argues that she is not:

> "racist *per se*; she is in fact, like most Bermondsey people… 'placist'. This means that the defence of the place - the manor - and the way of life of the people in a community formed the basis of kinship and residence criteria, is everything to them" (Evans, 2006, p. 61).

Meanwhile, racism of the ethno-nationalist kind, which Evans fears is on the rise in Bermondsey and elsewhere in Britain, is:

> "indicative… of a shift in the idea of community relatedness in Bermondsey… from a preoccupation with kinship and residence in a narrowly defined geographical area and towards an explicit discourse of ultra-conservative cultural nationalism, which is more broadly defined and racially conceived as whiteness (ibid., p. 61)".

Therefore, rather than a product of white supremacy as a historical structure of power which transcends class divides - within which Evans, as a white middle class person, is also implicated - Sharon's racism is recast as stemming from the "parochial concerns of the working class neighbourhood" (ibid., p. 63).[21] But while there is truth to her argument that the

(2012) whose work is particularly strong in terms of demonstrating differences in formations of whiteness in Britain according to class.

[21] And it is this same parochialism, Evans goes on to suggest, from which derives a specifically white working-class lack of investment in education (relative to local Asian families). In attempting to redefine Sharon's racism as the product of a specific working class form of "ignorance", Evans at once downplays the ways in which this racism is part of deep-rooted formations of whiteness *and* makes at least two classist judgements; first, that working class people are more disposed to forms of racial prejudice than middle class people (see also Tyler 2012: 25) and second, that both this and their rejection of the education system is ultimately the result of their "ignorance". This latter argument demonstrates how Evan's concern for class representation and class politics is heavily paternalistic. Paul Willis' (1981 [1977]) classic work of sociology - "Learning to Labour" –

former London docklands were - and still are, to some extent - characterised by a strong ethic of communitarianism that involved a strict determination of insiders and outsiders based primarily around kinship, this should not be seen as mutually exclusive with nationalism and white supremacy. Virdee (2014, ch 4) argues that such ideologies, while originating in British elite self-conceptions, permeated the working class from at least the late 19th century onward. Indeed, east London was the setting for the foundation of the first fascist organisation in Britain in 1902 - the British Brothers League - its very name, with its mixing of ideologies of kinship and nation, underlining the futility of attempts to separate these forms of social exclusion (ibid: Ch 3).[22] Meanwhile, white supremacist attitudes and practices within the working class (not to mention other classes too, of course) were similarly prevalent in the post-war period – a time which Evans, in common with many other left-leaning commentators, fondly remembers as the height of working class strength and organisation in Britain. This went beyond far right political activity but was embedded within the practices of what are normally considered 'left wing' institutions, such as the trade unions. For example, trade union enforced colour bars operated in many docklands workplaces during this time, which prevented non-white workers from being employed or confined them to lower status, lower skilled and lower paid roles (Virdee 2014, p. 102).[23] Meanwhile during this period trade union members were also involved in more explicitly white supremacist 'political' actions; the dock strikes in support of Enoch Powell MP in 1968 after he was sacked from the shadow cabinet after making his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech perhaps being the most illustrative example. In this incendiary speech Powell warned of the dangers for "decent, ordinary fellow Englishmen" of continued immigration from Britain's colonies, relaying the remark of a constituent who claimed that this would lead to a situation where "in 15-20 years the black man will have the whip hand over the white man" (Channel 4, 2008). After workers first went on strike in the West Midlands (local to where Powell was the MP) they soon spread to the London docklands where, over the course of four days between 6,000 to 7,000 dockers took strike action, with a smaller

omitted from Evan's bibliography – presents an alternative, Marxist approach to the issue of working-class rejection of the British education system.

[22] Thanks to Isaac Marrero-Guillamón for pointing this out to me.

[23] Virdee notes that this applied to the Tate and Lyle sugar factory in Silvertown. During my fieldwork I heard a story of how, at the Bromley-by-Bow gas works in the 1970s, black workers were confined to the 'gang' which stoked the furnaces in the sweltering conditions inside the retort houses, with white workers on at least one occasion taking strike action when employers attempted to assign black workers elsewhere.

number (300-800) taking part in a demonstration and march to parliament (Lindop 2001, p. 82).[24]

Class Loss is Race Loss

In the aftermath of the 2016 'Brexit' referendum, and the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency later that year, arguments that investments in whiteness on the part of a white working class stem from a "privileging of identity politics over concerns with socio-economic inequality" have been frequently reiterated (Bhambra 2017a, p. s217, emphasis removed).[25] But as Bhambra (2017b) argues, such arguments fail to take into account race as a "structural process [which] has organised the modern world". In making race a question of "identity" that is` supplementary to class, rather than constitutive of it, they betray a "methodological whiteness" - one which for Bhambra (2017b) "constitutes the standard social scientific discussion of race".

What, then, in Bhambra's terms, might constitute such a structural analysis of whiteness in London's former docklands? And what might this have to offer our approach to Jimmy's lament? Here it is useful to revisit the work of Stuart Hall and his collaborators in the 1970s and 1980s. In their ground-breaking and now classic text *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. (2013 [1978]) examine the explosion of a moral panic around 'mugging' in the British media in the late 1970s in relation to a "crisis of hegemony" of the post-war British welfare state. Their analysis is structural in that they work with a Marxist conception of society as divided into distinct classes, but with the proviso that class relations themselves are "structured by race" and divided into distinct "class fractions". 'Mugging' is interpreted in relation to this racial class structure, as one of a number of mechanisms (economic, ideological and political) through which social relations of class and race are reproduced and hegemony restored. Hall et al provide a detailed account of race and class as mutually imbricated social structures, reproduced through myriad institutions, social practices and forms of discourse, and underpinning the formation, mediation and circulation of affective states and social

[24] Unrelated to pay and conditions at the docks, Shilliam (2018, p. 103) argues that these strikes are evidence of working-class investments in whiteness which go beyond the "instrumentality of the racialized division of labour" to encompass a "populist defence […] of a racialized nation confronting the settlement of Black and Asian bodies".

[25]Indeed, Evans herself published an short article shortly after the referendum in which she rehearsed her arguments from previous work in relation to 'Brexit' (Evans 2017). In this account, support for 'Leave' in the "left behind" predominantly white working class, post-industrial areas of Britain is the outcome of "the reconfiguration of politics away from class altogether and toward a new form of solidarity built on cultural nationalism" (ibid: 218). Again, the extent to which there is anything 'new' about this nationalism is insufficiently probed.

anxieties. Such an account goes some way towards satisfying Bhambra's demand for an account of race as a "structural process". However, now over 40 years old, does this 'conjunctural analysis' of class and race in Britain in the 1970s help us to understand Poplar today? The language of "class fractions" certainly seems somewhat dated; is it possible to point to anything quite so fixed and definite today?

It is arguably the *dissolution* of the distinct "class fractions" discussed by Hall et al which is part of what is at stake in Jimmy's lament and in the newspaper articles that he showed me from his archive. Such a historical perspective on shifting structures of race and class is provided by Shilliam (2018) in his book *Race and the Undeserving Poor*. Less Marxist in his approach to Hall et al., Shilliam retains a focus on race and class as structural questions but places a greater emphasis on intellectual history. Written in the wake of the 'Brexit' referendum vote, Shilliam seeks to provide a genealogy of the white working-class political constituency that was so associated with the result, demonstrating that, far from a recent invention, it is a:

> "constituency produced and reproduced through struggles to consolidate and defend British imperial order, struggles that have subsequently shaped the contours of Britain's postcolonial society. (Shilliam 2018, p. 6)"

Shilliam's book upends many of the assumptions of the dominant story of class loss, discussed above. The usual story of 'class loss' presents it as the result of a long history of battles between the working class and the state - one which, with Thatcher and the onset of the neoliberal era, the working class eventually. It is then, in this moment of disorganisation and disarray, that there is a supposed turn to whiteness as a form of compensation. We have already seen how this account requires a historical erasure of long-standing investments in whiteness across all classes in Britain. Shilliam takes this critique further, demonstrating how the politics of class – far from 'primary' with respect to questions of race - in fact operates around a deeply historically embedded racialised distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor; a distinction Shilliam shows has been central to the integrity of Britain's colonial and postcolonial order, from the early 19th century to today.

With respect to the rise of Thatcherism and the neoliberal era, Shilliam shows how the breakdown in what he calls the racialised "national compact" between capital and labour (which integrated trade unions into the functioning of the state and expanded welfare provisions for sections of the working class) was not simply a case of the former winning the class war over the latter but was in fact partly authored by those "racialised as white and

who acted on behalf of a 'white working-class' constituency" (ibid: 107). He develops this point with reference to the 1968 dock strikes in support of Enoch Powell – introduced above. Despite the protestations from elements of dockers' left-wing trade union leadership that they should not support Powell - a right-wing Conservative MP - as he was no friend of the working class, many rank-and-file members participated in strike action in his defence (Lindop 2001, p. 91). Shilliam views this moment in 1968 as a taste of what was to come - a microcosm of broader shifts in political sentiment across the country. As Powellism mutated into Thatcherism over the course of the 1970s, the Conservative Party wedded together strong anti-immigrant and white nationalist rhetoric with increasingly open hostility to trade unions. Despite this turn away from the national compact, at the 1979 election Thatcher's Conservatives won with a 11% swing to the Conservatives among skilled workers and a 9% swing among unskilled workers. In this way, Shilliam argues:

> "[workers] who were racialised as white and who acted on behalf of a 'white working class' constituency could not but be agents in their own demise …Their preference to defend their race over their class unintentionally helped to inaugurate the neoliberal era wherein the deserving/undeserving distinction was wielded by political elites to cut apart this constituency" (Shilliam 2018, p. 107).

In the subsequent neoliberal period Shilliam argues that the deserving/undeserving distinction was "[delinked]… from informal colour bars and [returned] to the general economy as a test of moral character" (Shilliam 2018, p. 116). One's status as white and working class no longer afforded the same degree of protection or privilege as it did under the national compact and the stage was then set for the emergence of a "white 'underclass… imbued with a hyper-visible social dysfunctionality and a moral character undeserving of welfare" (ibid., p. 4). But in the last decade or so, Shilliam notes, this situation has transformed once more, with the "white working class" re-emerging as a deserving political constituency. Shilliam interprets 'Brexit' - and one might add the subsequent groundswell of support for Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in the 2019 General Election in predominantly white, working-class post-industrial areas - as a contemporary parallel to white working-class support for Enoch Powell. Shilliam presents evidence that in both cases - support for Powell in the late 1960s and for Leave today - were strongest amongst those demographics who reported concerns about immigration and perceptions of their own downward mobility.[26] In

[26] Shilliam (2018, p.159) also notes that polling data collected on the day of the vote shows that "across all tenure types the highest percentage of leave voters were those who occupied council housing". For Shilliam this is in keeping with the observation that "of all

both instances, Shilliam argues, a white working-class political constituency acts not in the defence of class but rather of race.

Postcolonial melancholia?

Melancholia is the dominant affective state which Shilliam identifies in relation to those "[acting] on behalf of a 'white working class' constituency" in the context of the Brexit vote. What he calls "melancholic racialized nationalism" reflects a "desire to retrieve the racialized securities of the post-war national compact" but without the realistic prospect of being able to do so. Here he references the earlier work of Paul Gilroy (2004) and his well-known diagnosis of Britain's "post-colonial melancholia", whereby resurgent nationalism is interpreted in relation to a collective inability to mourn the loss of Empire. But while these forms of structural critique are useful for situating Jimmy's lament in relation to shifting structures of race and class, it would not be accurate to characterise Jimmy's lament in Lament in terms of "melancholic racialised nationalism" or "postcolonial melancholia". For Freud (2006 [1917]), from whom Gilroy's and Shilliam's concepts of melancholia ultimately derive, melancholia is a pathological state, characterised by a dogmatic refusal to mourn a loss object.[27] But while Jimmy is evidently struggling to come to terms with – to mourn - multiple forms of loss, this does not manifest as dogmatism. Rather Jimmy's reflections are full of ambivalence. This ambivalence gestures to an important space between the white working-class political constituency that Shilliam so astutely critiques and the more mundane, material realities of being both white and working class, and identifying as such. In this final section of the chapter, I want to further draw out this affective ambivalence with reference to one further scene in which Jimmy presents objects from his archive.

◊

A couple of months after our first session, Jimmy is showing me some further items from his collection. This time I have a video camera with me. We've been filming for a while and I suggest we take a break, but Jimmy's enthusiasm continues unabated. "One last thing! Can

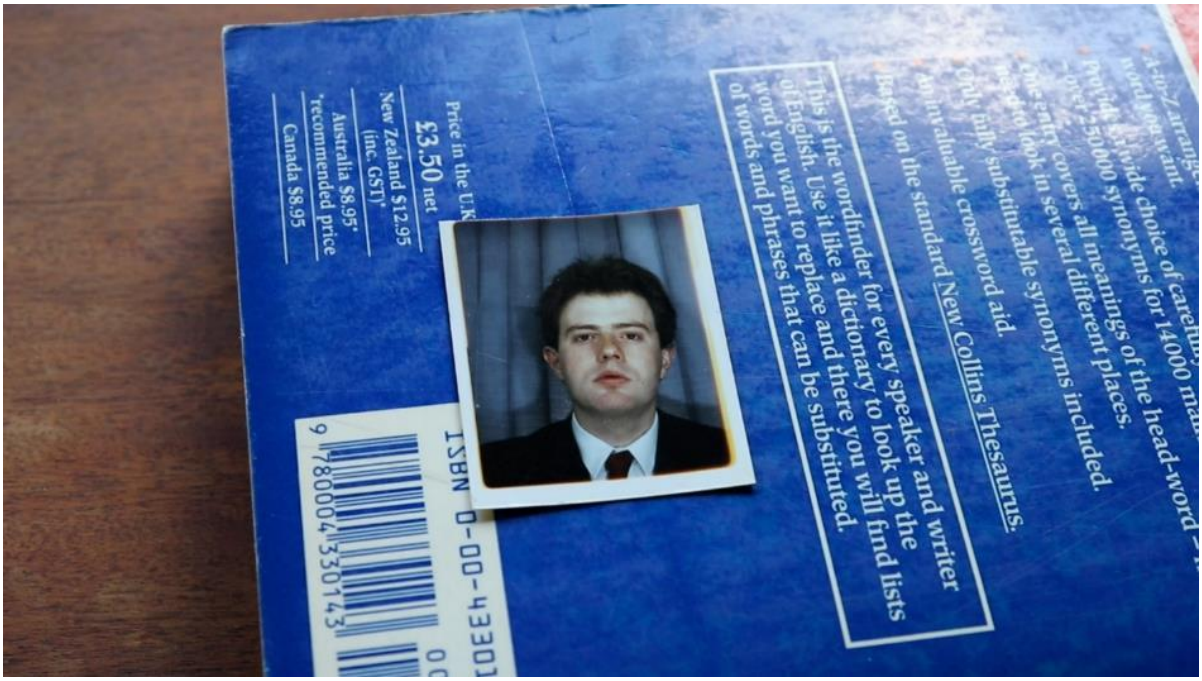
welfare provisions, housing was historically most open to the racialized distinction between deserving and undeserving".

[27] Freud (1958 [1917], p. 249) writes that while in mourning attachments to a lost object are gradually lessened in melancholia there is a failure to mourn which eventually results in the "identification of the ego with the abandoned object" (emphasis removed). He states that its "distinguishing mental features are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (ibid., p. 244)

we do one more?” He pulls out a small blue plastic wallet with another series of cuttings. He takes them out one by one, laying them on a desk so I can film them.

WATCH: https://vimeo.com/702904650/bf3b6ccdd2

1.8 – Alf Garnett Vimeo page



1.9 – Jimmy's cab license photo

1.10 - Watercolours in Spectator magazine

Jimmy moves on to show me some other objects - a record by the band Bauhaus; a postcard from a friend on holiday in Hanoi - before coming back to Alf Garnett. I've stopped video recording at this point, but my audio recorder is still running. Jimmy shows me a couple of clips on his laptop from Till Death Do Us Part, the 1960s and 70s sitcom in which Alf Garnett featured. We talk about TV sitcom and drama today and why it might be that it is no longer possible to show what Jimmy calls an "unvarnished working-class character, borrowed from life" today, while on East Enders there are all sorts of horrible story lines featuring rape, murder etc. Then Jimmy brings up the case of the editing of old films to make them more acceptable to contemporary audiences. He's unsure about this practice. "A classic case", Jimmy says, is the case of the film *Dam Busters*, a film based on the daring bombing raids by the Royal Air Force to destroy Nazi dams during the 2nd World War. On the one hand, Jimmy says, it's a film about the fight between liberal democracy and fascism. On the other hand, one of the pilots (in real life and in the film) named his dog the N-word, with broadcasters now often deciding to edit out or redub these scenes.

> "What does that say about the character of the man?... There was an existential crisis – will Western liberal democracy survive or not, or will it be obliterated by the Nazis? He's fighting that. He doesn't survive the war, so we say – he gave his life so others will live and have freedom… [but] what interests me is – he calls his dog the n word… [so] how pejorative was that word then?"

Jimmy is not sure what to make of this contradiction, as he sees it, and what should be done about the film. I offer that maybe this is not such a contradiction because:

> "It didn't have the same meaning then just because white supremacy was a lot stronger. And the idea that black people were inferior was just more accepted. You say about Western liberal democracy and fighting the Nazis, but Western liberal democracy was completely compatible with slavery in other parts of the world. These ideas of freedom were completely modelled on a white male, primarily, and then gradually, through social struggles, it's been extended to include other categories. And actually the category of the human being had to be extended to include black people"

Jimmy agrees that it was a status quo that "needed adjusting in a big way", before adding, "let's not forget... I've had experiences of being judged because of my accent".

I ask him if he minds if I turn the camera back on.

WATCH: https://vimeo.com/702927038/08599b7f78

1.11 – Being Judged Vimeo page

Conclusion: Structures of Feeling

In this chapter I have attempted to situate Jimmy's lament in relation to a historically shifting structures of race and class, and to specify the concept of 'class loss' as a historical and affective condition. We saw how there are competing accounts of 'class loss' as it pertains to the London docklands, specifically around questions of race and the constitution of a 'white working class'. While the likes of Evans (2006; 2012; 2017) have argued that, from the time of Thatcher onward, a discourse and politics of whiteness emerges primarily as a response to the decline of class politics and the institutions that once made this possible (most notably the trade unions and the Labour Party), Shilliam presents an alternative genealogy of the white working class. He argues, with particular reference to strike action at the London docks, that the politics of 'class' in the post-war period was structured around a deep-rooted racial logic (operating around the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor). Shilliam's account helps us to understand that class loss - as it played out historically in Britain in the latter decades of the 20th century and into the 21st - is simultaneously a process of 'race loss'; a process whereby sections of the white working class became more ambivalently included within the privileged category of whiteness.

It would be easy to paint a picture of Jimmy's lament as the symptom of the downward mobility of elements of the white working class. And that is certainly part of the story I am trying to unpack in this chapter. For example, we might consider this in relation to Jimmy's working life. One of the reasons, Jimmy quit his job driving a black cab a couple of years before I met him, alongside his deteriorating mental health, was a perception that he was having to work harder and longer hours to maintain his earnings because of increased competition from new 'ride-hailing' smartphone applications such as Uber. While once Black cab drivers (who are more likely to be white) could reliably earn higher wages than private hire drivers due to their monopoly on 'hail and ride' services, Uber et al have to a large degree broken this monopoly, rapidly diminishing the advantages of being a black cab driver.[28] We might also consider Jimmy's positionality as a social tenant in the context of four decades of the 'Right to Buy'. While many of Jimmy's white working-class neighbours have bought their properties and sold them on to move out to the suburbs, benefiting from substantial discounts and a strong London property market, Jimmy's mobility is constrained as a social tenant and he is approaching retirement age without the same financial assets to draw on as some of his white working class peers - a topic to which I will return in the next chapter.

However, there is a tension between situating social actors in relation to historically shifting structures of race and class, as I have endeavoured to do in this chapter, and slipping into a form of analysis which performs what Berlant (2011) calls a 'symptomatic reading', reducing complex, ongoing sociality and subjectivity to a set of static structural determinants. While I consider it important to situate Jimmy in relation to his structural positionality as white and working class, for (to paraphrase Stuart Hall) these are highly significant modalities through which urban regeneration in Poplar is 'lived', I also want to be mindful of how such abstract categorisations do not by any means tell the whole story and - as Jimmy himself is only too aware – can themselves effect their own forms of violence on those so classified.

We can see these forms of violence at play with respect to the dominant associations of the white working class and white working-class people with racialised resentment. As Jimmy alludes to when discussing his experiences of driving a cab, people he met would often assume that he, as a white working-class man would "just hold certain beliefs, political beliefs". Meanwhile, he goes onto say: "I found in the cab, any white middle class person, without exception would be racist. Once I got talking to them. Without exception. Without

[28] Analysis of figures published by Transport for London shows that white British taxi drivers are twenty times more likely to drive a black cab than Bangladeshi taxi drivers (Transport for London, 2021)

exception." Jimmy later told me that, on reflection, this point was somewhat exaggerated, but this only underlines the evident frustration Jimmy feels at how he, as a white working-class man, is made to bear the weight of the deeply embedded racism of Britain more broadly. As Imogen Tyler (2008, p. 26) notes with reference to the 'chav' phenomenon, the association of white working-class people with racism can actually function as a form of racialisation in itself whereby the white working class embodies a "contaminated whiteness".

It is my hope that the ethnographic vignettes I have presented in this chapter begin to demonstrate the existence and possibility of more ambivalent, open, and less dogmatic and pathological forms of affectivity among those who are ascribed as, or themselves identify as, 'white working class'. But in doing so I do not suppose that this affectivity is completely open ended; rather across these vignettes Jimmy grapples with the structural situation he finds himself in. The concept "structures of feeling", developed by the post-war British Cultural Studies scholar Raymond Williams (1977), is helpful here.[29] A Marxist and a socialist activist, Williams was committed to a form of social analysis which helped to critique and unpick the intricate procedures through which class society is reproduced and struggled against in the domain of culture. But he notes the tendency for much of this analysis to render "culture and society in a habitual past tense" such that "living presence is always, by definition, receding" (ibid., p. 128). On the one hand there is "the social" which is "fixed and explicit - the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions". On the other, everything else, "all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective' (ibid., p.128)." Williams' concern was to bridge this analytical gap between the social and the personal, between fixed form and living presence arguing that the relevance of critique to our "present cultural process" depended on it:

> "Perhaps the dead can be reduced to fixed forms, though their surviving records are against it. But the living will not be reduced… All the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion, are against the terms of the reduction and soon, by extension, against social analysis itself. (ibid., p. 129)"

The term structures of feeling is Williams' attempt to engage with these complexities, tensions, shifts and uncertainties as they play out in the living present. It both recognises, on

[29] My engagement with Raymond Williams and his concept of structures of feeling draws from Highmore (2016). Highmore discusses William's understanding of culture as "a whole way of life" and that was importantly influenced by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict.

the one hand, the influence of ‘structure’ and determination (the latter term Williams (1973, p. 4) defines elsewhere in terms of “setting limits, exerting pressures”), while on the other hand emphasising the ways in which “social experience… is still in process” (Williams, 1977, p. 132) comprising not only fixed and dominant forms, but also residual and emergent elements.

Working-class whiteness, then, needs to be seen not only as a structural positionality or politicised identity, but also as something more every day, mundane and material. It pertains not only to structures of power but also structures of feeling, comprised of “inalienable components of a social and material process” (Williams, 1973, p. 133). While this chapter has primarily sought to situate Jimmy’s lament in terms of broad historical structures of race and class, here I want to gesture to Jimmy’s lament as an opening onto the complex and ambivalent affective landscape of urban regeneration in Poplar. As an opening for introducing the ways in which my fieldwork practice became caught up within this affective landscape. And as an opening for thinking with affect as a site of invention and cultural poesis (Stewart, 2005; 2007). As I move into the next chapter I will continue to try to move between critical and more experimental, expansive registers, as we consider Jimmy’s and others attempts to channel their affective energies into a practical project to re-establish a pub on the Aberfeldy Estate.

The Tommy Flowers – section overview

In the last chapter I sought to situate Jimmy's lament in relation to historically shifting structures of race and class - in the London docklands and Britain more broadly. I introduced the concepts of class/race loss, white working-class displacement, and affective displacement to specify what is at stake in Jimmy's lament in broad structural terms. Across the next two chapters I shift my focus from structure to infrastructure. If in the last chapter the pub was positioned as condensing and symbolising a set of anxieties about the predicament of white working-class Poplar, here I am interested in the pub in a more grounded and material sense. Building on the literature on 'social infrastructure' I examine the social spaces themselves and the patterns of use, inhabitation and sociality taking place there. I take as my focus the Tommy Flowers; a project to re-establish a pub on the Aberfeldy Estate, five years after the last pub on this and its adjacent estates had permanently closed.

Or at least, to call the Tommy Flowers a pub is one way of describing the project. Occupying a formerly disused retail unit on Aberfeldy Street in what was at different points in the past a florist and a doctor's surgery, the Tommy Flowers is in fact a hybrid space, part pub, part cafe and part heritage and regeneration project. From Thursday to Sunday the Tommy Flowers conforms to a familiar East End pub model; an informal place for estate residents to get together and consume alcohol while also offering regular evening entertainment in the form of pub quizzes, karaoke, and open mic nights. The days of the week when it doesn't open as a pub it operates as a daytime community café – Tommy's Tea Rooms - where tea, coffee, filled rolls (sandwiches) and cakes are provided, free of charge or with an optional donation. The Tommy Flowers is also host to regular art-exhibitions, workshops, and events. Many of these events have a local history and heritage focus; as does its name, taken from a local man of working-class origins who invented the world's first electronic programmable computer as part of efforts to break the Nazi 'Enigma' code during the 2nd World War (in a team along with the more well-known Alan Turing). A representation of the computer – 'The Colossus' - is etched onto the front window of the pub, and on the side of the unit there is a spray-painted mural of Tommy Flowers himself; young, bespeckled, with his blond hair in a neat side parting.

2.1 – The Tommy Flowers (Londonist)

2.2 – Tommy's Tea Room sign

This combination of functions, uses and aesthetics reflects the range of interest groups involved in the project. First there is Poplar HARCA, the local social landlord who are overseeing the redevelopment of the Aberfeldy Estate. They own the freehold to the shops along Aberfeldy Street which will eventually be demolished as part of the redevelopment. In the time being, Poplar HARCA – alongside their development partner EcoWorld – have decided to encourage new premises to open on Aberfeldy Street on a 'meanwhile' basis. The focus on arts and heritage at the Tommy Flowers conforms to Poplar HARCA's broader approach to urban regeneration. On their website Poplar HARCA describe the Tommy Flowers as a "placemaking" and "community regeneration" initiative which "has become a much-loved social hub for the whole community, long-term and new residents alike" (Poplar HARCA, 2020a).

It was through Poplar HARCA that two artists were recruited to run the pub side of the project. Both Garry and Nick are relative newcomers to this part of east London and partly make their living through art activities associated with urban regeneration. Garry Hunter is Creative Director of the "arts initiative" Fitzrovia Noir which specialises in "revitalising empty buildings with new art and activity" (Fitzrovia Noir, n.d.). Originally from the north-east of England, Garry has been working in Poplar since 2011 Through Fitzrovia Noir he has worked with Poplar HARCA to commission 'street art' murals, including on the shutters of disused shop units along Aberfeldy Street. Meanwhile Nicholas Joubinaux (Nick) in 2019 was living and exhibiting work at the nearby Trinity Buoy Wharf: a former industrial site now hosting art exhibitions and events next-door to a new housing development. As a result of their influence, in 2019 the Tommy Flowers hosted regular art exhibitions, art openings, film screenings and creative workshops such as glass blowing, sculpture, and even basic computer programming. Many of these activities have a local heritage slant: Garry has received funding from the Greater London Assembly Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm's Untold Stories fund for a project called 'Unearthing Poplar: celebrating hidden histories'. Since 2019, Garry has also been working to establish a 'Making Space' in the unit next door to the Tommy Flowers which focuses more exclusively on such creative workshops.

The third and final main interest group engaged with the Tommy Flowers project is Aberfeldy Big Local (ABL). ABL are a local residents' group - independent of Poplar HARCA - established in 2013 in order to administer the distribution of £1 million of grant funding to local projects and initiatives, courtesy of the National Lottery Community Fund and The Local Trust. Under the motto "Trusting Local People", the Local Trust's model of regeneration involves giving residents decision making power regarding how funds are spent

locally. An employed community organiser and a partner organisation - in this case Quaker Social Action - assist with the process, but it is a committee comprised entirely of residents which makes decisions about the budget. The ABL committee includes residents from a range of ethnic backgrounds, but residents of Bangladeshi ethnicity are small in number and relatively inactive in relation to the size of the local Bangladeshi population. Some of the most active members of the committee during the time I was conducting fieldwork in 2019 were white British (as were the community organiser and other staff members from Quaker Social Action) and it was white British committee members most actively pushing forward the Tommy Flowers project. While at the time of my fieldwork Garry was the licensee of the Tommy Flowers pub, running it as an independent business, ABL provided funding for 'Tommy's Tea Rooms' element of the project, including the payment of two staff members, Josie and Wayne – the latter also being an ABL committee member.

It was through the Tommy Flowers - and 'Tommy's Tea Rooms' in particular - that I got to know Jimmy, Josie, Wayne and a core group of white, working-class interlocutors and it is their perspectives, practices and affective struggles which are my focus across the next two chapters. While in the last chapter I introduced Jimmy and his story of 'affective displacement', these chapters are constructed around a form of displacement that is much more immediate and direct; the compulsory purchase of Wayne's three-bedroom maisonette as part of the Aberfeldy Estate regeneration. We examine his battles with the local housing association over how he and his elderly father might be compensated and rehoused, and his attempts to use the Tommy's Tea Rooms as an informal community organising space to, as he puts it, "create some community cohesion". I analyse these efforts as a means by which Wayne resists his impending displacement.

However, attempts at creating "community cohesion" through the Tommy's Tea Rooms encounter numerous barriers. To begin with, while Wayne wants to use the Tea Rooms as a space from which to organise collective resistance to the local housing association, the housing association retains freehold ownership of the shop unit with the power not to renew the lease. It also, along with their property development partners, have their own agenda for the space, featuring it prominently within their marketing materials for the new development to present an image of the regenerating 'Aberfeldy Village' as a desirable place to live for prospective buyers. Wayne in particular is sceptical about some of the arts-based activities taking place in the pub which he describes as 'art-washing'. Thus, while in many respects there is a lot of cross-over and collaboration between the pub and Tea Rooms components of the project, in terms of Wayne's efforts to resist displacement they might also be seen as working in opposite directions. Second, the Tea Rooms, housed within a shop unit designed

to look like a pub, is not particularly accessible to the large local Muslim population. It therefore caters primarily to the local white working-class community. And third, while a degree of 'community cohesion' certainly exists among the white, working-class regular visitors to the Tommy's Tea Rooms, participant-observation within this space reveals divergent interests, perspectives, and experiences among this group with respect to urban and estate regeneration also.

In the first of the two chapters I focus on my relationship with Wayne and my attempts to assist him in his efforts at creating "community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms. Drawing on Latham and Layton's (2019) concept of "social infrastructure" and Mark Fisher (2016) and Ben Highmore's (2018) cultural and historical account of the decline of the pub as a dominant vernacular space in Britain, I situate these efforts as an attempt to recreate the pub as an infrastructure of working-class sociability - one which might assist in building up grassroots political capacities so as to challenge Poplar HARCA's approach to urban regeneration and Wayne's displacement from the area. I reflect on the manner and extent to which these efforts constitute a form of resistance in the face of displacement, paying particular attention to its affective and interpersonal dynamics and the ways these are mediated through the architectural and material space of the Tommy Flowers/Tommy's Tea Rooms and the Aberfeldy Estate more broadly, as it undergoes comprehensive redevelopment.

In the second of the two chapters I turn to examine in more detail the barriers to the creation of "community cohesion" encountered over the course of these organising efforts. As introduced above, these barriers are multiple. But drawing on a series of ethnographic vignettes taken from my interactions and conversations in Tommy's Tea Rooms, I highlight the legacies of the Right to Buy (RTB) - the housing legislation introduced in 1980 which allowed council tenants to buy their homes at highly subsidised rates - as particularly consequential in the undoing of the previous regime of white working-class "community cohesion" that once predominated in this place. While the RTB has become a paradigmatic example of neoliberal government policy in critical urban theory, much less attention has been given to the ways in which these reforms have played out through the social and political relations of place - nor the intersections of race and class therein. In elucidating these processes, I supplement my concern in chapter two with the pub as infrastructure with a concern in chapter three for council housing as infrastructure amid urban regeneration. Building on Murawski (2018b), I show how this entails supplementing the concern for the materiality of infrastructure, which is very prevalent in the anthropology of infrastructure, with that of its less sensorially immediate but not less 'material' property relations.

Note on positionality

After my first visit to the Tea Rooms in February 2019 - which I will come on to describe shortly - it became a place I made a regular habit of visiting. Not only was it highly relevant to my research questions in its combination of practices of heritage and urban regeneration, but its design and ethos also fitted well into the rhythms of my fieldwork schedule. I did not live in Poplar during my intensive fieldwork year and the Tea Rooms provided me with a base of sorts - somewhere I knew I could go in the daytime on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to meet people and socialise informally. As a non-commercial space, explicitly set up for this purpose, I was able to spend as much time as I liked in the space, both during opening hours and sometimes afterwards, with no fear that I was getting in the way of serving the next customer or taking up too much time in someone's busy schedule. Josie and/or Wayne (depending on who was on shift) would provide a constant flow of conversation and cups of tea, punctuated by visits from whoever else decided to turn up on that day. As I will come onto describe in more detail in chapter five, I also developed my own role in the space, acting as a kind of resident oral history researcher, repurposing my fieldwork practices, to some extent, to align with the interests and agendas of my interlocutors.

I felt very welcome in the Tea Rooms. I enjoyed being there and my interlocutors seemed to enjoy having me there also. That I 'fitted in' so well is of course heavily influenced by my social positionality. Being white and English certainly helped; pubs are part of my 'cultural heritage' too and I felt very able to join my interlocutors in drinking alcohol. Being a man was also significant. The majority of regular visitors to the Tea Rooms were men, and although women also used and participated in the space, it could be considered to be a 'male space' in terms of the types and patterns of sociality practiced there. For example, during my visits the men would normally engage in a group conversation, with private conversation discouraged. In contrast, women who used the space were less like to 'host' group conversations in the same way. Ironically it was the Tea Rooms which, to my mind, recreated the fraternalistic, patriarchal atmosphere of the East End pub more than the pub element of the Tommy Flowers itself, which attracted a broader range of customers and had a less settled dynamic. However, as I will argue in the next chapter, there were also important differences between the atmosphere of the archetypal East End pub remembered by my interlocutors and what was recreated in the Tea Rooms.

Relatedly, there were differences in how Wayne and Josie performed their roles. Josie was often to be found behind the counter, making cups of tea and coffee, chipping into the

conversation every now and again, but often a somewhat background presence to the main social activity taking place around the tables and chairs in front. Sometimes Josie would quietly occupy herself making birthday cards for all the people she knew who had birthdays that week, working from a long hand-written list. Wayne, meanwhile, would often be seated in the front, making conversation with me and whoever else was visiting that day. My presence as a white, English man contributed to these dynamics and shaped the kinds of relationship I was able to build in the space.

There were also political affinities I shared with users of the space which assisted my 'fitting in'. As I will come onto discuss in more detail during this chapter, my background of involvement in housing campaigns and community organising projects in London heavily conditioned my relationships with people in Tommy's Tea Rooms. This was particularly the case with Wayne - a self-identified anarchist – with whom I had many in-depth political discussions, often about the Labour Party of which I was an active member at the time of my fieldwork.

But while most regular users of Tommy's Tea Rooms were white, late-middle-aged, working-class men and it was people of this demographic group with which I developed the most intensive research relationships, it's important to state that this space hosted people beyond this demographic group. First, the pub component of the Tommy Flowers project tended to be visited by a broader range of people than the Tea Rooms, succeeding to some extent in Poplar HARCA's stated goal for the space in bringing together long-standing white residents of the area with relative newcomers living in the completed new-build sections of Aberfeldy Village. Evening activities ranging from pub quizzes, art openings, Karaoke and 'Talkaoke' (a variant of the former where participants sit around a circular table, in the middle of which a host facilitates conversation by passing around a microphone) drew in different groups. In some cases, people from Garry and Nick's art networks travelled from outside the immediate area to attend.

In contrast, the Tea Rooms hosted a more restricted demographic of predominantly white, working-class residents of long-standing. But even here there were notable exceptions. For example, two of the most regular visitors to Tommy's Tea Rooms were working-class women of colour. Nazia, a working mother of mixed Pakistani and Chinese heritage who had grown up in the neighbouring district of Stepney, frequently visited the Tea Rooms in the daytimes and the pub in the evenings, depending on her shift pattern at her catering job at Canary Wharf. Meanwhile Lila, a Somali woman, widowed with three children (teenagers and older) was one of the most frequent visitors to the Tea Rooms and the pub. Living on a

short-term tenancy in a maisonette above the row of shops opposite the Tommy Flowers, in the daytimes Lila would pop in and out of the Tea Rooms as she came and went from her home running errands. In the evenings she would often meet other Tommy Flowers regulars for a drink. A Muslim and having come to Britain from Somalia as part of an arranged marriage, Lila told me that the Tommy Flowers was the first pub that she had ever visited.

There is therefore a multiplicity of stories one could tell about this space (and space within a space). However, I focus on a particular subset of stories rather than trying to do justice to them all, orientated around the core heritage dimension to the project and around which visitors - including me - were differently situated. It was around the question of heritage which the white British ABL committee members were united in their support for the Tommy Flowers, and which to a large extent brought the project into being. It was around the question of heritage that the long-standing white working-class residents and I developed our particular research relationships in this space. And it is around the question of heritage that my interlocutors articulated their experiences of displacement. I therefore foreground these questions and relationships here.

Interlude Two: Morning Drinkers

It was Josie who first told me about the Tommy Flowers Pub.

It's my first week of fieldwork. We are standing at the sink at St Matthias community centre, washing up breakfast after the weekly homeless shelter (she's washing, I'm drying). I'm feeling pretty groggy after a night of interrupted sleep on the floor of the office but pleased that Josie is keen to chat. A white British woman in her 50s with short cropped dark hair, wearing a loose lilac sweatshirt with the sleeves rolled up, Josie is part of the team of volunteers who arrives early in the morning to put out the breakfast and clean up afterwards. While the guests are made up of men, mostly without settled immigration status and from various parts of the world, the regular volunteers are mostly white British women like Josie who have lived in the East End all - or at least most - of their lives.

Submerging her hands in the soapy water, she tells me about her weekly routine: volunteering at St Matthias, a few shifts in a pub in Chrisp Street Market, a few shifts in a pub in Mile End. And recently she's picked up a few more shifts at Tommy's Tea Rooms, a cafe which is also a pub in the evenings, on the estate where she lives. She offers to take me there after we've finished cleaning up, to introduce me to some people. A little while later, the plates, mugs and cutlery washed, dried, and placed back into their appropriate places, we are ready to leave. Josie explains that we will make a couple of stops on route - we have responsibility for the box of sandwiches and other snacks donated by the local Greggs bakery. Those sandwiches that remain after the guests have left are distributed to a couple of the local pubs. I follow along. We're joined by Anne, another one of the volunteers.

Our first stop is the Manor Arms on East India Dock Road, otherwise known as 'Bum Daddies'. Josie tells me that it is frequented by the men staying in another - permanent - homeless shelter opposite called "The Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest". The pub doesn't serve its own food and, Josie explains, the men appreciate something to eat with their drinks. Walking through the door at 9.15am I'm surprised to see a couple of elderly men already at the bar, pints of lager in front of them. The landlord greets us with a friendly 'hello!'. Josie passes the bag of sandwiches over the bar, and we stop to chat for a while. One of the men at the bar is complaining of not being able to sleep:

> "I felt half dead when I woke up this morning"

“I bet Theresa May wished she was dead when she woke up this morning!”, the Landlord responds. The landlord is referring to the Prime Minister’s defeat in parliament the previous evening on crucial Brexit legislation, following a rebellion from her own pro-Brexit MPs. It’s the third defeat faced by the government on the same legislation and there is doubt as to whether she will be able to continue in the job.

"I feel a bit sorry for her,” said Anne.

"Yeah, I also feel a bit sorry for her, but then..." the landlord trails off. The conversation turns to someone having to wait three weeks for a GP appointment - "it's bloody ridiculous" says the landlord.

On our way out Josie explains that the pub has a special license to open at 9am every day. It’s a place for the “morning drinkers” she says. “There’s a bit of a circuit”. They start off in the Manor Arms and then move onto the pubs at Chrisp Street which open at around lunchtime. That’s where we’re headed now with the rest of the sandwiches.

Walking through the Lansbury Estate Anne leaves us to go and check on an elderly neighbour. Josie and I carry on towards The Festival Inn - a two storey yellow brick building stationed at one end of the market square, its name spelled above the front door in neat modernist metal lettering. Outside we pass a group of men who are often to be seen begging for money in the market and Josie exchanges a greeting. Once out of earshot she tells me that earlier that morning she’d seen a man staggering around the market looking distressed. She wonders what happened to him, what support is available. Josie often talks to me about problems of homelessness, mental health, and addiction. She was able to access support when she needed it and now attends weekly sessions at a recovery centre in Whitechapel offering activities including meditation classes, acupuncture, and social visits to the theatre.

Josie unlocks the door to the pub and shows me inside. The interior is wood panelled, with large windows facing out onto the street, and thin cylindrical columns support the ceiling at intervals. Walking around the bar Josie shows me a large mirror on the far wall, engraved with the ‘Festival Star’ logo of the 1951 Festival of Britain - an original feature from when the pub was built and from which the pub takes its name. “They have to keep all of that, they can’t take any of that away when they redevelop”, Josie says, alluding to the upcoming redevelopment of the market. Josie is sceptical of the new development - “we don’t need a new cinema, there’s two just down the road”. I ask her what she would like to see instead. She pauses to think for a moment before replying: “A permanent shelter for Growth [the

charity that runs the shelter at St Matthias community centre]. Somewhere they [the guests] can go in the daytimes, to take a shower".

The landlady of the pub is a family member. Josie comes from a family of publicans: her parents owned pubs in Poplar and Essex when she was growing up, and the pub just across the other side of the market used to be owned by her grandfather. For years she worked in various care roles - as an assistant physiotherapist and as a home carer - but she had to give that up after falling and breaking her arm.

"I had to take care of myself", she explains.

Working in the pub was a way to earn money when she was unable to do care work. But it's clear to me that she never really gave up doing care work.

Back outside, we continue towards the Aberfeldy Estate and the Tommy Flowers. Josie says hello to two or three other people on route. As we walk through the Brownfield Estate Josie points out all the places where there used to be pubs, many of them gone without trace - turned into new flats or, in the case of the John Franklin, simply bulldozed and left for years without explanation; a pile of rubble surrounded by metal hoardings.

At Balfron Tower we descend into a subway, traffic roaring above our heads, before emerging on the Aberfeldy Estate. We walk a few hundred meters past 1950s and 60s low and medium rise residential blocks, a primary school and a community centre before turning right on Aberfeldy Street. Two rows of shop units face each other at ground level with maisonettes (two-storey flats) perched on top, facing out onto the mature trees. The street is quiet, bar a few people going in and out of the Londis convenience store and standing at the cash point. Most of the shop units have their shutters down. Visible above the hoardings at the south end of the street, cranes, diggers, and other heavy machinery work away on the next phase of the Aberfeldy Village development.

"You've got your first customer", Josie shouts as she shows me through the door of the Tommy Flowers. She can't stick around, she's got to go and get ready for her next shift.

2.3 - Festival Inn pub interior

2.4 - Festival Inn pub interior

Chapter Two: From Pub to Pad, and Back Again?

The room is large enough to host around twenty people, bar stools and assorted wooden chairs arranged around small circular tables. At the far side of the room, facing out towards the front window, is the bar. The beer taps are covered with a tea towel to indicate that no alcohol is being served, and on the bar are arranged ceramic jars of teabags and coffee granules, a display of sandwiches and cakes, and a donations box in the form of a bright green can of Carlsberg lager. A piano rests against a wall, with stacks of leaflets advertising local services and events strewn across the top. In one corner is a clunky karaoke machine, complete with LCD screen and two tangled microphones. In another sits a disco ball and a papier-mâché mannequin wearing a red “Make Aberfeldy Great Again” baseball cap. Displayed on the walls are eight black and white photographs. They show Aberfeldy Street in the early 1970s, taken during one iteration of the ‘Aberfeldy Festival’. Bunting is draped across the street in row after row. Crowds of mostly white faces line the pavements and the balconies above, looking on at teams of men and women in wacky fancy dress outfits, racing down the street on precarious carts. The spectators laugh and clap and shout their support as the racers rattle by. Children climb on the street railings to get a better look, sucking on ice lollies. An older woman at one of the balconies waves a Union Jack flag.

The photographs offer a stark contrast to Aberfeldy Street, as viewed out the window, today. Half of the shop units have their shutters pulled down, the paint is flaking off the street railings and the most visible inhabitants are the many pigeons gathered in the rafters of the upstairs maisonettes. Wayne, who is on shift this morning points himself out to me in a few of the photos. Just a child at the time, he is visible on one of the balconies alongside other members of his family - his mum Pat, his dad Bob, his two younger sisters Dani and Tania, and his maternal grandmother Lucy (who is waving the flag). He’s not quite sure which year this was, but most likely it is the early 1970s, going by Wayne’s youthful appearance and the flared jeans that some of the children are wearing. The photographer is unknown: the images were donated by a man called Tommy Shotter who had been involved in organising the festivals. He had responded to a call from the artists Garry and Nick for people to share photographs and other ephemera relating to the history of the Aberfeldy Estate. Nick then used his photographic expertise to scan the images and have them professionally printed in a larger size, ready to be exhibited.

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For a period during the 1970s the Aberfeldy Festival was an annual event, featuring cart racing - as in evidence in the photographs – as well as other activities including (but not limited to) a children's picnic, darts competitions, and a majorettes' performance. These events were planned and organised by volunteers belonging to local groups and organisations including the churches, the Young Wives Group and South Poplar Youth (SPY). They borrowed equipment through local networks and received donations from shops and businesses. And such festivities weren't unique to the Aberfeldy but widespread throughout Poplar and the East End. A programme from the 1975 edition of the - more extensive - Teviot Festival, organised by residents of the neighbouring Teviot Estate, lists a total of thirty six separate events taking place over two days including: a Festival Parade of "colourful floats" with a prize for "best dressed float", a stage for music and theatre performances, men's and women's football matches, boxing and judo exhibitions, a 'tug-of-war' competition, a refreshments tent, and a fancy-dress local 'pub crawl' called "The Great Pram Race". The programme also advertises a prize for the "best decorated flats" donated by Charrington's, a brewery which at this time had its main bottling and warehousing facilities in Bromley-by-Bow, just to the north of Poplar.[30]

Now in his early sixties, long silvery hair down to his shoulders, silver ear piercings and wearing a sparkly pale blue scarf over a Seattle Sea Hawks American Football jersey, today Wayne lives in the same maisonette with his eighty-eight-year-old dad, Bob. But Wayne and Bob's long stay in the area is coming to a close. They have received notice that their leasehold property is subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) by Tower Hamlets Council. This mandates them to sell their property to the council for what a surveyor deems the 'market rate'. But what they will receive for their three-bedroom maisonette is not enough to purchase even a one-bedroom property in the new 'Aberfeldy Village' development, let alone an equivalent replacement. No longer working full-time after being made redundant from his job as an IT technician at the very same council that is now dispossessing him of his home, Wayne isn't in the position to take out a mortgage on one of the new-builds - one

[30] While the Aberfeldy Festival photos represented a nostalgia for a sense of lost community among my white, working-class interlocutors, the Teviot Festival was itself an attempt to revive a sense of community spirit that was thought to have been lost. The 1974 film "Fly a Flag for Poplar" follows a group of Teviot Estate residents as they go about organising the first 1973 iteration of the festival. Made by the film collective 'Liberation Films', 'Fly a Flag for Poplar' is an example of 'community video' - a genre of film making which emerged in the 1970s as portable video recording became available to broader audiences. The London Community Video Archive, of which 'Fly a Flag for Poplar' is a part, describes how "the medium was taken up by people ignored or under-represented in the mainstream media – tenants on housing estates, community action groups, women, black and minority ethnic groups, youth, gay and lesbian people, and the disabled." (Dowmunt and Webb, 2017)

suggested course of action by Poplar HARCA. Wayne and his dad therefore face the prospect of being forced to move out of the area, and maybe outside of London completely.

The current compulsory purchase and eviction proceedings are not Wayne and Bob's first experience. The Murphy family (Wayne, his parents and soon to be born younger sister) first moved into their three-bedroom maisonette on Aberfeldy Street in 1966. Before moving to Aberfeldy Street, they lived as an extended family group along with Wayne's maternal grandparents and uncle in a council-owned Victorian terraced house on Abbots Road, just around the corner from Aberfeldy Street. This house - without an indoor bathroom or central heating - was demolished as part of the post-war redevelopment of the Aberfeldy to make way for a park. In place of this five-bedroom house, the council offered the family two separate properties: One for the nuclear family and one for Wayne's maternal grandparents and uncle. The principle was 'like-for-like'. However, now as leaseholders rather than council tenants, they are subject to a market logic which determines remuneration according to the 'market value' of the condemned property, leaving them responsible for finding suitable replacement housing for themselves.

The experience has been a source of much distress and bitterness for Wayne. "We were never offered the chance of regeneration", he tells me. "No consultation, nothing. They went straight for a CPO. And then it was 'rush rush rush' - trying to get us to sign papers without a solicitor present". He had got together with a group of twenty other leaseholders to try and challenge the CPO through the courts. They were successful in winning a slight increase in the amount offered but - after receiving legal advice that their chances of winning were slim - there was a lack of appetite among the group to push things further and try to challenge the CPO through a public enquiry. In protest at how they were being treated Wayne stopped paying his service charges. However, this resulted in him being served with documents summoning him to a leaseholder tribunal, with Poplar HARCA demanding that he pay the outstanding service charges as well as £9,500 in interest and penalties; costs that would further diminish his funds and therefore also his ability to remain living in the local area. His voice faltering, Wayne impresses on me the detrimental effects this has had on his health and that of his elderly father: "Since we got the CPO my dad has had two minor strokes and a heart attack. I've been prescribed anti-depressants". I am surprised that Wayne is sharing these details with me - a stranger that he has only just met.

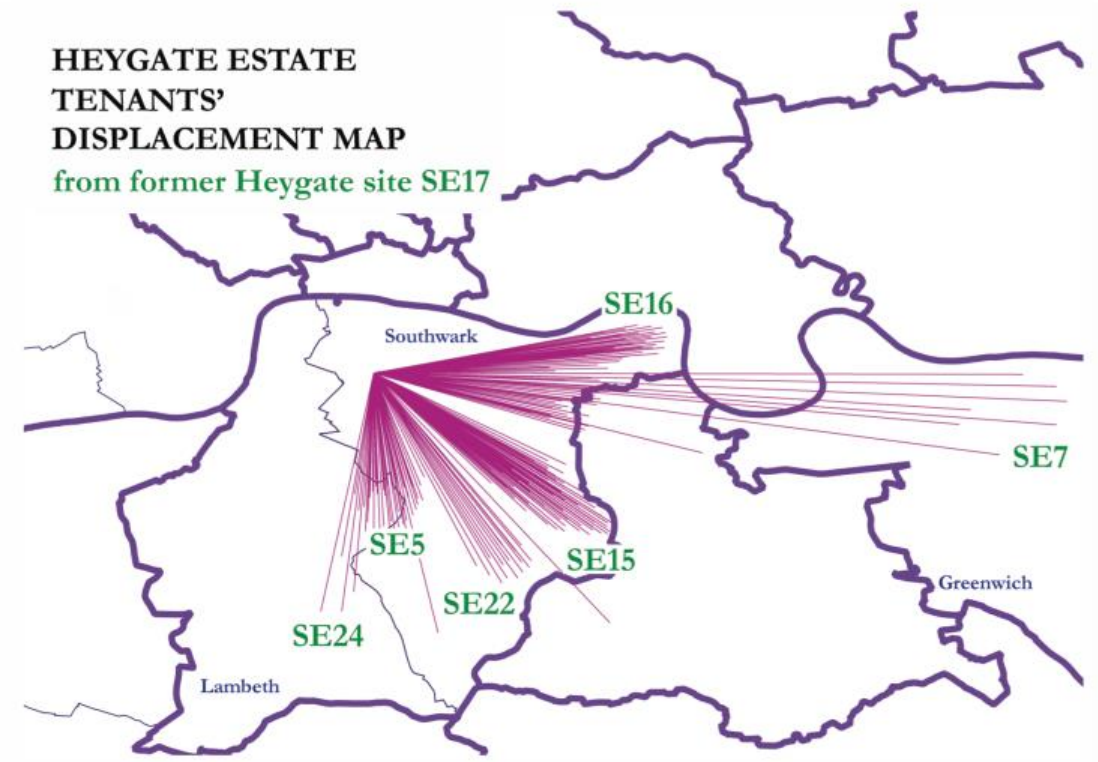
2.17 – Teviot Festival programme, 1975

Resistance?

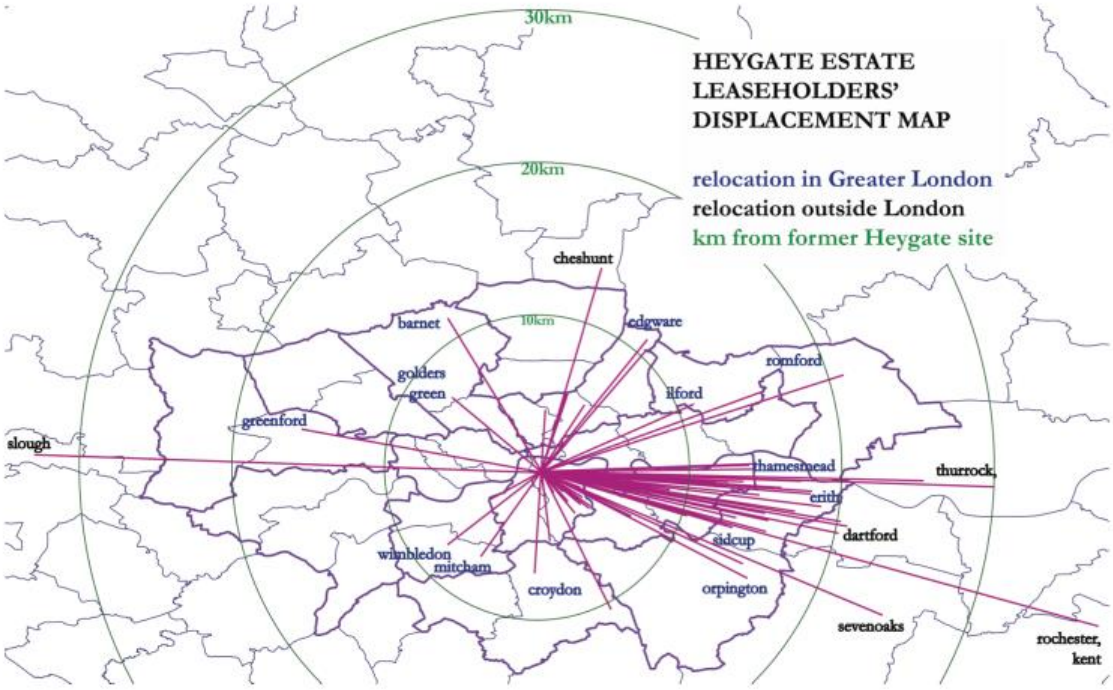
Wayne's story echoes that of many other leaseholders subject to compulsory purchase orders on ex-council estates in London. Since 1997, 161 estates in London have been demolished, amounting to approximately 55,000 homes and 131,000 people displaced (Estatewatch, n.d.). While the rehousing of social tenants is the responsibility of the landlord (e.g., the council or housing association), leaseholders - who normally own around a quarter of properties on estates in London - must go through the compulsory purchase process.[31] These are often protracted affairs, with the amounts offered in compensation and access to suitable alternative properties frequently contested by leaseholders. As such, leaseholders are commonly among the last to leave condemned estates. Evidence also suggests they are more likely to be displaced across greater geographical distances than those of other tenures: "Displacement maps" pertaining to the demolition of the Heygate Estate in south London, put together by the activist collectives Southwark Notes and 35% campaign, show that while former tenants of the estate were rehoused mostly within the borough or neighbouring boroughs, leaseholders in many cases moved out of London completely. As in Wayne's case, this discrepancy may relate to the difficulties that leaseholders have in finding equivalent properties in London with the amount offered in compensation. (Although as I will come onto discuss in the next chapter, viewed from another perspective, leaseholders also have a higher degree of market 'choice', with the amount received from a CPO at London prices, even if depressed relative to London property prices, high when compared to property values outside the capital).

The health issues suffered by Wayne and Bob because of the stress of their impending displacement are also reflected in this bigger picture. In his recent book-length study of contemporary estate regeneration in the city, Watt (2021, p. 28) details the "extensive displacement anxiety" experienced by owner-occupiers facing compulsory purchase orders. Watt defines displacement anxiety as "a *prospective* ruptured sense of place - of home and/or neighbourhood - as a result of a potential, forced external real-world move" (ibid., p. 28)

[31] It is hard to estimate the number of live-in leaseholders who have been displaced by estate regeneration. Across 14 estates subject to regeneration programmes involving substantial demolition surveyed by Watt (2021, p. 94), between 12% and 33% were owned by leaseholders, with the majority closer to the higher end of the spectrum. However, many of these leaseholders rent out their properties - 42% of homes bought via RTB in London are now rented privately (Copley, 2019) - and therefore in such cases it is private renters rather than leaseholders who are being displaced.



Map produced for and originally published in LTF, Just Space, SNAG and Lees, L. (2014) Staying Put: An Anti-gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London.



Map produced for and originally published in LTF, Just Space, SNAG and Lees, L. (2014) Staying Put: An Anti-gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London.

2.18 - Tenant and leaseholder displacement maps for the Heygate Estate, London Borough of Southwark (Southwark Notes and 35% campaign)

emphasis in original). Discussing the specific positionality of “owner stayers” like Wayne and Bob - those leaseholders who bought their properties through RTB as opposed to those who have bought on the open market - Watt emphasises that this group overwhelmingly exercised their RTB not as a means of “playing the housing market” or “getting on the property ladder” but as a place to live long-term (ibid., pp. 173-4). More likely to be older, retired and having lived on their estates for a longer period of time than other groups, Watt argues that the process of estate regeneration can be particularly distressing for members of this group as they are more likely to face the prospect of being separated from long established community support networks at a time that they might need them most, and more likely to face difficulties accessing mortgages to finance the purchase of new properties. In some instances, Watt’s interviewees report the “severe emotional distress” as having contributed not just to the ill health but, ultimately, the deaths of elderly leaseholders; a phenomenon Watt terms “death by displacement anxiety” (ibid., p. 320).

If the contours of Jimmy’s displacement introduced in the previous chapter are ambiguous and complicated, bringing together myriad histories and dynamics beyond ‘gentrification’ as commonly understood, Wayne and Bob’s story is more easily incorporated within dominant activist and scholarly discourses on estate regeneration and gentrification. Put most succinctly, they are being forced to leave their homes against their will by an estate regeneration scheme actively supported by the local housing association and local council. This is likely to result in their moving out of the immediate area, and maybe even out of London completely, with the new housing built in its place going to new residents from a higher socio-economic stratum. Echoing critical commentators on estate regeneration, Wayne talked to me about his impending displacement in terms of “gentrification” (Watt, 2021; Lees, 2014) and “social cleansing” (Elmer and Dening, 2016).

In our first meeting Wayne conveyed to me his determination to resist his displacement. After first being reassured that I wasn’t in any way working for - or reporting back to - Poplar HARCA, Wayne told me all about his ambitions to use the Tommy’s Tea Rooms as a space from which local residents with shared issues connected to housing and regeneration might be able to get together to share stories and take collective action. He also talked about the Tea Rooms as a space from which to “create some community cohesion” - something which he described as having been eroded over the years and decades in which he had lived in the area, partly as a result of the loss of pubs and other community facilities where residents could get together and informally socialise. While he acknowledged that there was a community centre just across the road, this was owned and managed by Poplar HARCA and therefore wasn’t somewhere he felt people could talk freely and openly about issues

connected with housing and regeneration. By sharing aspects of my own previous work as a trainee community organiser working in another part of London, and my familiarity with - and passing involvement in - housing campaigns in Tower Hamlets over the previous decade, I was able to quickly build a good rapport with Wayne. I emphasised that I was keen to make myself useful to him and his concerns; I had wanted my fieldwork to involve working with 'activists' and here I found an opportunity.

In this chapter I examine these efforts to "create some community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms as a form of resistance against displacement amid estate regeneration. However, in order to do so it is necessary to grapple with the ways in which these attempts at resistance were entangled with the Tommy Flowers / Tommy's Tea Rooms as a heritage and regeneration project, emerging principally from a specifically white, working class set of concerns about the loss of local pubs. Unlike with Jimmy's story of displacement discussed in the last chapter, Wayne's story of displacement can be easily incorporated within dominant activist and scholarly discourses on estate regeneration and gentrification - and he himself used these frames to articulate what was happening to him and his dad. But to uncritically adopt such a framework would be to miss the centrality of heritage to Wayne's involvement with Tommy's Tea Rooms and his efforts to, as he put it, "create some community cohesion". Thus, as with Jimmy's lament, understanding Wayne's displacement and how this is resisted requires reckoning with Wayne's specific positionality as white and working class.

The centrality of whiteness to Wayne's experience of displacement can be drawn out in relation to the sense of 'betrayal' Wayne articulated to me across many different conversations at how he and his dad were being treated. This sense of betrayal was multifaceted. It was linked to their length of residence, paying council rents week after week until they exercised their Right to Buy around the turn of the millennium. It was also linked to their participation in local industries - in Bob's case going back to the 1930s, with long spells doing hard manual work in the West India Docks and nearby Bromley-by-Bow gasworks. The key culprits of this betrayal were the local housing association and the Labour run local council, which Wayne saw as "in bed together". The Labour Party was a particular object of complaint; the party which was supposed to represent people like him and Bob, and which was responsible for building much of London's council housing stock, was now working with housing associations and property developers to "socially cleanse" the area. Wayne would often repeat a line about how this urban dispossession was being overseen by "a Labour council, a Labour mayor [of Tower Hamlets] and a Labour MP [for Poplar and Limehouse]". Politically identifying as an anarchist since his involvement in the punk and metal music

scenes from the late 1970s onwards, Wayne has never voted in his life, but he would emphasise to me how all his family, once solid Labour voters, would never again vote for the party as they "totally betrayed us and can never be trusted".

Wayne's sense of 'betrayal' by the local state and Labour Party is familiar from other ethnographic work on post-industrial working-class communities in Britain (Evans, 2006; 2012; 2017; Koch, 2014; 2018). Based on research on a council estate in the southeast of England, Koch (2014) describes the shattering of a "fragile moral union… between residents and the post-war welfare state", brought on by the withdrawal of state resources and services since the dismantling of the system of council housing from the first Thatcher government onward. Whereas in the post-war period there was a partial alignment between the state and residents in "aspirations for nuclear family homes" (Koch 2018, p. 16), residents today complain of feeling "abandoned", "forgotten" and "betrayed" as their estate has increasingly become run-down and punitively governed, both by the police and the local welfare bureaucracy. Academic research on the legacies of 'Right to Buy' has also emphasised 'betrayal' in its political critiques of the policy. Drawing on interviews with leaseholders facing compulsory purchase, Elliot-Cooper et al (2020a, pp. 2-3) conclude that "working-class residents who bought their properties on London council estates" were the subject of an "effective 'betrayal'" since at its inception RTB was presented as "something that would provide greater security, private property rights, and a fuller stake in a home-owning democracy". But estate regeneration, having resulted in thousands of leaseholders in London being served CPOs, now shows these promises to have been illusory.

Yet without wanting to diminish the sense of righteous indignation expressed here, what is less emphasised in these accounts, and which is crucial to underscore in relation to my ethnographic material, is how such discourses of betrayal are connected to forms of class identity which are racially marked. Or, in other words, how the discourse of betrayal as articulated by Wayne is specific to his positionality - and identity - as white and working class. For it is, for the most part, only *white* Poplar residents who are able to link their sense of entitlement to council housing to their own and their family's work and residence in the area, stretching back to the post-war period and beyond. And it is, for the most part, only white Poplar residents who can remember a time 'before' when the Labour Party represented their interests. The image of Wayne's family on the balcony powerfully evidences their claim to rightfully belong to Poplar; but arguably does so by locating them

within a lost, ‘golden age’ of the East End of the sort discussed in terms of “memories of whiteness” in the last chapter.[32]

The centrality of whiteness to Wayne’s experience of displacement - and attempts to resist this through Tommy’s Tea Rooms - can be further drawn out with reference to the Aberfeldy Festival images. The images were a frequent reference point in conversations with my white, working-class interlocutors in Tommy’s Tea Rooms; emblematic of the strong local social networks which had once existed, and which had allowed for local people to advocate for themselves. Today, in contrast, the fragmentation and dis-empowerment of this community was much lamented, along with a degree of resentment and envy over a perception that local authorities were supporting the growth of alternative religious and ethnic communities in its place. On a few occasions while in conversation in Tommy’s Tea Rooms my white, working-class interlocutors pointed out of the window to a Bangladeshi Parents Association, housed in a shop unit across the street, in order to make a point about what had gone wrong. Almost always with its shutters down, it was a waste of council resources, one suggested. Meanwhile Jimmy, ironizing the discourse of urban regeneration, questioned why there should be a separate parents association for the Bangladeshi community - “is that what you call creating ‘inclusive communities’?”. Part of the resentment here stemmed from the fact that Poplar HARCA had tried to prevent the Tommy Flowers from having a ‘pub’ sign outside its front door, presumably for fear that it would not be inclusive. Clearly having such a sign limits the inclusivity of the space but why, Jimmy seemed to ask, was that a requirement of some spaces but not others?

The way in which ‘community’ was now managed by the local council and housing association was therefore a particular cause of frustration. My interlocutors contrasted the grassroots community of the Aberfeldy Festival images to the kinds of externally mediated and orchestrated community-building initiatives which were so characteristic of the area today in the context of urban regeneration. Jimmy commented to me that even the term ‘community event’ or ‘community festival’ as used today immediately connoted an external organisation rather than something more grassroots and organic. And Barry, a resident of the Teviot Estate, who as a teenager and young man was heavily involved in organising the Teviot Festival, corrected me when I accidentally referred to it as the Teviot Community Festival: “Teviot Festival, not *community* festival!”. Such ‘community’ events, I was told, are

[32] It is important to state that in drawing attention to how Wayne’s discourse of betrayal is connected to his positionality as white and working class I am not saying that non-white leaseholders facing compulsory purchase would not also feel a sense of betrayal, only that the way in which that betrayal is articulated would likely differ.

often organised by ‘outside’ entities and individuals (normally ultimately reporting to Poplar HARCA) attempting to bridge ‘divides’ among local residents. Jimmy and others felt very little ownership over and inclination to participate in such events.[33] Wayne meanwhile was suspicious that anything organised by Poplar HARCA ultimately served their gentrifying agenda for the area.

ABL and the Tommy Flowers, on the other hand, offered the promise of a more grassroots kind of community building which they felt that they could be part of - closer to that depicted in the Aberfeldy Festival images. In this chapter I examine these efforts to build “community cohesion” through the Tommy’s Tea Rooms, orientated as they are around the image of a communitarian, integrated and predominantly white working-class Poplar of the post-war period.[34] I argue that they can be considered to comprise a form of resistance to displacement amid estate regeneration - but in a very specific sense. To adopt the frame of resistance here might seem questionable. “White nostalgia” is not often associated with questions of resistance in anthropological and adjacent literatures, and if it is then these are forms of ‘resistance’ of a nationalist or right-wing variety which seek to defend an unequal status quo against attempts at redress. But here I am interested in how what might be thought of as “white nostalgia” might, in fact, contribute to a form of resistance against estate regeneration informed rather by an ethic of care and companionship: one which does not try to defend an unequal status quo or revert back to one which previously existed, but provides a form of shelter amidst infrastructural breakdown and sustains some degree of hope for the future (Berlant, 2016). It is around questions of mental health and wellbeing that the

[33] That said, it’s important to note that not everyone in Tommy’s Tea Rooms had exactly the same perception of and feelings towards Poplar HARCA specifically. While Wayne generally had a singular view of Poplar HARCA the institution, owing to how its regeneration policies were affecting him so directly, Jimmy was more ambivalent, having received support from the Poplar HARCA-run community centre in the period after he stopped working and was suffering with acute difficulties with his mental health. These differences point to the fact that Poplar HARCA is a large, complex multifaceted institution with many employees and local functions.

[34] While in this chapter I focus on Wayne’s efforts at resistance through Tommy’s Tea Rooms and the ways in which these efforts thereby came to be orientated around this image of white, working-class Poplar, Wayne’s efforts at resistance go beyond this framing. As he pointed out to me after reading a draft of this chapter: “When I got together with the 20 leaseholders to fight HARCA regarding the CP [compulsory purchase], I was the only white person on that group. It was mainly Bengali people, and a few Nigerians. They were local people to me, and as much as the community as [my white neighbours]. The demographic of the Aberfeldy estate changed over the decades we lived there, and we welcomed people of all races and religions. My discourse was for ALL the tenants and leaseholders of ALL races and religions. They were my neighbours - I didn't see it as a colour - my anarchist principles don't let me. They were working class neighbours.”

relationship between nostalgia and this ethic of care and companionship is most apparent, and I attempt through my ethnography to draw out these connections.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section I explore literatures on urban and social infrastructure, and the specific urban infrastructure that is the pub. In particular I engage with Ben Highmore's (2018) recent historical account of the decline of the pub as a dominant "vernacular space" in Britain over the last several decades, and his development of Mark Fisher's thesis that the decline of the pub - alongside the rise of the owner-occupied private dwelling - is an important part of the story of the decline in class consciousness in Britain over this time period. In the following section I analyse ethnographic material from my time spent with Wayne and others in Tommy's Tea Rooms in relation to Highmore's account. I show that the latter can helpfully illuminate important aspects of my ethnography, but I depart from Highmore's dismissal of nostalgia as a mode of resistance to the "colonisation of everyday life by neoliberalism" (2018, p. 4). In the closing section I develop a conceptualisation of the Tommy's Tea Rooms as an 'enclave' and temporary shelter amid urban regeneration and displacement.

The pub as infrastructure

I'm sat in Tommy's Tea Rooms with Wayne and Liam – the community organiser paid through the ABL budget. Wayne is talking excitedly about a recent trip they took with the Local Trust to visit 'The Bevy' - a community-run pub on a housing estate in east Brighton. The Bevy has a large premises (a former pub), complete with meeting rooms, separate licensed bar and cafe, and kitchens serving food. There are regular events: art classes, cooking workshops, bingo. They even have a minibus that drives around the estate to collect isolated people. Importantly for Wayne, the Bevy is owned and managed by the local community through a membership scheme and has a target of becoming totally self-financing, rather than relying on grant funding. Wayne is feeling inspired - this is what the Tommy Flowers could be.

During my fieldwork I related to Wayne as a researcher, but also very much as an interlocutor and collaborator in this work of community organising through ABL and Tommy's Tea Rooms. As our relationship developed, with me visiting Wayne in the Tea Rooms at least once a week, Wayne would update me on his battle with Poplar HARCA and tell me about his latest ideas for ABL, with me playing the role of sounding board, or simply somebody to vent to. We would think through together the various problems he encountered, and I would try to feed back any information I had gleaned from other sources about the

latest progress of regeneration and redevelopment initiatives taking place in the area. This relationship was solidified through a regular habit of having lunch or coffee together at a cafe in Limehouse after the Tea Rooms had closed for the day where we had the chance to talk in a more private setting. (Wayne liked the coffee and the vegan menu options and so considered it worth the short drive).

Early on in our relationship I assumed that Wayne must have held out some hope that he and his dad might be able to somehow 'win' their battle with Poplar HARCA and remain living in the area. Why otherwise would he be investing so much time and energy in projects like ABL and Tommy's Tea Rooms? Why, would he be imagining turning the Tommy Flowers into an extremely ambitious and long-term project like 'The Bevy'? I was therefore subsequently surprised when he informed me that, no, he was expecting to leave, he just wasn't sure when. Most of the other leaseholders on the Aberfeldy Estate who had been served CPOs had already sold up and left, meanwhile his protracted dispute with Poplar HARCA had delayed a settlement on his property.

But if Wayne didn't actually envisage being in Poplar long term, what were we trying to achieve through all these meetings, all these discussions, all these plans for the future? Research on resistance in the context of estate regeneration has tended to focus on collective campaigns which have specific, explicit goals - for example, to prevent the demolition of estates, for existing residents to be given a right to return, or for the implementation of alternative grassroots regeneration proposals (Douglas and Parks, 2016; Hubbard and Lees, 2018; Lees and Ferreri, 2016; Watt, 2021). In general, the focus is on resisting the physical displacement of residents and the breaking up of established communities. But Wayne's efforts at creating "community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms do not conform to this model. His efforts are not connected to a genuine belief that he could defeat the CPO. If anything in this case the model is inverted; Wayne's motivation is less about the breaking up of an established community and more with the reconstitution of one which broke up some time ago, centred around the pub as urban infrastructure.

Here I am interested in Wayne's organising efforts in how they demonstrate a form of resistance beyond the instrumentality of "staying put" (London Tenants Federation et al., 2014). When staying put as an individual is no longer a realistic possibility, what then? How are the affective energies and ambivalences of Watt's "displacement anxiety" channelled? How might there still be possibilities for resistance amid - as opposed to only prior to - displacement?

In approaching these questions, I am particularly interested in how Wayne's efforts at creating "community cohesion" worked through the material space of the Tommy Flowers / Tommy's Tea Rooms. A body of work in urban studies employing the concept of "assemblage" has, over the past two decades or so, sought to address the agency of materiality and infrastructure in urban social and political life. Departing from some of the assumptions of previously dominant Marxist political economy approaches (although not necessarily incompatible with them) this literature has argued for a greater attention to the constitutive role of materiality and infrastructure in shaping urban processes - rather than only as secondary considerations in relation to, for example, the ways in which the urban is made through the antagonism between labour and capital (Block and Farías, 2016; Farías and Bender, 2010).[35]

Notably, among my interlocutors there was an emic understanding of pubs as 'infrastructure' or 'social infrastructure'. This is in evidence in Jimmy's lament, presented in the previous chapter, where he says: "I do think we've lost, that what you might call social infrastructure: places to go to meet people". The term also appears in a blog post written by Matt Leach, the director of the Local Trust (the organisation which oversees Big Local groups such as ABL), titled: "Social infrastructure - the foundation for strong, resourceful communities". Written after a visit to the project in early 2019, the blog argues that:

> "In any community, hard social infrastructure – shared and accessible physical space – is critical. Places like community centres, libraries, pubs; locations that people can congregate in at low or no cost and which can be the location of community activities. We know how crucially important such spaces are – and the rate at which, in many places, they are disappearing" (Leach, 2019).

Drawing on interviews with Wayne and Liam, Leach links the question of social infrastructure, and explicitly the lack thereof, to residents' ability to contest programmes of urban regeneration, such as that taking place on the Aberfeldy Estate.

[35] A subsection of this literature has applied this approach to the consideration of grassroots political initiatives and forms of resistance. For example, in relation to the Global South, McFarlane (2011) describes the ways in which "railway tickets, wires and stones, facilitate coordination among activists and the possibilities of resistance" among activists involved with the Mumbai Slum Dwellers Federation (see also Vasudevan (2014) on squatting and the 'makeshift city'). Meanwhile, Corsin Jimenez and Estalella (2013; 2014; 2016) examine the "popular assemblies" movement in Madrid, analysing the infrastructures and methodologies through which these public fora emerge in relation to the urban cityscape, and the social relations and forms of collectivity which flow from them.

> "if the community couldn't come together to meet, how could it have any influence on the incredible change going on around it, or start to make its voice heard?"

Leach's use of the term social infrastructure resonates with that of cultural geographers Latham and Layton (2019). For Latham and Layton, building on the work of urban geographers such as Abdou Maliq Simone (2004), "infrastructure is about the facilitation of activity" (ibid., p. 9). Social infrastructures meanwhile are "networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection" and "affordances for urban inhabitation" (ibid., pp. 3-4). Applied to the Tommy Flowers/Tommy's Tea Rooms - or any other pub - the concept of social infrastructure foregrounds the patterns of use, inhabitation and sociality taking place there: the ways in which urban spaces function as sites of social connection, of making claims on public space, of potential belonging, and of encounters across difference and commonality.

But the pub is not just any social infrastructure. And nor is the Tommy Flowers/Tommy's Tea Rooms - as a heritage and regeneration project to re-establish a pub on the Aberfeldy Estate - just any 'pub'. While Leach presents social infrastructure in general terms - "community centres, libraries, pubs; locations that people can congregate in at low or no cost and which can be the location of community activities" - there is a specificity to Wayne's activities within the Tommy Flowers/Tommy's Tea Rooms which needs to be drawn out.

Ben Highmore's recent writing on the decline of the pub as a dominant "vernacular space" in British social and cultural life is useful here. While not conceiving of the pub explicitly in terms of 'infrastructure', Highmore's account allows us to draw out some of the specificity of the Tommy Flowers in relation to Wayne's efforts of creating "community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms and the question of 'resistance' through infrastructure. His discussion has many points of connection with my ethnographic material bringing together a concern with the pub as a material, social and architectural form, with questions of class, class consciousness, 'class loss', mental health, and the possibilities of resistance to forms of neoliberal urban governance. As such it is worth engaging with in detail.

Highmore's discussion of the pub starts from the late Mark Fisher's assertion that the loss of such spaces for working-class people to gather is an important part of the story of class consciousness "deflation" in Britain over the late 20th century and into the 21st (Fisher, 2016). The concept of consciousness deflation is part of Fisher's attempt to address neoliberalism as an ideological formation which diminishes our capacities - imaginative, intellectual, and affective - to build alternatives to capitalist social relations. While Fisher's

concern with consciousness deflation or “collective depression” was a mainstay of his published work, beginning with his 2009 book “capitalist realism” (Fisher, 2009), in later talks and lectures Fisher points to the relationship between urban space and consciousness deflation. He draws a connection between the erosion of accessible spaces for working-class people to congregate and the simultaneous erosion of our cognitive, embodied, and affective understandings of dominant ‘reality’ as open to change and challenge and our sense of own agency in making this reality anew. Furthermore, Fisher’s concern with raised and deflated consciousness ties together questions of political agency and mental health: he insists that escalating cases of depression and anxiety in contemporary societies need to be understood in relation to the ways in which post-Fordism and neoliberalism have entailed a “privatisation of stress” (Fisher, 2011).

Highmore, developing and expanding Fisher’s insights, suggests that the pub might operate as a space of consciousness inflation in two ways. First, most simply, as a space where the working classes (and working-class men especially) came together to socialise collectively, which “supplied the conditions for the amplification of communication and for recognizing shared interests” (Highmore, 2018, pp. 6-7). In this way the pub forms something like an extension of the factory floor or other workplace that, in Marxist theory, is an important space in the formation of class consciousness. Second, and more complexly, drawing on written reports gathered by the 1930s “Mass Observation” project, Highmore suggests that the pub has/had a performative element, operating as a stage for “class theatre” (ibid., p. 7). The traditional four bar pub - with a distinction between the “public” and “saloon” bar - was both a place in which class distinctions were materially inscribed (with workers normally confined to the former and those of higher-class distinction in the latter) but was also a space where such distinctions were contested and redrawn.[36]

After considering the parallel decline of squats as a space of alternative forms of sociality and practices of feminist consciousness raising in the 1970s and 1980s, Highmore moves on to consider what might have replaced the pub as the dominant vernacular space in British cultural life. Highly relevant in relation to Wayne’s story, Highmore highlights how the decline

[36] For example, Mass Observation found that in “Worktown” - Mass Observation’s fictional name for the northern English industrial town of Bolton - everyone “went up the social scale at the weekend” (Harrison cited in Highmore, 2018, p. 7). Swapping their working clothes for bowler hats, manual workers would frequent the “saloon” rather than “public” bar where a different mode of sociability was expected - no spitting, no swearing and more expensive drinks. Highmore suggests that this ‘class theatre’ allowed “‘class’ to be revealed…[as] an intricately woven fabrication that articulates and obscures the orchestration of inequality” (ibid., p. 7).

of the pub since the 1970s has been in inverse relation to the rise of owner occupation. While Britain has lost 28,000 pubs since the early 1970s, falling 37% from 75,000 to approximately 47,000 in 2017 (Smithers, 2017) - the percentage of owner occupiers in England and Wales rose from 10% in 1918 to 55% in 1975 (Pawley in Highmore, 2018, p. 12), reaching 69.7% of households in the UK as a whole by 2002 (HomeOwners Alliance, 2012).[37,38]

Highmore (2018, p. 4) argues that these parallel trends represent a "historical move from spaces that point toward collective communion to spaces aimed at individualistic experiences". While the 20th century pub operates according to a "centrifugal" logic, characterised by a "social energy that, while it exists in a discrete locality…has an expansive outward reach" (ibid, p. 11), the owner-occupied private dwelling structured around the individual and the nuclear family has a "centripetal" or in-ward facing logic.[39] This has:

> "altered our relationship to place… produced a form of mass indenture that is treated as both normal and enviable ('getting on the property ladder'), and has produced all sorts of social feelings based on the fragility of what 'ownership' often means. (ibid., p. 11)"

Highmore's dichotomy between the centrifugal and centripetal broadly maps on to Fisher's dichotomy of raised and deflated consciousness, but Highmore substitutes the terms to steer the conversation "away from consciousness to a more general sentience that would include consciousness but also include less ideational feelings and sensitivities that are sustained as much by creaturely habits as 'habits of mind'" (ibid., p. 4).

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[37] CAMRA (The Campaign for Real Ale) - an organisation dedicated to the protection of British pub culture - defines a pub expansively: "The licensed premises must: (1) be open to and welcome the general public without requiring membership or residency and without charging for admission; (2) serve at least one draught beer or cider; (3) allow drinking without requiring food to be consumed, and have at least one indoor area not laid out for meals; and (4) allow customers to buy drinks at a bar without relying on table service (Campaign for Real Ale, 2019).

[38] The most recent figures show a subsequent slight drop in homeownership - comprising 65% of UK households in 2016 (Barton, 2017, p. 3).

[39] To give a sense of the features and qualities of the private home that contribute to this centripetal logic Highmore (2018, p. 12) cites the architectural critic Martin Pawley's prescient description of a "citizen of the future" from 1974, at a time when home ownership was on the rise: "Alone in a centrally heated, air conditioned capsule, drugged, fed with music and erotic imagery, the parts of his consciousness separated into components that reach everywhere and nowhere, the private citizen of the future will have become one with the end of effort and the triumph of sensation divorced from action."

As ‘social infrastructures’, then, Highmore assigns to the pub and the owner-occupied private home contrasting qualities: the former a space of consciousness inflation (to use Fisher’s term) or centrifugal social energy (to use Highmore’s) and the latter a space of consciousness deflation or centripetal social energies. And the decline of the pub as a dominant “vernacular space” in British culture life of the last several decades, and the parallel rise of the owner-occupied private home, is Highmore’s contribution to the story of the more general historical process of “consciousness deflation” outlined by Fisher.[40]

This historical account fits the situation on the Aberfeldy Estate rather neatly. The bulldozing of the Aberfeldy Pub in 2015 to make way for a new block of private flats enacts a very literal shift from, as Highmore puts it, ‘pub’ to ‘pad’. And while Highmore does not address RTB explicitly, Wayne’s story of displacement starkly illustrates “the fragility of what ‘ownership’ means” for former council tenants who became part of Margaret Thatcher’s “property owning democracy”. But Wayne’s organising efforts through Tommy’s Tea Rooms perhaps promise to push back in the other direction: might the centripetal dynamics of owner-occupation in the context of estate regeneration be countered by the centrifugal dynamics of the pub?

The Tommy Flowers and Tommy’s Tea Rooms appears to provide the perfect ethnographic test case for Fisher and Highmore’s thesis about the pub as a space of consciousness raising / centrifugal social energies. However, while Highmore declares that “we need to reanimate our collective spaces with the exuberant ‘centrifugal’ energies of pubs, trade unions, and feminist CR” (ibid., p. 14) as a means to “resist the colonization of everyday life by neoliberalism” (ibid: 4), he warns against such a nostalgic approach:

> “[the] collective joy that can animate these spaces cannot look back nostalgically, trying to recreate scenes from the 1970s. We must create our poetry from the future rather than the past and make it compelling enough and joyous enough to tempt

[40] Although both Fisher and Highmore seek to integrate considerations of feminist practices of consciousness raising within their broader discussions of consciousness deflation and inflation, more could be said - both in their work and in my engagement with it here - about the gendered space that is/was the pub and the gendered behaviours and forms of consciousness it is/was productive of. To the extent that the pub was a site of working-class consciousness raising, this was presumably on whole a white, male form of working class consciousness. Indeed, we should consider how a shift away from the pub as a dominant vernacular space towards the domestic space of the home might in fact, in certain circumstances, create opportunities for the reconfiguration of gendered power relations – for example regarding the burden of domestic work (with thanks to Carol Balthazar for this point). For concerted sociological engagements with gender and its intersections with class and race in Britain see Byrne (1996) and Skeggs (1997). Degnen and Tyler (2017) meanwhile provide a useful overview of contributions to the study of intersecting inequalities within the anthropology of Britain and how this compares to sociological approaches to intersectionality.

> people out of their private, centrally heated, and TV and computer-dominated spaces. (ibid., p. 14)"

Where, then, does this leave the Tommy Flowers / Tommy's Tea Rooms? Highmore doesn't specify why exactly "these spaces cannot look back nostalgically", but his play on Marx's famous line from *the 18th Brumaire* - "we must create our poetry from the future rather than the past" - suggests a modernist drive to invent new spaces of sociality which reflect the material, technological and social realities of the present rather than those of a previous era. In this way, the pub could be seen as a 'social infrastructure' appropriate to a historical moment in which social struggles - and especially labour struggles - revolved around the figure of the white, male industrial worker. In the context of urban regeneration today, in the more ethnically and socially diverse urban setting of Poplar, one could argue that the pub is no longer the social infrastructure most likely to act as a space of consciousness raising and other spaces need to be invented to "resist the colonization of everyday life by neoliberalism".

Across the following three ethnographic vignettes I want to explore the Highmore's distinction between centrifugal and centripetal social energies and his argument against nostalgia as means of reanimating collective spaces and therefore "resisting the colonisation of everyday life by neoliberalism". I show how Highmore′s distinction between centrifugal and centripetal social energies helps, to some degree, in elucidating some important aspects of the power dynamics at play in estate regeneration at the Aberfeldy Estate. But I also explore how the Tommy Flowers operated as an infrastructure of resistance in the context of estate regeneration in ways which cannot be contained within Highmore′s dichotomy. Arguably it is in terms of its centripetal dynamics, its nostalgia, and its status as a precarious, (white) working class enclave independent of Poplar HARCA, that Tommy′s Tea Rooms can best be conceived as a site of resistance amid estate regeneration.

2.19 – Aberfeldy Street

2.20 – Aberfeldy Street with Canary Wharf in background

Centrifugal and centripetal social energies

“They want everyone to live in private little boxes!”

One might argue that there was something of a centrifugal dynamic at play in how I myself first encountered Tommy’s Tea Rooms: introduced to the space by Josie after meeting her while volunteering at St Matthias community centre. Soon it was my turn to do outreach: Wayne had a large stack of ABL leaflets that he wanted to deliver to the households on the estate to raise awareness about what ABL were doing and encourage more people to get involved. He asked if I would help and brought Jimmy - his fellow ABL committee member - along too. Here I describe some moments from the couple of hours that we spent delivering leaflets on a Wednesday afternoon in April 2019. I do so to situate the centrifugal dynamics of the Tommy’s Tea Rooms in relation to an urban landscape in the process of being transformed through comprehensive redevelopment.

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Our first port of call was the block of maisonettes on either side of Aberfeldy Street. Wayne called out to a man standing on the access deck above, asking if he would “buzz us in” through the communal doorway. A white man, perhaps a little older than Wayne, with a thick brown moustache, I would often see him on the access deck in front of the door to his maisonette looking out onto the street below, a row of little St George England flags strung up on the railings in front of him. Handing him a leaflet I stopped to chat. He told me that he was a leaseholder, like Wayne. He’d seen his neighbours gradually leave the building, one by one. But he had stayed - there was so much uncertainty about the timescales for demolition and he wanted to stick it out. He was very critical of the redevelopment of the estate which, echoing Wayne, he said was a form of “social cleansing”. He was also scathing of the new build accommodation that some of his neighbours had moved into. While they might be OK inside, he said, people he knew who now lived in them complained of feeling isolated. It wasn’t like his maisonette, where he could see people coming and going outside his front door; in the new builds access to the apartments was via labyrinthine corridors - “They want everyone to live in private little boxes!”, he complained. He also said that the way the estate was managed had changed: He and his neighbours had used to furnish the access decks with chairs, plants and other objects so that they could socialise outside their front doors. But now they had been told that this was not allowed - apparently it was a fire risk.

After a few minutes of chatting, Wayne called out to me from below that I should hurry up, so I said goodbye and headed back downstairs. Wayne and Jimmy were waiting for me on Aberfeldy Street and together we walked south, past the construction hoardings behind which phase three of the Aberfeldy redevelopment was being built to a part of the estate built on the former site of Poplar Hospital. Here the red brick, neo-traditionalist architecture suggests it was built in the 1980s or 1990s, with four to six flats in buildings with one shared communal doorway. There was no way of getting inside these buildings so we were forced to leave small stacks of leaflets underneath the communal doors. Reconvening after a few minutes back at the road leading to the rest of the estate Wayne, glancing back over his shoulder, looked perturbed. The three of us then watched while a man wearing a yellow high visibility jacket - an estate caretaker - picked up a stack of leaflets and threw them into a bin. I felt like I wanted to intervene, but I wasn't sure if it was my place to do so. I waited for a signal from Jimmy and Wayne. None came. Wayne said he would have a word with his manager.

This event somewhat deflated our enthusiasm for delivering leaflets. On our way to the northern end of the estate we reflected on what had just happened. Wayne said that as he had passed the caretaker, the caretaker had said to him - "they're going straight in the bin". Jimmy commented that the caretaker's actions demonstrated the loss of East End community spirit and reflected that, rather than just throwing leaflets in the bin, "before someone would have just asked, hey - 'what are you up to?'".

The atmosphere improved as we arrived at a cluster of yellow brick houses and flats built at around the turn of the millennium. In front of one the houses, a group of around fifteen people - mainly women and children, mainly but not exclusively white - were sat on camping chairs, drinking cups of tea and enjoying the spring sunshine. "That's a bit of East End community for you", Jimmy remarked to me as we passed. Next, we visited some newly built high-rise apartments next to the River Lea. The development involved opening access to the waterfront. Jimmy was yet to visit this new area and marvelled at the view, describing it as "lovely". However, he pointed out to me that the pleasant river front view was for the benefit of the private flats, which had its own concierge entrance with newly laid grass and flowers. Meanwhile what he assumed was the entrance to the social housing units came out onto a car park and bin area in which assorted pieces of broken IKEA furniture were scattered about.

The final leg of our journey was the completed phases one and two of “Aberfeldy Village”. As with some of the earlier blocks, here again it was difficult to get access to the flats themselves. We walked into the reception area and asked the concierge if we could leave leaflets on a table by the door. In another building, where the door had been left open, we found a foyer area with a row of post-boxes. We quickly stuffed a leaflet inside each one, as if at any moment someone might come and challenge us about what we were doing. Back outside I wondered aloud whether we should put leaflets through the doors of the row of ‘brownstone’ style houses/apartments, each with its own small set of stairs going up to the front door. “Nah… if we’re being watched, we might piss them off”, Wayne replied. So we called it a day and returned to the Tommy Flowers.

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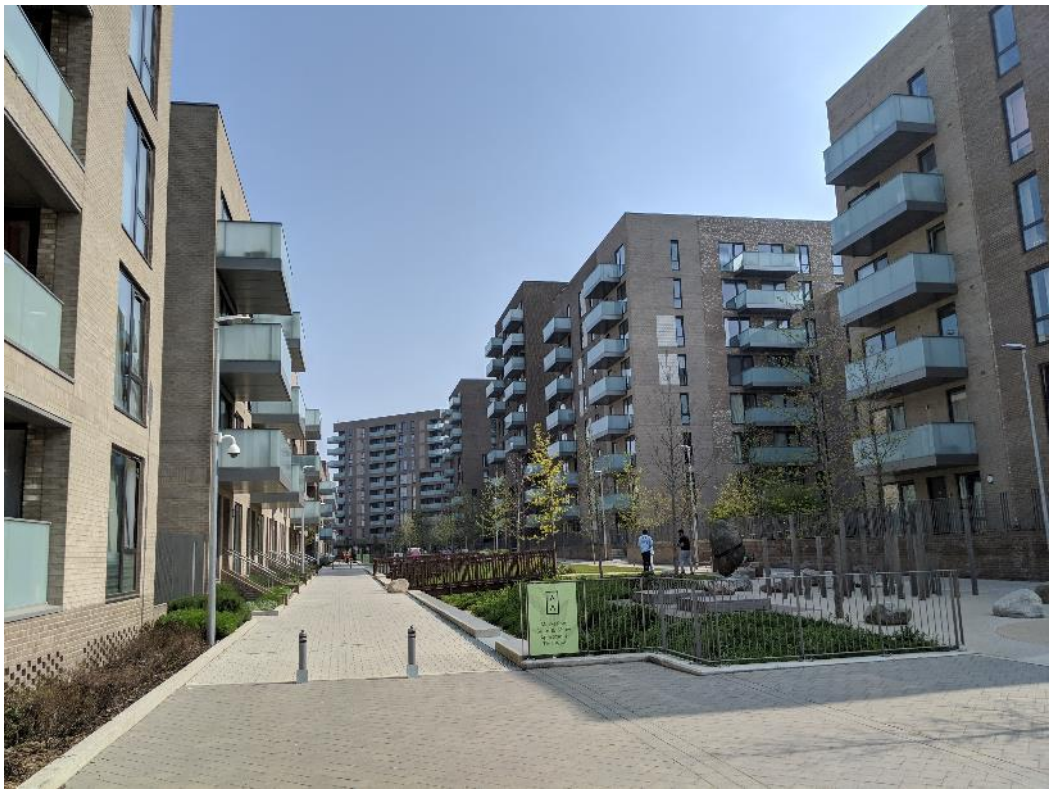
Various elements of this vignette are testament to the centrifugal dynamic generated by Tommy’s Tea Rooms. The Tea Rooms operated as a kind of community base where Wayne, Jimmy and I got together before going out onto the estate. Going out delivering leaflets with Wayne and Jimmy led to unexpected social encounters, such as an opportunity to speak to the man standing on the access deck, looking out over Aberfeldy Street. Jimmy and I got to see parts of the estate that we hadn’t seen before and came across social scenes such as the group of around fifteen people sitting in front of their homes enjoying the sunshine.

But these centrifugal dynamics come up against the centripetal dynamics of the ‘Aberfeldy Village’ regeneration and broader mode of neoliberal urban governance of which it is an expression. Perhaps most notable in this regard was the moment when the caretaker threw our leaflets in the bin, without stopping to ask what we were trying to achieve, and with none of us feeling able to respond. What could be a better illustration of Fisher’s notion of deflated consciousness? Instead of any feeling of mutuality or solidarity the care-taker’s behaviour demonstrated an attitude of suspicion whereby the three of us with our leaflets were immediately designated as unwanted interlopers - nothing more than a source of nuisance or ‘anti-social behaviour’. And on the part of Jimmy, Wayne and I, there is the passivity in the face of being so summarily dismissed - rather than challenging the caretaker’s behaviour we simply watched, with Wayne stating that he would have a word with his manager later on.

These illustrative moments of deflated consciousness are also connected to the architectural layout of the redeveloped estate. It was a lack of access to people’s front doors which meant

that we had to leave the leaflets on the floor in the first place. Meanwhile such architectural features, common to parts of the estate built in the past thirty or so years, are described by the leaseholder as contributing to a feeling of isolation among residents used to more public-facing properties, with communal areas immediately outside one's front door. Then finally, in the Aberfeldy Village, architectural layout and the previous experience of being perceived as a nuisance mean that we operate under the assumption that we are under surveillance and do not linger long.



2.21 – Aberfeldy Village

2.22 – Concrete tea cargo, Aberfeldy Village

“Maybe we’ve just got to admit that the community already has what it wants?”

On our way back to the Tommy Flowers, Wayne and Jimmy got into a conversation about what hope ABL had of exerting any say over Poplar HARCA’s regeneration plans. Jimmy was feeling doubtful. He wondered aloud - what power did ABL really have in the face of the combined resources of Tower Hamlets Council, Poplar HARCA and the property developers? In contrast, Wayne was more optimistic. He emphasised to Jimmy how ABL had already managed to attain assurances from the developers of Aberfeldy Village that a permanent space for the Tommy Flowers pub would be included within a set of revised plans. Even if it were impossible to prevent redevelopment, they could exercise leverage and oversight along the way; Wayne was currently proposing to the ABL committee that they contract their own regeneration experts to write a report on the Aberfeldy regeneration. This might be able to determine, for example, if the developers working on the site of the former gas works were complying with their legal responsibilities over air pollution and the environment. This dynamic between Wayne’s optimism and Jimmy’s pessimism would become familiar to me over the course of my fieldwork. But Wayne wasn’t always so optimistic. Over time his aspiration to grow ABL into an organisation that might take on Poplar HARCA began to dissipate amid a sense of frustration at the enormity of the challenge and the level of ambition of other committee members.

A few months later I arrived at the Tea Rooms to find Wayne and Jimmy sitting across from each other a table. The mood was sombre. There had been disagreements within the ABL committee over the future direction of the Tommy Flowers. Wayne was beginning to despair at their lack of ambition and capacity. The conversation turned to why they seemed to struggle to get more people involved. Jimmy stood up and began pacing the room. “Maybe we’ve just got to admit that the community already has what it wants?”, he said. Looking out the window as a late to middle-aged, bearded Muslim man wearing a prayer hat walked past, he added, "I wonder what he wants, whether he is happy with the community? - maybe he is?”.

“Maybe you should ask him?” I said, as a joke but also slightly out of frustration. In the ensuing awkward pause, I decided to feed back to Jimmy and Wayne part of a conversation I’d had with Sultan, a young Muslim man of Bangladeshi heritage who worked in his dad’s Londis convenience store across the road. Seeing me greet Josie in the street he’d asked me if she was the landlady of the pub, and I’d explained that she worked in Tommy’s Tea Rooms which was separate. Despite coming to Aberfeldy Street most days he had no idea

that the Tommy Flowers doubled up as a cafe in the daytime. And for that reason, he'd never felt inclined to come inside.

"There you go Wayne; we need a big sign on the window or something." said Jimmy.

"Didn't you used to have a sign outside?" I asked. Then I noticed the blackboard sign I was referring to, folded up inside the door.

Wayne shrugged. "It's Garry's pub, isn't it? We can't just put a sign up".

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During the last few months of my intensive fieldwork year in 2019, and in the period afterwards when I remained in touch with Jimmy and Wayne through phone calls, email, and occasional visits, both men regularly mentioned to me their thoughts about giving up their involvement in ABL. The covid-19 lock down, beginning in March 2020, had put a stop to much of ABLs activities, with the Tea Rooms and the pub forced to close. But even before this event their enthusiasm had seriously waned. Then in the summer of 2021, Wayne and Bob, after much delay and uncertainty, finally did leave London, swapping their three-bedroom maisonette in Poplar for a suburban house in Lincolnshire in the east midlands, around two and a half hours by car from Poplar. And at around the same time Jimmy resigned his place on the ABL committee. In many ways, then, Jimmy and Wayne's hopes invested in ABL ended in disappointment. They might even be considered as having 'failed' in what they set out to do - and this is how both Jimmy and Wayne tended to view things. Borrowing Highmore's framework we might say that this shows the limitations of a nostalgic project like Tommy's Tea Rooms in confronting the centripetal social energies of estate regeneration - limitations which, as Jimmy alludes to in the ethnographic vignette above, were perhaps inherent to a project of trying to "create some community cohesion" through a pub in an area with a large Muslim population.

In some ways Highmore's argument about nostalgia makes a great deal of sense in relation to my ethnographic material. There was a mismatch between the scale of Wayne's aspirations for resistance (aspirations I also shared and wanted to contribute to fulfilling) and the available vehicle - a pub which appeals to a relatively narrow group of local residents. Despite attempts to reach out beyond this group, such as our afternoon spent delivering leaflets described above, these aspirations came up against the lack of suitable social

infrastructure for the task. This led to a growing sense of frustration among Wayne, Jimmy and the ABL committee members, which was palpable on the above-described morning at Tommy's Tea Rooms. I too became caught up in this sense of frustration; reacting to Jimmy's tendency to talk and speculate a lot *about* what Poplar's Muslim community thought or how they lived, but seemingly reluctant or unable to have this conversation *with* them.

But it was remiss of me to express frustration with Jimmy for his seeming reluctance to get out of his comfort zone and start striking up conversations with strangers in the street. I suspect that this is not why he came to Tommy's Tea Rooms; it was not part of its value and appeal as a social infrastructure for him. Jimmy came to Tommy's Tea Rooms to meet with people he knew, with whom he already had some rapport - even this was challenging enough. Therefore, perhaps the issue here was less that the social infrastructure was deficient in terms of our aspirations for it, and more that our aspirations were unsuitable for the social infrastructure. What if Tommy's Tea Rooms was never really meant to generate "centrifugal social energies"? What if its value as a site of resistance lay elsewhere – perhaps even in the very nostalgic qualities which Highmore in his chapter seems to reject as a basis for collective resistance?

In his play on Marx's famous line from *the 18th Brumaire*, Highmore offers a linear conception of social struggles. The philosopher Isabelle Stengers (2005) critiques such modes of thinking - or what she calls thinking in the "major key" - for their tendency to define what is at stake in terms of an "'either/or' disjunction". In this case, resistance to neoliberal modes of governance is said to require an orientation to the future *rather* than the past. Stengers contrasts thinking in the "major key" to thinking in the "minor key", or - in Deleuze's terms - thinking "par le milieu". This mode of thinking has a "pragmatic ethos": Rather than guided by "the power of some more general reason" this ethos demands "paying attention as best you can, to be discerning, as discriminating as you can about the particular situation" (ibid., p. 188).

With Stengers therefore we might ask: Why, exactly, must we create our poetry from the future rather than the past? When evaluated against the lofty goal of fundamentally challenging Poplar HARCA's plan for the redevelopment of the Aberfeldy estate, my interlocutors' attempts to "create some community cohesion" through the Tommy's Tea Rooms might be said to have 'failed' - and they themselves certainly felt this at points. But there are other measures against which to evaluate their practices; measures which, in

keeping with Stengers' pragmatic ethos, can be drawn out from my ethnography. With this in mind, let's return to the morning I arrived at Tommy's Tea Rooms to find Wayne and Jimmy in a melancholic mood.

"It's like a men's group!"

As the morning wore on, one by one other people arrived. First Bob - Wayne's dad - dropped by, as he would tend to do when Wayne was on shift. He sat down across from me (a little heavily since the chair was low down and, being nearly ninety years old, Bob's knees aren't what they used to be). He asked me about how I was getting on with the books he'd lent me including a pictorial history of the London docks where Bob had begun his working life. I replied that I had enjoyed looking at them and that I wanted him to check over a draft blog post I had written for my 'Poplar Stories' Facebook page, based on an interview I'd done with him about his time working at the Bromley-by-Bow gasworks.

Shortly after, Derek arrived. Another Tommy Tea Rooms regular, Derek is a self-taught computer programmer and astrology enthusiast and, like most other regulars, is in his sixties and no longer working full time. As someone interested in both computers and local history Derek is very invested in the commemoration of Tommy Flowers and has been petitioning to have an English Heritage 'Blue Plaque' installed on Abbott Road, where Tommy Flowers was born. Derek has also sat down with me for an interview for Poplar Stories.

Paul is the next to walk through the door, having just finished a shift driving a black cab. Wayne serves him a tea and he joins in the group conversation. He tells us that he can't be bothered working long hours anymore. He just goes out for a few hours and comes back.

With six of us now inhabiting the small space of the Tea Rooms the atmosphere becomes lighter and more jovial. Paul and Derek had been to the Halloween Karaoke at the Tommy Flowers on Saturday night. They joke about who had the best costume, Paul showing everyone a picture on his phone of himself dressed as a giant pumpkin. Paul relays to us how a friend that he had brought along had commented how the atmosphere in the pub had been really good, contrasting with his experience of other local pubs - "there's no aggro [aggression] in here, it's really relaxing".

Paul tells us an anecdote about a taxi ride he'd had near London Bridge. Jimmy - himself a former black cab driver and therefore fellow student of The Knowledge - pedantically but

playfully corrects Paul for confusing the name of one of the streets. A little later on I notice that Jimmy and Paul have gone into the other room to survey the big London road map which is pinned to a wall. Jimmy and Bob also have a joke together: When Paul is looking for an umbrella his wife had left in the pub the other evening, Bob says to Jimmy in the manner of Sherlock Holmes: "it's a mystery, Watson", with Jimmy playing along and answering back in character. It's nice to see Jimmy enjoying other people's company as he had seemed quite down earlier that morning.

I have a few words with Jimmy as he is way out the door - heading onto an appointment at the Job Centre. "It's like a men's group!" he jokes, gesturing back towards the assembled group.

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This scene reflects some important aspects of what I suggest my interlocutors valued about Tommy's Tea Rooms. First, we can see how the Tea Rooms functions as a place where my interlocutors could casually drop by and meet one another. The social scene that developed that morning was not planned in advance but unfolded organically as first Bob, then Derek, then Paul walked through the door. It's important to note that, before the Tea Rooms opened, this group of regular visitors for the most part did not know each other, or at least were not in the habit of socialising together. The loose conviviality of the space, where one could drop by with no obligation to pay, and where group socialising was encouraged, over time allowed regular visitors to get to know one another and form of 'community' of sorts.

Second, the Tea Rooms brings together people around common interests and concerns. The conviviality of the space is 'loose' in the sense that people turn up when they want, and one doesn't know who might turn up on a given day, but it is delimited to some degree by proximity and common interests. The regular visitors to the Tea Rooms live on the Aberfeldy or neighbouring estates, within walking distance. And for the most part they share an interest in questions of local history and heritage connected to their age, gender, class, and ethnic background. Although I did not align with them in terms of my age and class/educational background, I was welcomed into the space, facilitated by my adopting the position of resident oral history researcher. Thus, my interviews with Bob about his experiences working in the local docks and gas works, and with Derek about his interest in Tommy Flowers, contributed to an informal programme of shared activities. This loose conviviality structured around shared activities has elements in common with Emma Jackson's (2020) description

of “practices of belonging and becoming” at a bowling alley in north London. But while Jackson, as with much research surveyed under the rubric of ‘social infrastructure’ by Latham and Layton, is particularly concerned with convivial *multiculture*, at the Tea Rooms - at least in this scene - conviviality takes place among white, working-class men exclusively (with the partial exception of myself).

Third, the Tea Rooms is characterised by an ethos of care and companionship. Within the literature on social infrastructures a normative value is placed on spaces which allow for encounters across difference. But here, I argue, there is value in ‘sameness’ - of a certain kind. Jimmy’s remark - “it’s like a men’s group” - brings this to the fore. A “men’s group” can refer to a range of things but can most basically be described as a therapeutic initiative, ranging from group therapy sessions facilitated by trained psychotherapists to less medicalised sessions organised around group activities. For example, on another occasion Jimmy told me about a men’s woodworking group a friend of his, who has also suffered from mental health difficulties, regularly attends in Whitechapel. In line with the contemporary rise in discourses of mental health, men’s groups respond to the specific mental health issues faced by men and engage the ways in which masculinity and mental health intersect. I suggest that Jimmy’s light-hearted comment about the Tea Rooms being like a men’s group reflects both that the space was predominantly used by men, and how these men related to one another in this space according to an ethos of care and companionship.

Clearly comfortable in the company of the Tommy’s Tea Rooms regulars, Jimmy would often talk openly about his difficulties with his mental health. As a result, Jimmy’s wellbeing became an object of shared responsibility and concern among those of us who regularly frequented the space. This manifested through, for example, others encouraging him to come and socialise when he was feeling more inclined to stay at home; by Wayne dropping off vegetables from his friend’s allotment; and by people regularly asking after Jimmy if they hadn’t seen him for a while. It was also clear that spending time in the space was beneficial to Jimmy’s mood and that it helped him to relax: his playful dialogue with Bob in the vignette presented above was the kind of scene that would often develop around Jimmy - at other moments to be found walking around the room reciting lines from his favourite Shakespeare plays or other kinds of improvised performance. This mental health dimension of the Tea Rooms eventually became more formalised: Realising that visitors to the Tea Rooms would often use it as a place to talk about their problems or seek support the ABL committee decided to pay for Wayne and Josie to undertake a course in non-judgemental listening techniques.

In light of the preceding points, then, might it be that what is most important about Tommy's Tea Rooms is not its centrifugal dynamics but rather its centripetal ones? Rather than it exhibiting a social energy with an "expansive outward reach", here the Tea Rooms functions instead as a kind of enclave - a temporary shelter for some of those experiencing displacement amid urban regeneration to gather and seek relief.

Conclusion: Enclave

Critical wariness of nostalgia – particularly as it pertains to the white working class - is understandable and important. As we saw in the last chapter, there is a tendency for nostalgic historical accounts of transformations in class in Britain in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to downplay or erase the extent to which forms of working-class strength existed alongside - and were to a significant extent premised on – forms of racial discrimination and inequality. Laura Renata Martin (2017), writing in the American context in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump as President, argues against such a nostalgic perspective, insisting that to build solidarity today "the left must finally put to rest its love affair with the idea of the white male blue collar worker as the standard bearer of revolutionary consciousness".

But while such critiques of leftist nostalgia are extremely valid to the extent to which historical racial inequality is downplayed and the experience of other social groups is neglected, nostalgia is here presented as exclusively negative – as something which needs to be "put to rest". In contrast, in this chapter I have sought to engage with the precise forms the white, working-class nostalgia takes, examining how it operates within the particular milieu that is urban regeneration at the Aberfeldy Estate. In such a context of infrastructural breakdown and mental ill health, I suggest that the undoubtedly nostalgic project that is the Tommy's Tea Rooms created an infrastructure of care and companionship. And if it is the case that one of the ways in which neoliberal urban governance operates is through making people feel isolated, disconnected and alone, thereby reducing one's capacity to act, I suggest that the Tea Rooms represented a modest form of resistance to these dynamics.

More broadly, the idea that nostalgia as it pertains to the white working class should be "put to rest" points to a tendency that such nostalgia is equated with racialised resentment – a problem that we encountered with respect to the literature on whiteness and urban change discussed in the previous chapter. This closes down space for (white) working class articulations of loss which are not reducible to racialised resentment. While it is not possible to disentangle the ways in which lost class privileges were tied up with racial inequalities it is

also important not to collapse one into the other. As Mark Fisher (2014a, p. 25) argues, to do so would be to:

> "grasp what has been lost only in the terms of the worst kind of resentment *ressentiment*, or in terms of what Alex Williams has called negative solidarity, in which we are invited to celebrate, not an increase in liberation, but the fact that another group has now been immiserated."

What is needed instead is an acknowledgement of loss; forms of loss which cannot be reduced to the loss of racial privileges only. Acknowledging nostalgia is the "modest argument" put forward by Alistair Bonnett (2010) in his book Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia. In proposing the acknowledgement of nostalgia Bonnett does not seek to make an argument for or against nostalgia - it is far too riven with contradiction and complexity for that - but merely urges a recognition of its ubiquity, including within the very same 'progressive' political projects which are often dismissive of it. Nostalgia, he argues, is "a shared and inevitable emotion in an era of rapid and enforced change" (ibid., p. 132). Acknowledging nostalgia meanwhile offers the possibility for the social critic "to begin differently" (ibid., p. 46), such that nostalgia might become a site of opening up rather than closing down lines of enquiry and critique.

It is such a situation of rapid and enforced change which brought my white, working-class interlocutors together within the space of the Tommy Flowers/Tommy's Tea Rooms. Rather than dismissing out of hand my interlocutors' undoubtedly nostalgic efforts to "create some community cohesion" through a project to recreate a pub on the Aberfeldy Estate, I present it as a form of resistance. But this is a kind of resistance which knows that a final victory is impossible, but which continues to struggle nonetheless in pursuit of "little victories", as Wayne once put it to me. A nostalgic resistance perhaps, one whose "blatant vulnerability, its pathos, are premised on the impossibility of its struggle against time, its wistful realization that the past is out of reach" (Bonnett, 2010, p. 44).

To finish, I want to underline this point with reference to a visit to the Tea Room's by Linda - a leaseholder on a neighbouring estate. At a meeting at St Matthias community centre about local redevelopment, Linda had told me about her long-running battle with Poplar HARCA over service charges owing as a result of renovation work done to her building and her concerns about a new plan to turn the underground car park underneath the building into an

'escape room'.[41] I suggested that she come to Tommy's Tea Rooms to meet Wayne as someone in a similar position. In the company of me and a revolving cast of other sympathetic listeners, Wayne and Linda shared their stories of estate regeneration and their sense of outrage and defiance about how they had been treated. The experience was energising for Wayne. When we went to the Limehouse cafe to have lunch together afterwards Wayne told the owner - an acquaintance of his - that there had been a "revolutionary atmosphere" in the Tea Rooms that day. And his enthusiasm continued into the next day when he posted an update on the Tommy's Tea Rooms Facebook page encouraging more such gatherings to take place. Paradoxically however, given Wayne's subsequent surge of enthusiasm, the content of our discussion that day was actually in many ways focused on how hopeless the situation was in terms of mounting a campaign which might seriously challenge Poplar HARCA's approach to estate regeneration. Neither Wayne nor Linda had much hope that they might successfully contest the redevelopment plans. As Wayne put it, "I'm not defeatist but the corporate machine will drive you down". A large part of the discussion that day revolved around effects that estate regeneration had had on their health and that of their elderly parents, and the sense of isolation they had felt. Wayne spoke about his head "whirring when I go to bed at night" with worry, while Linda spoke of how "you see it like it's just you". Repeating what he had told me previously, Wayne said that his dad had suffered "two minor strokes and a heart attack" since they had received the CPO. Linda shared that her mother, who had since passed away, had had cancer at the time they were forced to move out of their flat for the renovation work to take place: "She should have spent her last years in peace and comfort, but that was taken from away from her", adding "I will never recover from what happened to mum".

If there was a form of resistance enacted here it was less concerned with Wayne's previous ambitions to build a collective organisation that might take on Poplar HARCA and more with the opportunity for some relief from the "privatisation of stress" that Fisher argues to be a distinguishing feature of neoliberal affect. Just as he had done when I had first met him in the Tea Rooms, Wayne communicated some of the suffering inflicted on him and his dad through the compulsory purchase process. He was even able to turn some of this suffering into humour. Towards the end of the conversation Wayne began to think aloud about what agency they might still have - sharing playful fantasies about bespoiling Poplar HARCA's reputation. "We could organise a march, a graffiti campaign, a social media campaign - they

[41] Wikipedia summaries the Escape Room concept as: "a game in which a team of players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal in a limited amount of time. The goal is often to escape from the site of the game." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escape_room)

would *hate* it." Getting into his stride, he continued to laughter from the rest of the room: "We could call it 'Extinction HARCA'. We could wear yellow vests [like the French 'Gilet Jaune' protesters]. If I had enough time I'd get my balaclava and go out at 4am graffitiing." Before concluding sarcastically: "But of course I would never do that!"

We might even go further and say that 'resistance' in this case amounted to a decision to, in some ways, stop resisting. Wayne, now accepting that he was going to be leaving the area, advised Linda that she should follow suit: "All this fighting Poplar HARCA wears you down - it makes you depressed. They will come back [with more charges, more disruption] - again and again…. My advice to you: sell up and get out." Meanwhile Linda recalled that a friend had said to her: "when you die, you don't want to have Poplar HARCA written on your gravestone'".

An enclave carved out amid the redevelopment of the Aberfeldy Estate, Tommy's Tea Rooms provided a space of temporary shelter for Wayne and others facing displacement from the area. Resistance here is about retrieving some sense of pride and agency from a situation which has stripped you of it; to retrieve a sense of individual and collective capacities - even if only to make a symbolic protest - or to walk away from the situation with a feeling that at least *we* did something to fight back.

Chapter Three: Selling Off Your Heritage

In the last chapter I situated Wayne's efforts at "creating some community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms in relation to shared sense of nostalgia among my white, working-class interlocutors. I discussed how the social infrastructure of the pub functioned in important ways as a temporary shelter for some of those experiencing displacement amid urban regeneration, but also limited the ability to bring a broad range of local residents together around broader efforts to build collective capacities to challenge Poplar HARCA's approach to urban regeneration. But while the emphasis here was on the difficulties faced in bringing local residents from different religious and ethnic background together, we should not therefore assume that long term white residents, while gathered in the same place, were totally united in solidarity. The Tommy's Tea Rooms was a space of 'collective communion' and 'fellow feeling' in important respects (Highmore, 2018), but there was far from perfect consensus about the merits and demerits of estate regeneration, nor the exact sources of 'blame' for the situation they found themselves in.

In this chapter I explore further barriers to solidarity in the context of estate regeneration, taking as my focus the legacy of the Right to Buy (RTB) - the very policy that allowed Wayne and others now threatened with compulsory purchase the chance to become leaseholders in the first place. Through presentation of a series of conversations with my interlocutors from Tommy's Tea Rooms, alongside the consideration of historical material pertaining to the post-war management and allocation of council housing in Poplar and Tower Hamlets more broadly, I develop an analysis of the ways the implementation of the RTB after 1980 - along with other concurrent reforms to the allocation of council housing - has worked to interrupt a previous 'moral economy' of council housing: A moral economy in which housing was managed as a collective community resource and distributed according to moral criteria such as kinship affiliations, length of residence, and perceptions of community contribution. As a result of this breakdown, today council housing ceases to be allocated according to such communitarian criteria and has become, on the one hand, allocated according to strict criteria of 'need' and, on the other hand, a form of private property. The combined effect of such a 'residualisation' and privatisation of council housing has been to further facilitate the outmigration of long-standing white, working class residents of the East End, contributing to the demise of the integrated, communitarian, predominantly white, working-class community that my interlocutors felt a large degree of nostalgia for. Differently situated in relation to the RTB, occupying different tenure statuses and, as a result, experiencing estate regeneration

in qualitatively different ways - conversations with my white interlocutors at Tommy's Tea Rooms demonstrate how the legacy of RTB remains a source of tension and disagreement. I examine some of the moral sentiments and judgements that emerged in these conversations, mapping out what I call an 'economy of moral judgements' arising out of the remaking of the post-war moral economy of council housing and showing how this presents a continuing barrier to solidarity and collective action today in the context of estate regeneration.

I therefore shift in this chapter from an examination of the social infrastructure of the pub, to the *affective infrastructure* that is council housing. The literature on social infrastructure tends to place much more emphasis on affects normally affirmed as positive such as "trust", "cooperation", "friendship", "togetherness" and "belonging", (Latham and Layton, 2019; Jackson, 2020) than it does on affects normally judged as negative, such as disagreement, dissensus, awkwardness, withdrawal, resentment. As already alluded to in chapter 2, there is a strong normative civic emphasis to a lot of this work. In contrast, scholars writing on history and affect argue for the importance of attending to negative affects. For example, in different ways, both Ahmed (2010) and Navaro-Yashin (2009) show that an emotion such as melancholia can tell us something important about past injustices which persist in the present - injustices that would be erased by the affirmative injunction to 'let go'. In this way, I suggest that attention to the divergent and ambivalent emotions expressed by my interlocutors can be used to excavate and examine important entangled histories of race, class and council housing, and evaluate the possibilities for and barriers to affective solidarity in the context of estate regeneration.

However, in contrast to other scholars who have used the term affective infrastructure to describe, for example, the feelings of modernist failure transmitted by a crumbling public hospital in Papua New Guinea (Street, 2012) or the relationship between the materials and political imagination in the case of the Iquitos-Nuata road in Peru (Knox, 2017), here I am less concerned with materiality than with *materialism*; less with the immediate socio-materiality of concrete, bricks and mortar than with the less visible but no less 'material' property relations which the RTB has done so much to transform. Here I build on Michal Murawski's (2018b) critique of recent anthropological approaches to infrastructure for their lack of attention to property relations. How, then, do the transformations in property relations brought about by the RTB shape the affective present of estate regeneration? How do the emotions and moral sentiments associated with the legacy of RTB shape the possibilities for forms of sociality and solidarity today?

Council Housing as Infrastructure

While most, if not all, of my white working-class interlocutors at Tommy's Tea Rooms shared a sense of loss regarding the Aberfeldy Estate as depicted in the photos of the Aberfeldy Festival, and all were sympathetic to Wayne's situation, they did not necessarily share his account of betrayal at the hands of the local housing association and the local Labour party. Some 'pointed the finger' in other directions, directly or indirectly. I got my first sense of these diverging perspectives on a visit to Tommy's Tea Rooms shortly after my first meeting with Wayne. This time Wayne wasn't on shift and it was Josie serving behind the counter instead. Part way through the morning we were joined by John, a white man in his early 60s and another life-long resident of the area. Like many of the other Tommy's Tea Room regulars, John grew up living in council housing on the Aberfeldy Estate, but he is unusual in being an owner-occupier of one of the Victorian-era terrace houses which survived the post-war redevelopment of the estate, and is therefore neither a Poplar HARCA tenant nor leaseholder. [42]

John sat at a table by the window on the far side of the room and got out his laptop. Meanwhile I carried on my conversation with Josie. We were talking about issues that leaseholders like Wayne were having in relation to the Aberfeldy Estate regeneration.

"Some people did well out of the right to buy, but other people not so much", I said. Josie - also a leaseholder on the Aberfeldy Estate - nodded her agreement. She knew others who were facing problems, and she was having some issues regarding service charges of her own.

Sensing a break in the conversation, John looked up from his laptop: "what you were saying then - about some people doing well out of right to buy. What you actually mean is: Pocketing a load of money out of selling off their heritage?".

John's directness caught me by surprise. "What do you mean by that?", I stuttered.

[42] Once condemned as slums for their lack of internal bathrooms and hot water facilities, many such houses have today been transformed into homes for middle and upper-class Londoners, favoured for their relatively generous room sizes, back gardens and adaptability. As freehold rather than leasehold properties they also are not subject to leaseholder charges nor the likelihood of compulsory purchase orders. I also live in, and part-own, one of these houses.

He continued by way of anecdote: “I had a friend - she lived on Brick Lane [a street in Shoreditch on the inner boundary of Tower Hamlets, close to the City of London]. She was a proper socialist, a member of the Communist Party and everything. And her family were too. But when it came to right to buy, even they bought their place!”

At this point Josie said she had to leave briefly to pick up the rolls and sandwiches. She said that we should look after the cafe while she was gone and, sensing some tension, joked that we should try not to fight each other in the meantime. As Josie headed towards the door I tried to reassure John that I knew where he was coming from; I wasn’t saying that I agreed with the RTB politically. But what did he mean by “selling off their heritage”, exactly?

“Well we’ll never get that stock back”, he replied. “It’s gone forever. And, I don’t want to get racialist but the indigenous people of this area -” John paused and looked at the window, before continuing. “We’re being outbred, we’re being pushed out by wealth. Look at this street. It will never have the atmosphere it used to. It will never be a bustling, busy street again.”

“Like in the photo there?” I replied, pointing up at the images of the Aberfeldy Festival.

John nodded and sighed loudly, before continuing in a somewhat forced, upbeat tone. ”Anyway! That’s it. It’s not coming back.”

◊

Over the course of my fieldwork I learnt that the topic of the RTB could provoke strong feelings. Perhaps precisely because of it being a contentious topic it was rarely, if ever, raised in group conversations, and over the many hours I spent sitting in Tommy’s Tea Rooms the above dialogue with John was only one of two occasions I remember it being discussed. Both occasions took place when Wayne was not on shift and this was most likely not a coincidence; such a forthright condemnation of the RTB, and disapproval of those who exercised it, in some respects clashed with Wayne’s account of his displacement and of his betrayal at the hands of the local council, housing association and Labour Party. Here John raises the spectre of another source of betrayal - those who exercised their right to buy, turning a collective resource into individual private property, and particularly those who have made money in “selling off their heritage”.

In some respects, John's outburst resonates with dominant critical accounts of the political motivations behind, and lasting implications of, the RTB. John tells the story of a friend of his - "a proper socialist" - who despite these political commitments exercised their RTB. Here John suggests an affinity between the project of socialism and that of council housing, and by implication suggests that RTB worked to undermine this relationship. In a recent article on the legacies of RTB for the US-based socialist magazine Jacobin (later republished by its sister UK-based publication Tribune), Macfarlane (2019) makes a similar point. The RTB, he states:

> "took aim at traditions of collective solidarity in working-class communities. There, by giving more people a direct stake in the system of private property and unearned wealth, Thatcher's reforms did much to erode socialist sentiment."

Macfarlane argues that this erosion of "socialist sentiment" was no accident. He shows how RTB was the culmination of a long term attempt on the part of Conservatives in Britain to neutralise the socialist threat posed by council housing, tracing the idea of a "property owning democracy" back to the Conservative politician Noel Skelton who, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, wrote of the need for "an expansion in the number of property-owners [as] the best way to neutralize the appeal of socialism among workers". The term was then revived in 1946 in the context of the Labour government's mass council house building programme, by the soon-to-be Conservative Prime Minister Anthony Eden, before becoming the slogan through which Thatcher promoted the RTB policy which was put into legislation in 1980. Similarly, critical housing scholars Stuart Hodkinson, Paul Watt and Gerry Mooney (2013, p. 6) argue that RTB was used as a "political weapon to weaken the Labour Party", citing documents published by housing policy groups within the Conservative Research Department in 1976 - only a few years before the implementation of the RTB - which explicitly outline a need to "negate the existing close affinity of the Labour Party with council tenants" (Conservative Research Department cited in Hodkinson et al., 2013, p. 7).

For Hodkinson et al. (2013), the RTB and associated privatisation measures are "arguably one of the most iconic and significant applications of neoliberal policy worldwide", and one which has been "central to the transformation of UK society over the past three decades". This transformation can partly be illustrated via statistics on housing tenure. Alan Murie (2016, p. 65) reports, "[more] than 2.8 million council and socially rented homes were sold under the Right to Buy between 1980 and 2015". Combined with a lack of investment in new council housing since the first Thatcher government and the transfer of existing council stock to private housing providers, council housing as a percentage of the housing stock has

dramatically declined as a result. In 1979, 29.2% of the housing stock in England was council owned, but in 2021 it was only 6.4%, with an additional 10.1% renting from “private registered providers” (DLUHC, Table 104, 2022). In Tower Hamlets the figures are starker still: Whereas at the onset of RTB in 1981 82% of all dwellings in Tower Hamlets were owned by local authorities (Watt, 2009), today the proportion of households renting directly from Tower Hamlets council is only 9%, with a further 25% living in housing association properties (DLUHC,Table 100, 2022). Meanwhile, of the more than 312,000 homes sold through RTB in London (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government table 691, 2022) approximately 42% are now rented out by private landlords (Copley, 2019).

It is in terms of class and class conflict, therefore, that the politics of RTB and its radical transformation of property relations in Britain are most often critically assessed. For Hodkinson et al, the RTB and associated privatisation measures “can only be fully understood as part of a wider neoliberalizing agenda, an agenda that is driven by a particular class project”. Meanwhile, Macfarlane’s article plays off of the title of historian EP Thompson’s famous book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, with the title “The Unmaking of the British Working Class”. He argues that, through the alteration of property relations, Thatcher’s government dramatically shifted former council tenants’ sense of their class interest, and therefore the balance of class forces in Britain more broadly:

> "As homeownership in Britain has increased over time, the number of voters with a vested interest in the buoyancy of a financialized housing market has increased, while the constituency of voters with an interest in high-quality public housing has declined markedly” (Macfarlane 2019).

Macfarlane contends that this transformation was so successful it facilitated the Labour Party’s pivot in the 1990s and 2000s, away from advocating the development of new council housing, and towards a “greater emphasis on meeting homeowners’ aspirations”.

Although not explicitly stated, these accounts work with the Marxist insight that, on this issue at least, the key to understanding culture, society and politics - or what Marx himself called superstructure - lies in close examination of what he called the economic ‘base’ or ‘infrastructure’. Such a base-superstructure schema is out of keeping with contemporary anthropological approaches to the study of infrastructure. As Murawski (2018b) points out, the emphasis has rather been on the materiality of infrastructure as a window onto complexity, multiplicity and indeterminacy, often accompanied with a Latourian insistence that social analytics should be “flat” rather than presupposing vertical “structures”. Against

this predominant trend, Murawski makes the case for the continued relevance of the base-superstructure model with reference to the Palace of Culture and Science in post-socialist Warsaw. This gigantic Stalinist skyscraper "'gifted' to Poland by the Soviet Union" and opened to the public in 1955 has survived numerous attempts to privatise and demolish it, and continues to dominate the skyline of Warsaw and play a key role in the social and cultural life of the city's inhabitants today. Murawski argues that key to the remarkable persistence of this "still socialist" building is the fact that it was built upon public land expropriated from private land owners after the second world war - a socialist economic 'base' which has subsequently allowed the building to be appropriated by myriad public functions and uses, and which in turn make it difficult for city authorities and property developers to privatise the building today (see also Murawski, 2019).

There are merits of such a focus on property relations in attempting to understand barriers to solidarity in the context of estate regeneration in Poplar. Although in the last few decades there have been numerous tenant and resident-led campaigns across London and Britain challenging attempts to privatise and demolish council and ex-council estates, such campaigns are on a significantly smaller scale to the tenants' activism of the mid-20th century. For example, between 1968 and 1970, thousands of tenants in the East End living in properties owned by the Greater London Council (GLC) were involved in a protracted rent strike, protesting rent rises of up to 70% through which the Conservative controlled council sought to bring council rents in line with those in the private rental market (Moorhouse et al., 1972). Strike activity was particularly concentrated in Tower Hamlets where thirty-four tenants associations, representing residents from different estates in the borough, came together to form the Tower Hamlets Federation of Tenants Associations to coordinate their activities. They were supported in this by local trade union branches and the trades union council, and even the threat of strike action by seven senior shop stewards at the Royal and West India groups of docks in the event that any rent strikers were evicted by the GLC (East London Advertiser, 1969). Such events were in living memory for my Tommy's Tea Rooms interlocutors; recalling his childhood memories of the rent strikes, Wayne contrasted what he perceived as a lack of resistance to contemporary estate regeneration with the apparent militancy of his parents' generation who would "never have put up with this". There would have been "big protests in the streets" he argued, if the council had tried to evict residents like Poplar HARCA are doing now.

EAST LONDON ADVERTISER

Incorporating TOWER HAMLETS INDEPENDENT

No. 5323 FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1969 6d.

RENTS: TENANTS, POLICE IN CLASH

THOUSANDS OF EAST END TENANTS WERE AMONG THE CROWDS OF 'NOT A PENNY ON THE RENT' CAMPAIGNERS WHO MARCHED TO HOUSING MINISTER MR. ANTHONY GREENWOOD'S HAMPSTEAD HOME ON SUNDAY.

'GUERRILLA WARFARE' IN DOCKS

Photo: Kenneth Newman

Pictured with their banners and slogans are these members of the Park View Tenants' Association before they left for Hampstead on Sunday.

3.1 – East London Advertiser during time of 1968-70 GLC rent strike

One could argue, in the materialist vein of the authors cited above, that this contrast is, at least in part, the result of what Murawski (2018b) calls the "recomplexification" of property relations in a post-socialist (or post-welfare state) context. Not only has the number of tenants renting directly from the council in Tower Hamlets dramatically reduced, but residents of the borough are now distributed across at least 7 different types of tenure: 1) "assured" social tenants renting from Poplar HARCA; 2) residents in "temporary accommodation" in buildings owned by Poplar HARCA, often condemned to be demolished, but sometimes renting from a third party housing provider; 3) leaseholders of former council homes who either bought their properties through RTB or on the open market; 4) leaseholders of new-build properties (and therefore not currently subject to compulsory purchase orders); 5) private renters whose landlords have either bought their council properties through RTB or on the open market; 6) shared-ownership leaseholders who own a percentage of their properties while paying rent to the housing association landlord on the rest. 7) Freeholders of non-council-built properties. In the 1960s, one might argue, an injury to one was, very often, an injury to all. Today however, in this complexified network of property relations, the impacts of estate regeneration play out differently depending on one's particular tenure status, potentially making solidarity between residents more difficult to attain.

But while the historical transformation of council housing from a public to a private form of property is certainly relevant to John's critique of those he accuses of "selling off [their] heritage" and my broader concern in this chapter with barriers to solidarity in the context of estate regeneration, the binary of public vs private normally employed in critical discussions of the RTB and its legacies is inadequate in unpacking his intervention. This becomes clear when he goes onto say that "we'll never get that stock back", with the "we" John is referring to not "the public" or "the working class" of prevalent critical accounts of RTB but what he calls the "indigenous people of this area". Evans (2012, p. 20) argues that this discourse of "indigeneity" was pioneered by the far-right British National Party (BNP) in the first decade of the 21st century, seeking to construct a limited 'ethnicised' vision of British identity. This turned "the global game of post-colonial politics… on its head" by construing "indigenous" Britons as the rightful owners and beneficiaries of national resources, against the claims of purportedly non-indigenous others. But regardless of where this particular term comes from, the underlying sentiment - that the council housing stock should be allocated on a communitarian basis, according to one's membership of a local kinship networks and racial/ethnic group - has a much longer history (Carter, 2008; Dench et al., 2008; Evans, 2006; Lowe, 2004).

Moreover, the Marxist insistence on the economic 'base' as "determinate in the last instance" (Althusser cited in Murawski, 2018b, p. 17) is of little use in comprehending the ways in which elements of culture *do not* change even while property relations are transformed. One might argue that John's comments speak to a lag or an inertia in the relations between base and superstructure; despite large changes to the property relations of council housing, other aspects associated with this infrastructure - for example, its material culture and the moral and embodied expectations regarding its allocation and use - persist. Such social, cultural and material intransigence has been analysed by anthropologists in post-socialist settings - for example, Nicolescu (2018) analyses the persistence of socialist work habits and values among former employees of Romanian state-socialist factories, both in post-socialist Romania and after labour migration to Italy. Collier (2011, p. 7) argues that the "mundane systems built to support daily life" in the Soviet industrial city of Belaya Kalitva "proved stubbornly intransigent" in the face of post-socialist transition in 1990s Russia. And Schwenkel (2013, p. 270) describes how long-term residents of a GDR built public housing complex in Vietnam "cling… to the values, sentiments, and promises of social transformation and betterment" that they associate with the building. A comparable body of work focused on contexts beyond the 'eastern bloc' has examined what Muehlebach and Shoshun (2012) call

(borrowing from Lauren Berlant) “post-Fordist affect” (Fennell, 2015; Molé, 2012; Muehlebach, 2011).[43]

In this chapter, then, I attempt to develop an approach to the legacies of RTB in the context of estate regeneration which is attentive to the importance of property relations, but goes beyond a too rigid Marxist conception of economic determination and public-private dichotomies. Towards this end, in the next section I present a largely historical account of the allocation of council housing in the post-war era in Tower Hamlets and other London boroughs, engaging two main texts: the post-war classic sociological study *Family and Kinship in East London* (Young and Willmott (2007 [1957]) and the controversial follow-up study *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict* (Dench et al., 2006). I critically analyse these texts drawing on the concept of moral economy. Rather than premised on a public-private dichotomy, the concept of moral economy helps to elaborate the ways in which norms and obligations work to shape both market and state forms of economic exchange and social provision. But, as notably demonstrated in Dench et al. (2006), the moral economy through which housing was once allocated in the East End has broken down. Despite this, however, I suggest that sentiments associated with this moral economy continue to circulate today. Then, in a subsequent section, I turn to anthropological developments of the concept of moral economies which depart from a strict focus on economic questions, to consider "the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space" (Fassin, 2009, para. 32). I argue that the persistence of moral judgements and emotions associated with a now defunct moral economy of council housing is a barrier to solidarity in the context of contemporary estate regeneration.

From ‘Family and Kinship’ to ‘The New East End’

A “place characterised by continuity of family residence” was how Young and Willmott (2007 [1957], p. 26) described the East End district of Bethnal Green - the site of their now ‘classic’ 1950s sociological study, *Family and Kinship in East London*. In their survey of 396 married people with at least one living parent, 59% of married women and 50% of married men had parents living in Bethnal Green. Among this group, 28% of married women lived in the same

[43] For Muehlebach (2011, p. 62), writing about post-Fordist Italy: “Fordism is thus less helpfully thought of as an era past than as a locus of sensibility and yearning that leaves crucial traces in the neoliberal present. It survives not just in the form of dilapidated industrial ruins that dot the outskirts of cities like Milan but also in the structures of feeling around which social relations and senses of self were organized”.

house or flat, and 23% on the same street. Such family clustering was fundamental to the extended family networks of care and obligation which formed the heart of Young and Willmott's study (and which they so admired). At the heart of this, was the figure of the mother, and particularly the relations between mothers and daughters, who between them kept and managed the home, raised the children and looked after the elderly. Mothers would also go about organising housing for their newly married children by, for example, talking with neighbours and the rent collector about what housing might becoming available. Young and Willmott describe a mutually beneficial arrangement between mothers and the rent collectors who were responsible for placing new tenants. In having someone 'speak for' new tenants, landlords could be reassured that tenants could be depended upon to pay their rent and keep to the rules. In exchange, rent collectors allocating housing ensured that the preference for family clustering was respected.

Even as far back as 1957, however, this system was under threat. Young and Willmott describe the growing role of local councils in local housing which in 1957 owned "nearly a third of the dwellings in the borough" and by 1962 nearly half. "Councils" they argued, "select their tenants by different methods":

> "They give preference to 'slum' dwellers and people who need is judged greatest, not on the grounds of a person's family relationships. The whole complex, informal, intimate, and chancy network of a relative 'speaking for' relative spreads only to the doors of the Town Hall. Inside, and at County Hall, 'speaking for' is not time-hallowed custom, it is nepotism. Although any day you see a large round mother standing with her slim and anxious daughter behind her at the counter of the housing department, in this sphere her voice cannot gain priority for her children. Kindly administrators do their best to see that members of families get rehoused close together. But it is much rarer for Council tenants to be clustered in families, for the mother has none of the special influence with the local authorities that she does with the private rent collectors." (ibid., pp. 41-2)

Almost 50 years later, in 2006, a follow up to *Family and Kinship in East London* was published by the Institute for Community Research - the same institute which commissioned the initial study. Michael Young was again involved, alongside two new authors - Geoff Dench and Kate Gavron (Dench et al., 2006). Again, the authors express concerns about municipal approaches to the allocation of council housing. But while in the 1957 book the concern was with how the new welfare state might undermine pre-existing family networks of care and obligation, in the 2006 restudy a new urgency abounds; this time specifically about

the relationship between council housing allocation and local racial tensions. The book argues that the disruption of a "moral economy" (ibid., p. 4) governing access to public goods such as council housing lies at the "roots of hostility" (ibid., p. 2) expressed by long-standing white residents to Bangladeshi relative newcomers. This argument is constructed through presentation of interviews conducted with long-standing white residents in which frequent complaints are made about a perception that "foreigners" (ibid., p. 181) are given priority for council housing over those who are "born and bred" (ibid., p. 117). The authors interpret these sentiments in relation to a historical account of the evolution of systems for allocating council housing alongside the growth of the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets in the post-war period. Here I present a summary of Dench et al's account, supplemented by additional historical sources before moving onto consider critiques of the book, and an assessment of what contribution it can make to conceptualising council housing in terms of "moral economy".

As was the case in other London boroughs in the post-war period (Burney, 1967; Carter, 2008), new arrivals from Britain's colonies and former colonies were excluded from accessing council housing. In Tower Hamlets in the 1970s this resulted in Bangladeshi families being confined to poor quality housing in the private rented sector. Dench et al. (2006) describe how Bangladeshi men, attempting to ameliorate this situation, began squatting properties in the Spitalfields area of Tower Hamlets, entering into alliances with white squatters involved in counter-culture activities. In 1976 the Bengali Housing Action Group was formed, to coordinate the activities of various smaller squatting groups that had emerged, and to present a united political front advocating for improved housing options for the Bengali community. The activities of BHAG contributed to important reforms to laws and policies informing the allocation of council housing. In 1977 the GLC agreed to help Bangladeshi families with finding housing, and the same year the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was passed which "specified homelessness as the key to public housing entitlement" (ibid., pp. 47-8).

Dench et al present the 1977 Housing Act as a "real turning point" in their story (ibid., p. 47). In making homelessness the key to public housing entitlement, the 1977 act made assessments of housing need paramount. This was now supposed to override previous criteria for entitlement, which the authors summarise in terms of two main principles. The "sons and daughters' principle", as was in evidence in the 1957 study, gave priority in the allocation of housing to the children of council tenants. Dench et al describe this as essentially giving a "collective property right to tenants' families". Meanwhile, the "ladder principle" ensured that "more desirable housing would be reserved for those tenants who

proved themselves more deserving." According to the authors, criteria of 'deservingness' included such things as the length of time one had been on the waiting list for new housing and informal assessments of one's contribution to "neighbourhood affairs".[44] Dench et al argue that under this new system, white families have been less able to demonstrate the same degree of housing 'need' as they generally suffer from lower levels of overcrowding than Bangladeshi families. This has contributed to white families feeling "squeezed out", with many ultimately deciding to leave the area (ibid., p. 58).[45]

The authors then move onto discuss what they describe as the "white resistance" to these changes, manifesting in challenges to the Labour Party's control of the local council in the 1980s and 1990s (ibid., p. 60). Since the inception of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in 1964, the Labour Party had been completely dominant in council elections, winning almost all the seats in elections held between 1964 and 1974. However, the Liberals (later to become the Liberal Democrats) began to challenge Labour hegemony, picking up seven seats in the 1978 local elections and eighteen in 1982 before finally winning a majority on the council in 1986. The Liberals electoral strategy played on white resentments around housing and promised to bring about a return of the sons and daughters' council housing allocation principle.[46] Upon assuming office in 1986 the new administration set about finding ways to get around the stipulations of the 1977 Housing Act and thereby exclude Bangladeshi families from accessing council housing. Dench et al describe how, alongside re-initiating a sons and daughters' scheme to be administered by seven newly devolved 'neighbourhoods', these measures included: housing homeless families in short term bed and breakfast hotels outside of Tower Hamlets rather than in council housing; declaring new arrivals from Bangladesh as having made themselves "intentionally homeless" upon leaving

[44] These observations can be elaborated in relation to historical research conducted on housing provision in the south London borough of Southwark. Carter (2008, p. 162) describes the role of elected Labour Party councillors in handling nominations for council housing and how criteria of respectability were central in the allocation of council housing, with housing visitors "invited to grade the 'quality' of the family to be re-housed, the tidiness of its house, and the condition of its furniture".

[45] Drawing on census data the authors describe how, between 1971 and 1991 "the percentage of children in the white community fell by more than a third". They also argue that there is a "positive association between the deficit in the family class [age 0-17 and 35-54] among the white population and the density of Bangladeshi settlement", with lower number of white families relative to the rest of the white population in the west of the borough than the east of the borough (Dench et al., 2006, p. 58). Frustratingly, however, the authors do not present the figures on which they make these claims, making their validity hard to assess.

[46] Carter (2008) describes a similar phenomenon taking place in Southwark, with wards heavily populated by long standing white working-class residents in the north of the borough switching to the Liberal Democrats from 1986 onwards, leading to the Liberal Democrats becoming the largest party on the council by 2002.

Bangladesh and therefore being ineligible for housing; and offering Bangladeshi families flats on "the worst estates which, when refused, could be used to declare the families intentionally homeless" (ibid., p. 167).[47]

The authors do not condone the actions of the Liberal Democrat administration, but they do not explicitly condemn them either. If anything, their account is rather sympathetic, suggesting that, "[without] openly articulating anti-immigrant sentiments, [the Liberal Democrats] indicated sympathy for the idea of promoting local interests and solutions" (ibid., p. 165). That this sympathy for "local" interests and solutions (by which Dench et al. presumably mean 'white' interests) is shared by the authors is clear throughout the book, and especially in its conclusions. Here they return to and restate their belief in the importance of "informal moral economies in giving ordinary people some power to control their own lives according to their own values" (ibid., p. 230). Echoing the 1957 study, they argue that it is upon such reciprocal networks of support that a "stable social democracy" should be based, which relies upon "a fair balance between what citizens put into society and what they get out of it" (ibid., p. 224). But immigration, they argue, poses a challenge to social democracy. And in a place of high immigration such as the East End, newcomers must be "integrated into a pre-existing moral economy and loop of mutual support" (ibid., p. 224) rather than for those informal systems to be usurped by bureaucratic imperatives constructed around universalist notions of individual need.

While receiving praise from politicians, journalists and other public figures for "[raising] important questions about race relations and the modern welfare state" (Willetts, 2006), *The New East End* has been severely critiqued in academic quarters for its multiple short-comings. Bourne (2006, p. 97) critiques the way that "views of race relations have been completely shorn of the economic and political forces at work in the area" and Moore (2008, p. 365) argues that, in the absence of such an analysis, the authors have "fall[en] back on a rational choice theory" of racism. Weymss (2008) critiques their historical representation of relations between the British Empire and Bengal, which underplays Bangladeshi claims to belonging in the East End. Meanwhile, Keith (2008) and Back (2009) question the authors'

[47] Other measures pursued by the Liberal Democrat administration included, in 1993, moving the homeless persons department "from a racially diverse central location in Bethnal Green locality, to a part of the borough dominated by the White population" which it was much more difficult for minority groups to reach by public transport, and which was an area with a history of racial attacks (Lowe, 2004, p. 210). As summarised by Glyn (2010, p. 999): "under the previous Labour administration housing policy had been both inefficient and discriminatory; however, the Liberals made discriminatory procedures the centre of their community politics, establishing the idea that the Bengali families were a threat to the existing community and did not belong here".

static, reified conceptions of the “white” and “Bangladeshi” communities. For Keith (2008, para. 2.4) in *The New East End* “nostalgia trumps history”: rather than conducted with a critical distance, that might interrogate the “[myths] of entitlement” (Moore, 2008, p. 365) expounded by their white interlocutors, the authors rather elect to “[join] resentful whites on their terrain” (Bourne, 2006, p. 95).

Elements of this critique can be elaborated with reference to Dench et al.’s very limited treatment of the RTB and other legislation which contributed to the reduction of overall council housing provision from the 1980s onwards. As Sarah Glynn (2010, p. 996) has argued:

> “The crucial issue, which the book does not discuss, is that the problem is not the prioritising of those in greatest need, but chronic underinvestment in public housing, which has meant that those in greatest need can only be helped at the expense of those a little better-off.”

As already introduced in chapter one, the RTB was central to this chronic underinvestment, with councils now mandated to sell their council housing stock to individual tenants at a discount of between 30 and 50% off their market value, along with restrictions placed on the ability of local authorities using the money raised to build more housing (Murie, 2016, p. 36). And while the borough became a site of intense new economic activity in the 1980s, with the construction of the Canary Wharf financial district, the fact that this took place on council land that had been handed over to a new London Docklands Development Corporation meant that local municipalities were largely unable to levy redistributive taxes on this business activity. As a result, council house building all but stopped.[48] But rather than engaging with this highly relevant history, the authors demonstrate a perverse fixation with the reforms to housing allocation brought in by the 1977 Housing Act - as if the allocation of housing can only be a zero-sum game.

[48] In Tower Hamlets, in the 30 years following the implementation of the RTB (1980/81 - 2009/10), construction began on only 240 local authority dwellings. New council housing projects have increased slightly over the following decade (2010/11 – 2021/22) with construction beginning on 470 dwellings in Tower Hamlets during this period (DLUHC Table 253, 2022). While between 1980/81 and 1985/86 all new construction is from private enterprise, from 1986/87 onwards social housing built by registered social landlords begins to contribute to the overall picture.

A Moral Economy of Council Housing?

Despite these very significant flaws, however, I suggest that there is still some value in Dench et al.'s description of a deeply embedded "moral economy" concerning the allocation of council housing in east London. The authors' description of the communitarian principles upon which council housing was allocated during the post-war period reflect some of my own interlocutors' stories of how they obtained their tenancies. For example, Wayne told me that, after obtaining his first council tenancy on a 'hard to let' estate with a bad reputation, he was able to move to a better estate after a few years of demonstrating he was a good tenant - including by overpaying his rent each week. He also told me that he was on the sons and daughters' list and seemed to attribute getting his second council tenancy to a combination of the "sons and daughters" and "ladder" principles discussed above. Meanwhile Barry, a resident of the nearby Teviot estate, told me that he "probably wouldn't have got" his flat if he hadn't been involved in various community initiatives such as the Poplar Theatre Workshop and the Teviot Festival. "You're not getting paid, but you're making local connections" he said. In the same interview Barry argued for the merits of the sons and daughters' scheme, according to a logic familiar from *Family and Kinship in East London*:

> "Going back to GLC times they had the son's and daughters' scheme…. And then they said 'it's racist, so we'll get rid of it'. Now you've got the problem of people are getting older and they haven't got a support system around them, because no sons and daughters that live nearby! So it's crazy thinking."

It is impossible to know the precise bureaucratic procedures through which Wayne and Barry actually obtained their council tenancies. But the fact that they themselves attribute some responsibility to the sons and daughters' and ladder principles is important in itself; it demonstrates something of the culture of expectation and entitlement with regard to council housing that my interlocutors grew up within, and which they to some extent continue to hold onto today.

But there are also ways in which Dench et al's conceptualisation of a moral economy of council housing could be productively extended and developed. First, it needs to be extended to include consideration not just the impact of the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, but also RTB. As noted above, the authors of *The New East End* do not consider the impact of legislation promoting the privatisation and residualisation of council housing, such as the RTB, in contributing to the sense of scarcity and competition for public resources articulated by their white interlocutors. Neither do they consider the challenge that

the RTB posed to the moral economy that they sketch out. References to the RTB in the book are few and far between. Perhaps one reason for the relative absence of any discussion regarding this issue is the fact that most of the empirical research for the book was carried out in the 1990s - preceding both estate regeneration initiatives and the sustained boom in London property values which have made the RTB leaseholder a prominent feature of contemporary media debates. Yet even before these events, the RTB was already radically reshaping the ability of long resident people to relocate from the East End, and therefore surely deserved more attention than it is given.

During my fieldwork, in contrast, the legacies of the RTB in reshaping the demographic make-up of the local community frequently came up in conversations with my interlocutors. I presented an example of this at the beginning of this chapter, with John seeming to contrast the principle of council housing as a collective, community resource - to be allocated to the "indigenous people of the area" - with the RTB which he criticised as a means of "selling off your heritage". John was not alone in expressing his disapproval of those making money out of the RTB. For his part Wayne, expressed scepticism that "landlords" renting out properties bought through the RTB were worthy of sympathy now that they were under threat of compulsory purchase. Thus, alongside the shift to a system of council housing allocation based on need, the legacy of the RTB has similarly become a problem within the moral economy sketched out by Dench et al. But rather than causing residents to be divided on the basis of ethnicity and length of residence, this moral economy – as I will come onto show – generates a different set of fissures and tensions depending on how one is positioned economically vis a vis the RTB and estate regeneration.

Second, it is important to tighten our conceptualisation of "moral economy". The authors of *The New East End* use the term in an offhand and rather loose fashion. It appears three times in the book - once in the introduction and twice in the conclusion, and there is no attempt to develop a rigorous conceptualisation of it in relation to the material that they present, nor the expansive literature on the concept. In the introduction the term is used to distinguish between conflicts rooted in the economy, orientated around competition for work - which they note has historically been a pervasive feature of the politics of immigration in the East End - to conflicts pertaining to a "*moral* economy", characterised by new forms of "competition between communities for access to welfare support and public services, including education and, crucially, housing". Here the notion of moral economy seems to refer primarily to *conflicts* arising in relation to the provision and allocation of public goods and services and to discourses of morality and fairness concerning economic distributions. Then in the conclusion the emphasis is on the need for "newcomers … to be integrated into

a pre-existing moral economy and loop of mutual support". Here - in a continuation of some of the concerns of the original 1957 study - the term seems to refer to *substantive economic practices* themselves. This breadth of use of the concept begs the question: is this moral economy something substantive - an *economy* in which some kind of goods or services are exchanged - or does it refer rather to the circulation of discourses of morality and fairness concerning economic distributions?

In a recent anthropological reappraisal Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta (2016) seek to articulate a conceptualisation of moral economy which is able to bridge these two meanings. Departing from more recent uses of the term which are only loosely connected to questions of political economy, they stress the analytical power of a concept of moral economy that brings "class and capital back into the equation" (ibid., p. 413). They emphasise the origins of the concept in the work of the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson. Studying food riots among English peasants in the 18th century, Thompson (1971) proposed the concept to move beyond simple materialist readings of such events as "rebellions of the belly" and sought to bring into consideration the role of norms and obligations in determining when a riot occurred.[49] But while some approaches to moral economy have interpreted Thompson as presenting moral economy as an alternative space to the 'disembedding' force of the market economy, Palomera and Vetta argue that "all economies are moral economies" (Palomera and Vetta, p. 419). The "moral" quality of these economies does not rest on their being 'alternative', 'positive' or 'good' in some normative moral sense, or because they are necessarily associated with a virtuous social actor, but rather rests on the ways in which all forms of economic activity and social reproduction involve an "entanglement of values" (ibid., p. 415).

Palomera and Vetta's re-evaluation of the concept of moral economy can usefully illuminate certain elements of the historical account of "white resistance" given by Dench et al. As analysed by Jennifer Lowe (2004), the return of the sons and daughters' scheme demonstrates how, through appealing to local pluralistic conceptions of justice (in contrast to egalitarian, universalistic conceptions), long-term white residents working in concert with the Liberal Democrats were able to materially shape the allocation of council housing in their favour. As discussed earlier, this built on longstanding historical relationships of patronage and brokerage whereby elected councillors (among others) - following the rent collectors of

[49] Rebellion, Thompson argued, was the assertion of a moral code binding landlords to peasants such that, although a relationship premised on a high degree of inequality and exploitation of the latter by the former, "the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people" (Thompson, 1971, p. 79).

the era of private landlordism - used their positions within the council bureaucracy to allocate housing according to informal and discretionary criteria of deservingness (Carter, 2008; Dench et al., 2006; Young and Willmott, 2017 [1957]).

However, there are also limits to Palomera and Vetta's conceptualisation of moral economy in seeking to account for a moral economy of council housing today. The substantive moral economy outlined above is historical rather than contemporary. In many respects the Liberal Democrat administration, coming to power on the back of white resentments regarding the allocation of council housing, can be seen as the final act in this substantive moral economy. Because in 1986 when the Liberal Democrats won a majority in the council elections, Tower Hamlets Council was already under investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality after complaints for discrimination in its allocation of council housing. As described by Lowe (2004) this then resulted in the issuing of a Non Discrimination Notice in 1988, after the Council was judged to have not responded adequately to its findings. This attempted to force Tower Hamlets Council to change their housing allocation practices through the courts according to universal, egalitarian conceptions of justice. The CRE "vigorously opposed" (ibid., p. 223) the sons and daughters scheme and by 1992 it was, for the most part, discontinued, before being scrapped in 1994 with Labour's victory in the council elections and the return to a centralised housing allocation system. Since then, the principle of council allocation (or more accurately, social housing) based on assessments of need has prevailed, with little in the way of organised challenges to this principle.

This therefore begs the further question: If the substantive moral economy of council housing outline above has, to a large extent, broken down, does it make sense to approach my interlocutors' sentiments about RTB in terms of a contemporary moral economy of council housing? For Palomera and Vetta (2016) - as well as certain other recent anthropological engagements with the concept of moral economy (Alexander et al., 2018) - the importance of this concept resides in its ability to illuminate ongoing contestation in forms of economic exchange marked by structural inequalities. Indeed, for Catherine Alexander, Maja Hojer Bruun and Insa Koch, who specifically engage the question of "the moral economies of housing":

> "The concept of moral economies has all too often been used to assume that a break with, or breakdown of, a previous moral economy has occurred. By contrast, we use the concept of moral economies as a heuristic device to access our informants' demands for housing and how they make sense of their rights to a home in the face

> of political-economic processes and larger political-economic institutions (Alexander et al., 2018, p. 130)."

In contrast, here I am interested less in how my interlocutors' sentiments about RTB and council housing informed ongoing distributional struggles, and more in how a breakdown in a previous moral economy marks the present affectively in such a way as to hinder attempts to construct solidarity in the context of estate regeneration. It is the state of breakdown itself which I am concerned with; a breakdown which I suggest lies at the heart of questions of class loss, whiteness, nostalgia and heritage which run through this thesis.

Didier Fassin's reworking of the concept of moral economy - which Palomera and Vetta (2016) and Alexander et al. (2018) distinguish their approaches from - is helpful here. Reviewing the use of the term across the work of Thompson, the political scientist James Scott, and the historian of science Lorraine Daston, Fassin (2009, para. 47) proposes an approach to moral economy which "takes the moral dimension seriously, even if it means distancing ourselves somewhat from the strictly economic interpretation [of moral economies]". He defines moral economies in terms of "the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space" (ibid., para. 37). In reviewing Fassin's work, Palomera and Vetta (2016) usefully refer to Fassin's definition of moral economy as perhaps better understood in terms of an "economy of morals": The emphasis is on economy insofar as it pertains to the dynamics of production, distribution and circulation *of morals* (and its attendant sentiments emotions, values, norms and obligations) and not 'the economy' as more commonly understood in terms of the production, distribution and circulation of *material resources*. Drawing on his own work on French policing and the dynamics of riots and forms of protest in the *banlieu* and the operation of discourses and practices of humanitarianism within the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Fassin uses the concept of moral economy to attend to the collective social processes through which moral evaluations and judgements take form and shift over time, at varying social scales.

Building on Fassin, I suggest that amidst the breakdown in a substantive moral economy of council housing, a related "economy of morals" has emerged in its place wherein the sentiments, emotions, values, norms and obligations associated with the prior moral economy persist, but no longer function within the substantive economy which governs the allocation of council housing. In this economy of morals, a series of moral judgements are made regarding who is deserving and who is not, who is deserving of sympathy and who is not, who is considered to have breached moral conventions and who has remained within

them. These judgements are accompanied by particular emotional states such as anger and resentment, pride and shame. In the next section I will illustrate this with reference to ethnographic material drawn from time spent with my white working class interlocutors in Tommy's Tea Rooms.

An Economy of Moral Judgement

Anger and Resentment

John was not alone among my Tommy's Tea Rooms interlocutors in blaming RTB for contributing to the breakup and decline of the forms of working-class community in evidence in the Aberfeldy Festival photographs. Jimmy too had strong feelings about this. But while John expressed his feelings unambiguously that February morning in Tommy's Tea Rooms, interjecting into my conversation with Josie to get his point of view across, Jimmy's feelings were more ambivalent and generally only expressed in one-to-one conversations. Perhaps this was partly out of a desire not to offend or get into conflict with friends and acquaintances who held a different opinion. But I believe another part of this stemmed from his own conflicted feelings about this issue; particularly the ways in which these feelings related to his own frustrated sense of powerlessness about urban change, his fraying sense of ownership and belonging within the local community and his pervasive sense of ambivalence about whether to stay involved in initiatives such as ABL or to give up, and perhaps even leave the area for good.

If John's emotional reaction to the topic of people "doing well" out of RTB can be characterised as one of anger, I suggest that Jimmy's can be best characterised in terms of resentment. Resentment was a word that Jimmy himself sometimes used to describe his feelings about urban change and regeneration. For example, on one of our first walks around the local area we came across a woman leading a guided tour of around fifteen people. Jimmy had just been showing me the St Frideswides Catholic Mission building on the Brownsfield Estate, which during his childhood had been run by nuns and doubled up as a kind of youth centre. He had been telling me about how this building was part of the inspiration for the hit BBC television series *"Call The Midwife"* about a group of nuns working as midwives in the East End in the post-war period. The tour-guide was giving a more generic version of the same tour that Jimmy was giving me. My first reaction was to laugh at the irony of the situation, but Jimmy was not so jovial. After the tour had moved along up the road I asked Jimmy how he felt about seeing it. Jimmy paused for a moment to find the right word:

"I… resent it actually" Jimmy replied. "I feel the sense that it's a ruin that they're picking over the remains of… and the kind of culture that sustained that is no more." Struggling to articulate his feelings in the way he would like, Jimmy continued:

> "I feel that something has gone, something has gone. I feel it's gone. I dunno, sorry Rob, I can't, I'm having trouble. [Jimmy pauses]. You know what it is? You know what it is? I can't be bothered to do it myself. That's what it is. I'm trying to self-analyse. I think - I could be doing, possibly doing, that."

For the German philosopher Max Scheler, building on the writings of Friedrich Nietzche, at the core of resentment (or rather the particular form of resentment specified by the French *ressentiment*) is the harbouring of a sense of injury inflicted by another party which one is unable to react upon; for fear of "defeat" accompanied by a "pronounced feeling of 'inability' and 'impotence'" (Scheler 1992: 118). Jimmy's analysis of his own resentment is somewhat similar; locating at least part of the source of his resentment in himself - in his own ambivalent, frustrated desires, simultaneously wanting to do something like give tours of the local area but not being "bothered to do it myself". Of course, there are important social, structural reasons for why Jimmy might feel this ambivalence - as Scheler himself noted and which I will come onto discuss this in more detail later on - but for now I simply want to articulate this basic definition of resentment as a basis for considering Jimmy's feelings about the topic of RTB and urban regeneration in Poplar more broadly.

Resentment is not a word Jimmy used to describe his feelings about RTB, although the feelings he did express were uniformly negative. A little later on the same walk on which we encountered the tour guide, Jimmy and I passed a row of somewhat badly maintained houses, with evidence of the owners having at one point made modifications to the frontages of the sort only leaseholders are allowed to do - for example, bay windows, enclosed porches, different coloured front doors. Jimmy described these features as "the remnants of aspiration" - the original owners having probably moved on, with these properties now rented out privately by landlords with little incentive to keep their properties well maintained.[50] On another occasion, back at his flat, Jimmy expanded on his feelings about RTB, in the context of a discussion about two local history Facebook pages that we were both members of. Jimmy described how a lot of the members on these pages no longer live in the area - a

[50] Jimmy's description of such features as "remnants of aspiration" makes an interesting counterpoint to Daniel Miller's early celebratory analysis of RTB leaseholders "appropriating the state on the council estate" (Miller, 1988).

phenomenon he attributed to RTB. They had most likely “bought their place, sold it for a nice profit, [and moved] out”, he said. And he found it “sad” that:

> “today there might be a hundred people who respond to something [on the Facebook page] - a hundred people that, thirty years ago on a Saturday, would have gone to Chrisp Street Market [and] probably would have said hello to each other.”

Jimmy continued:

> “I do think the Right to Buy has had a real negative impact on communities. I’d imagine that’s not just an opinion that’s probably, an objective statement - that’s what’s happened. What I mean is: The idea that, hundreds of people who lived around here have moved away, impacts negatively on the neighbourhood. We’re social animals, we interact, we need a kind of connectivity. It’s unhealthy to live somewhere where you feel you don’t know people. It’s probably common kind of peer group review literature. There might have been research that, if you live in your neighbourhood and you know three people that’s bad. Thirty years ago I would know a hundred people. Don’t know them anymore.”

Clearly something that regularly occupied Jimmy’s mind, the issue of RTB in relation to the local history Facebook pages was something Jimmy returned to again and again in our conversations. On at least three occasions Jimmy mentioned a phenomena he’d observed on these pages whereby people - generally women of around his age - would post comments along the lines of: “You can take the girl out the East End, but you can’t take the East End out of the girl”. The first time, in the conversation described above, Jimmy just mentioned this is passing, but in subsequent conversations Jimmy expressed his irritation at these posts. On the second occasion Jimmy describes it as a “nonsense” thing to say, before continuing:

> "[But] you can't even say anything [in response because] they flare up, you get quite a bit of abuse if you say something.”

On the third occasion I asked Jimmy to elaborate further on his feelings. Why did he find it annoying when people posted things like that? Jimmy explained that something irritated him about the fact that:

> "Someone who had a council maisonette somewhere around Chrisp Street, ten or fifteen years ago and moved out to Dagenham… will say the East End's changed, it's not like it used to be, and they will be quite critical of how it is now. And yet, they can't seem to understand the irony of what they're saying - they've moved out, and they're very critical of how its changed. And yet they're part of that. It's almost as if they've left it, and they've taken some of it with them, and they've put a flag in the garden: 'the East End is here now'… I might make a comment one day - 'how far does the East End go?'"

While in the first conversation the sentiments Jimmy expressed around the topic of the RTB might be summarised as one of sadness, here I suggest we have something closer to resentment. Jimmy expresses a sense of irritation and perhaps hostility to those who have "bought their place, sold it for a nice profit, [and moved] out", but nonetheless then complain about how the East End has changed. At the same time they are redrawing the boundaries of the 'East End' ever further eastwards into Essex, perhaps giving Jimmy a sense of being left behind. As Jimmy says: "it's almost as if they've left it [the East End] and taken some of it with them". Seeing people post "nonsense" about "you can take the girl out of the East End, but not the East End out of the girl" causes some of these feelings of irritation and hostility to rise up. But it seems that Jimmy does not have an outlet for this hostility. Rather than challenge those who post such things directly Jimmy says that he cannot because people will "flare up", and instead he is left to ponder "one day" making a comment. As Scheler says: *Ressentiment* belongs to those "to whom the real reaction, that of the deed, is denied, who can only indulge in imaginary revenge" (117).

Ressentiment for Scheler is associated with a range of other emotions. These include "*envy*, *jealousy*, and the *competitive urge*" (italics in original). Envy, he explains, is "due to a feeling of impotence we experience when another person owns a good we covet". This feeling becomes envy when it "flares up into hatred against the owner" such that they are "falsely considered to be the cause of our privation". Are Jimmy's feelings of resentment perhaps connected to feelings of envy towards those who have used the RTB to leave Poplar and move to the suburbs, putting a "flag in the garden: 'the East End is here now'"? Jimmy never told me directly that he had wished he had exercised his RTB, but he did express an interest in moving closer to where his parents lived, on the Essex coast. Yet as an unemployed, social housing tenant the only means available to him to do this was to organise a 'swap' with someone living in social housing there; something which significantly limited his options. Jimmy also talked to me about being involved in ABL as perhaps something he was doing to "mitigate the fact that I didn't leave twenty years ago", suggesting a degree of regret over his

choices with regard to RTB. However, I think stronger than envy was a sense of resentment that he had been put in a position, partly by those that had left, to have to start contemplating his own outmigration. Because as he often told me, he valued "continuity":

> “Someone who grows up and lives in the same neighbourhood all their life - is that such a bad thing?".

Pride and Shame

One might be tempted to conclude that it was Jimmy’s status as a social housing tenant that underpinned his feelings of resentment towards those who had exercised their RTB and subsequently left the area. Jimmy’s tenancy status is surely an important aspect to be taken into account in seeking to understand why he feels as he does about the RTB. However, it is not the only relevant factor - there are other social housing tenants who, while subscribing to a similar set of values as Jimmy about continuity of residence and the idea of council housing as a collective resource, nevertheless expressed markedly different feelings about their own relationship to RTB.

A good example of this emerged in a conversation I had with Colin in Tommy’s Tea Rooms. Colin was not a regular visitor to the Tea Rooms or pub during the time of my fieldwork, but I met him on a couple of occasions when Josie was on shift. On one of these occasions we got into a long conversation about my research in which he shared some of his thoughts and feelings about local regeneration. Colin was unusual among my white interlocutors at Tommy’s Tea Rooms in his relatively positive view of Poplar HARCA. He had worked for the housing association in the past on resident engagement, and said that he understood what they were trying to do through urban regeneration; using the money received through selling private accommodation to fund new social housing construction and community provisions. He didn’t agree with others who suggested that Poplar HARCA should be leading the charge in campaigning against the current social housing system - rather, he argued that their job was to get the best deal that they could for existing residents.

As Colin himself admitted, his views were undoubtedly shaped by his own housing situation and direct experience of estate regeneration. He and his wife had recently moved from their socially rented flat on one of the upper floors of a 1960s high-rise tower block to a brand new flat, with large windows and a generous outdoor terrace. The new flat was “beautiful” he said; so much better than their old one which had problems with leaks and windows which

shook in their frames when the wind blew. He relayed to me how his wife kept saying that "we don't deserve it". He disagreed and wondered "where does this attitude come from, that working class people shouldn't have a modern, well-maintained place to live?"

During this conversation Colin talked a lot about his class background and identity. He had grown up on a Peabody Estate in the London borough of Islington in which not only the toilet, but also the sink, was outside. As a mature student he had gone to university, but he hated it when people said that this therefore meant he was no longer working class. Part of this class identity related to his decision not to try to exercise his RTB. As "a good working-class boy" and a "good socialist boy" he said that he had no interest at all in trying to "get on the property ladder" through the RTB, as "everyone is supposed to want to try to do these days". The idea of getting into loads to debt didn't appeal at all. Colin also expressed positive sentiments about other aspects of the local community, such as its multiculturalism. He said that he had "learnt a lot" from his Bangladeshi neighbours with whom, despite their religious differences, he had much more in common with than the likes of Boris Johnson.

Relatively at ease with many of the changes that had taken place in the area over the past decades, Colin expressed a sense of pride in *not* having exercised his RTB. "A good working class boy" and a "good socialist boy" he hadn't succumbed to new social pressures to "get on the property ladder". Perhaps Colin felt as though, in getting his new flat, he had been justly rewarded as someone who had stuck to the principles of the moral economy of council housing, discussed above. And while Colin expressed some sympathy for those being displaced through regeneration and didn't think that should be happening, he suggested that he wasn't particularly motivated to protest: "I'm all for being in solidarity, until someone offers me a nice new flat with a garden - then I'm off!", he joked. Here Colin makes light of the fact that estate residents are differently situated in relation to regeneration schemes and indicates that, ultimately, how he related to the politics of this issue would be driven by his own self-interest. But, delimited by the moral code discussed above, this is a particular kind of self-interest, contrasting with that of those who exercised their RTB. I suggest that Colin only feels able to make light of the self-interest at play in his motivations and actions because he has not contravened the principle of council housing as a collective resource governed by communitarian principles.

For those who *have* exercised their RTB and have therefore, arguably, breached this code, discussions of self-interest are more likely to be accompanied by the inverse of pride, namely shame. This sense of shame around the RTB comes across very clearly in the 2018 documentary film *New Town Utopia* which tells the story of Basildon, Essex; a 'New Town'

constructed in the post-war period in which the vast majority of housing was built, managed and owned by the state in the form of the Basildon Development Corporation (Smith 2018). Notably, Basildon was one of the places people migrated to from the East End in the post-war period and the older interviewees featured still have strong cockney accents and speak of their parents working in the docks. A four-minute segment on RTB is sandwiched between segments on Basildon's status as a "socialist stronghold" during the post-war era, with a high concentration of industrial employment and trade unionism, and its subsequent decline. While the rise and fall of industry is, for the most, part presented as something outside of the control of Basildon's residents, the RTB is conveyed to be something much more intimate, affecting one's relationship to oneself and the local community.

What comes across most strongly in this sequence are the competing tensions experienced by families now given the opportunity to buy their council houses; between on the one hand a broadly socialist common-sense that council housing was a public good that it was important to defend collectively, and on the other hand an opportunity for individual and family 'social mobility'. One interviewee, a middle-aged man sitting in a car recalls, "coming from a very Labour family, I can remember the discussions my mum and dad having. But at the same time, my mum and dad bought their council house, as a lot of people did." In the next shot, a retirement age man and woman are sat on a living room sofa. The man says: "I think it was something you…[were] a little bit ashamed of at the time, you was. You didn't openly broadcast it." A little later on the woman replies: "Everyone's principles were really sorely tested! And that was the thing with Thatcher weren't it really, cos it put that offer on the table and everybody went for it."

I encountered similar sentiments in Poplar. For example Harry, an employee of Poplar HARCA now approaching retirement age, told me that he had lived for most of his working life in a 1st floor flat on the Aberfeldy Estate, before exercising his RTB and subsequently moving out to live in Essex. On mentioning having exercised his RTB Harry added that this was "not necessarily something I agree with [politically] but it's a different thing when its about feeding your family". Harry therefore felt the need to justify having exercised his RTB. And while he was candid with me, in that he revealed that this decision was driven by self-interest, the way in which he expresses his reasoning also gives us a sense of the kinds of accusations Harry might be defending himself against. Thus RTB was a question of "feeding your family" rather than, perhaps, a matter of (bourgeois) economic maximisation and self-interest.

What does it mean to be working class?

Working-class moral discourses regarding housing and place recall Paul Watt's (2021) book length study of estate regeneration in London. Based on extensive interviews with residents across fourteen estates undergoing regeneration, Watt draws a contrast between "working-class" and "middle-class" relationships to place. Watt describes how the former group, comprised of long-term residents of social housing or 'owner-stayers' (who have bought their council homes through the RTB), exhibit what he calls forms of "traditional belonging" to place (ibid., p. 174). This form of belonging puts a high value on long-term continuity of residence, local family and social networks and involves strong place attachments - particularly to the estate itself, its immediate geographical environment and facilities. Middle-class estate residents, meanwhile, are characterised by "elective" and "selective" belonging, exhibiting a greater degree of geographical mobility and having the ability to choose whether or not to put down roots in an area; a decision based not just on what is "functionally important to them" but also what matters symbolically and aesthetically (ibid., p. 17). Watt similarly draws a broad contrast between working-class and middle-class relationships to housing. Building on Allen (2008), Watt argues that the latter group have an "orientation towards housing as a 'space of positions'", keenly aware of - and able to manipulate - the status of housing as a form of economic and symbolic capital. Meanwhile working-class residents, Watt argues, consider housing "primarily as a home, 'a place to live'" (Watt, 2021, p. 173).

Watt draws on this distinction to argue that working-class residents who exercised their RTB, living on estates now affected by regeneration schemes, overwhelmingly did so to secure a long-term place to live. In this way, RTB is presented as a means of "enhancing place belonging" (ibid., p. 175). Watt doesn't deny that these residents were also motivated by economic advantages - with mortgage repayments often cheaper than rent, for example - but stresses that this economic self-interest is distinct from "playing the housing market" in which "making a short-term gain and moving on" is a primary objective (ibid., p. 174). To support this point Watt presents interviews from leaseholders, including that of a black African couple threatened with compulsory purchase on the Ayelsbury Estate who contrast their own desire for a "home" with the anonymous buyers and sellers of a row of desirable, red brick ex-council houses opposite. Watt suggests that the idea of being "on a property ladder… was alien to them" (ibid., p. 174) and presents this as a generalisable disposition towards housing among working-class residents of social housing estates.

Watt's characterisation of a distinctly working-class form of "traditional place belonging" and associated attitudes towards RTB resonates with much of the ethnographic and historical material that I have so far presented in this chapter. I would agree that such class-based dispositions to place and housing exist, and that such a distinction can be a useful heuristic for capturing the experience of estate residents living through regeneration. However, as Caterina Sartori (n.d.) has argued in relation to her own research with leaseholders on the Ayelsbury Estate, motivations for exercising the RTB can be complex and multifaceted, traversing the distinction Watt draws between RTB as an affective investment in place and a financial investment in property. And in the case of white British leaseholders specifically, we need to go further: it is not just that motivations for exercising can be complex and multifaceted but presenting too rigid an analytical dichotomy between "working-class" and "middle-class" orientations to housing and place risks eliding an issue at the heart of RTB, namely, how it has worked in practice to undermine such firm categorisations. Notably Watt does not include interviews with people who exercised their RTB and left the area of their own accord; those who Jimmy describes as having "bought their place, sold it for a nice profit, [and moved] out". Without detailed empirical research it is not possible to posit conclusively the extent to which economic calculation played a role in this process of outmigration, but to assume that working-class people are somehow not possible of thinking in this way is far-fetched.

In my limited experience with RTB leaseholders who had moved to the suburbs, economic motivations were important to their reasoning for exercising their RTB. For example, Barry, introduced above, was at the time of my fieldwork living between a bungalow in suburban Essex and his flat on the Teviot Estate. Far from being reticent about the economic motivations of the RTB Barry described to me how, in the 1980s, he had watched the towers of the Canary Wharf financial district rising over Poplar and thought to himself, "I'm going to make a killing here". Fast forward thirty years and Barry still hadn't sold his flat (this was perhaps related to the fact that he had more or less gutted the place) but he was looking forward to receiving his compulsory purchase compensation as part of the Teviot estate regeneration. In the meantime, he was "refurbing it for evaluation", slowly installing a brand-new kitchen so that he would be able to get the maximum sum possible out of the compulsory purchase process. I came to know Barry outside of Tommy's Tea Rooms and this wasn't a space that he frequented, and it is perhaps Barry's status as half in and half out of Poplar which contributed to the apparent lack of concern for how his actions might be judged by others. Meanwhile Wayne - while not talking about his own motivations for the RTB in these terms - told me about a friend of his who had sold his leasehold property and moved to Wales. Here he has been able to buy a house for a fraction of the cost of what he

had sold his London property and was using the remaining capital to fund an affluent lifestyle.

Watt's distinction between "working-class" and "middle-class" orientations to place and housing therefore has some significant analytical limitations if employed in an overly rigid manner. But what should hopefully be clear by now is that these aren't solely analytical distinctions, but also moral ones. In the context of estate regeneration, where RTB leaseholders find themselves under threat of compulsory purchase, someone's motivations for having exercised their RTB operate as criteria of deservingness. If it can be demonstrated a person's investment in council housing aligned with - rather than contravening - the moral code stipulating that council housing is a collective resource premised on ensuring continuity of family residence, they are more deserving of sympathy than if it were determined that their uptake of the RTB was driven by "middle class" economic self-interest. In this way, in attempting to amplify the voices of his informants in the mode of the scholar-activist, Watt's analysis reproduces elements of the moral economy of council housing outlined above.

Something of this dynamic was at play in my conversations with Wayne on the topic of RTB. It wasn't until seven months into our relationship that I finally had an in-depth conversation with Wayne about RTB and its legacies. Until that point, our conversations on housing were always organised around Wayne's own story of displacement (as told in the previous chapter) in which he was keen to emphasise how working-class leaseholders such as him had been betrayed by the Labour Party and local council. Here the moral and political question of RTB was subsumed within the moral and political question of compulsory purchase and displacement. But towards the end of an extended interview recorded while driving around east London in his car, I was able to get Wayne to expand on his views on the topic.

Responding to a comment he made about Canary Wharf not being "working class friendly" when it was first built, I asked him "what does it mean to be working-class?" His response had much in keeping with Watt's concept of "traditional place belonging". Sandwiched between talking about how being working class was to be excluded "from the most important [and highly paid] jobs in society" and was about "suffering some form of deprivation" or being at risk of it, Wayne stressed that being working-class was "to be part of a community":

> "A proper proper working-class community, where everybody looks out of each other, we're not stabbing each other in the back, we've got time for each other, and also

you've got time for total strangers. I'll give you an example. Yesterday when I was at work, I saw a woman in a wheelchair, she couldn't get in the shop across the road, so I run out of work, went across the road, and I helped her into the shop, I got the shop worker for her. I can't see people of other classes doing that really, they're too busy in their life to get on with stuff."

Wayne then talked about how this traditional place belonging and attachment was threatened by the compulsory purchase process. Thus being working class is:

> "Also a mentality that you know where you come from, you know what your roots are, and you have a connection to the local landscape as well. This is why my dad is finding it so difficult, he's got more attachment to the local landscape than I have, he's been here longer, he's not had the same opportunity to travel that I have. I've got an attachment to it, don't get me wrong, although I'll move it's still going to be a massive wrench for me, but I realise it's got to be done. It's gotta happen. I don't want it to happen, but it's gotta happen. So being working-class is being very attached to your roots, your family, in a way that maybe other classes don't have that kind of relationship."

At this point we stopped the recording to have lunch. When we resumed I asked Wayne how RTB related to the this question of what it means to be working class:

> "Right to Buy wasn't a bad thing per se. What was wrong was the reason why people used it. Certain people used it as an escape, to get out the area. To buy their places really cheap and after three years, after the legal terms had expired, you could then sell your place. And if you got seventy percent off your property, and say it was worth – I dunno – two-hundred-thousand, and you got a hundred-and-forty-thousand – a hundred-and-fifty-thousand even – off. You could get a mortgage and you could pay your place off within a couple of years, maybe five years, and then you could move on to wherever you wanted. Cos at that time two hundred grand could buy you a really nice place in Romford, Dagenham or even further, anywhere up to Southend. So if you were just doing it for... capitalist reasons, or to improve your dream, or... if you had no affinity to the area, then you basically bought and sold and ran. Cut and run basically.
>
> My father and I bought the premises at Aberfeldy Street for a couple of reasons. First reason is - we wanted to stay in this area, that was our plan, my dad obviously

wanted to stay. And we thought that if we bought the premises, we could get it cheap and we wouldn't haven't to pay any rent so we could lead a rent-free lifestyle which I quite liked, not giving various organisations money every month or week just to live in our property. So we bought it - I bought it for him, took a loan out, won't say how much it was, it was pretty cheap, and that was it - the idea was my dad was going to live it until he died, and then I'd take over, and that would be me. And then when I died, I'd hand it on to my sisters and we'd keep the house in the family. It was a three-bedroom maisonette. OK decorated - fine. Structurally sound. And the whole idea is, we bought it cos we wanted to live in the local area. So that's what we did, bought the place, my dad lived in it for god knows how many years - I bought it twenty years ago I think. And he lived in it twenty plus years before that... The whole idea was he was gunna have it until he died, and then I'd move in. I had to move in cos I lost my job, which was fine. And the same plan applied.... so the whole reason to buy the place was to live rent free. I didn't like the idea to pay capitalist landlords all this money just to live in the same place. So, that was good. But then obviously Poplar HARCA came along and compulsory purchased us."

Wayne then reiterated the story of his compulsory purchase before returning to the topic of RTB:

> "Right to Buy is good if you go for it for the right reasons. If you're a local person who wants to stay local, you want to retain the house in your family, you wanna live there... it's a wonderful thing. It enables people to retire early, you're not paying rent, once your mortgage is paid you're done. The only thing you've got to worry about is the service charges which registered social landlords are using as a form of income … At the end of the day, the dream of living there rent free, having a pension, retiring with a bit of excess cash after my dad working all his life and me working all my life was just taken away, the rug was pulled under our feet by Poplar HARCA, they just said 'no you can't have this place, you've got to sell it'. And Tower Hamlets council - Labour council, Labour councillors, Labour mayor, Labour MP - completely agreed, so, there you go."

Wayne's response resonates with Watt's dichotomy of middle-class and working-class orientations to place and housing, but now Wayne talks about two groups of working class people: Those who exercised their RTB for the "wrong reasons… as an escape, to get out of the area" and to make money in the process - what Wayne called "capitalist reasons" - and those who, like him and his father, had used it primarily to "stay in this area". With talk of

“right” and “wrong” reasons for exercising RTB it is clear that Wayne is making a moral distinction. And he does so with an awareness that others also make moral distinctions and judgements about the RTB, with me prefacing my question with an explicit mention of “people’s different perspectives” on the issue and how I’d “heard from quite a few people that actually it’s had quite a negative impact on Poplar”.

We must therefore approach Wayne’s answers about his orientation to place and housing in the context of the economy of moral judgement that I have outlined in this chapter. Indeed, Wayne’s responses here might be thought of as *justifications* through which Wayne draws a moral distinction, with himself on the side of ‘right’ and anonymous others on the side of ‘wrong’. Estate regeneration forces leaseholders like Wayne to justify their continued presence in the area. In this work of justification Wayne emphasises some aspects of his story over others. For example, the fact that he had previously bought and sold a property through RTB - making what he candidly told me on another occasion was “a bit of money, but not a lot” - before moving back in with his dad, is not mentioned here. To do so would perhaps risk the accusation: “selling off your heritage”.

Conclusion: Infrastructural breakdown, negative solidarity

Taking together, the sentiments expressed by my Tommy’s Tea Rooms interlocutors about RTB can be seen to form an economy of moral judgements, emerging - I argue - out of the breakdown of a historically powerful moral economy of council housing. John expresses anger towards those who have profited from a collective resource, accusing them of “selling of your heritage”. Jimmy expresses sadness and something close to resentment towards those who have “bought their place, sold it for a nice profit, [and moved] out”. Colin meanwhile emits a sense of pride at having been allocated a beautiful new flat and how this demonstrates that one doesn’t need to engage in the middle-class game of property ownership in order to be rewarded with a good place to live. Harry and Wayne, on the other hand, if not going so far as to express a sense of shame, are keen to justify their use of the RTB, with Wayne contrasting his actions, based on a working-class morality constructed around place and family obligations, to the “capitalist reasons” of unnamed others who exercised their RTB in order to make money and leave the area.

If the moral economy of the English crowd analysed by E.P. Thompson brought a working class together in rebellion against what was deemed the unfair or immoral pricing of grain, this economy of moral judgements circulating around the question of RTB in the context of estate regeneration works in the opposite direction. Rather than solidarity and collectivity,

the emotions of anger, resentment, pride and shame which are generated within this economy of moral judgements emphasise forms of inequality and divergent interests. We might go so far as to say that, rather than solidarity, this economy of moral judgements is more likely to generate "negative solidarity" (Williams, 2010; Read, 2019): an affective dynamic in which the experience of collective injury does not spur collective solidarity but rather a desire to see others brought down to (or below) one's own 'level'. I do not mean to overstate this point - such a dynamic of negative solidarity is not particularly in evidence in the ethnographic material I present here. But I suggest that it is in this direction that the economy of moral judgements operates and is therefore something that efforts to create forms of solidarity in the context of estate regeneration today – as discussed in the last chapter - must work against.

To return to some of the concerns with which I began the chapter, from the ethnographic material presented it is possible to discern a relationship between the sentiments expressed by my interlocutors regarding RTB and their tenure status. Thus, John's anger can be understood in relation to his not having exercised a RTB a council property, but having had suffered the consequences of what he saw as the resultant dismantling of the community. Jimmy's sadness and resentment corresponds to his being a social tenant who now faces leaving the area as a result of losing his sense of ownership and belonging to where he lives, but does not benefit from the same freedom to move as those who own ex-council leaseholds. Colin's pride is connected to having materially benefited from estate regeneration in the form of a new, "modern" place to live. Conversely, Wayne's attempts to reclaim a sense of pride through Tommy's Tea Rooms, and his accusations of betrayal and the hands of the Labour Party and local council can be interpreted in relation to the ways in which the compulsory purchase process works to strip leaseholders of agency, as well as a defence against potential accusations of his own culpability in the fragmentation and disempowerment of the community as one of those who did choose to exercise his RTB.

Following Murawski's (2018b) advocation for anthropologists of infrastructure to pay greater attention to property relations, we might posit that my interlocutors varied *economic* relations with social housing determine the kind of sentiments that they express with regards to RTB. However, as I have shown, these economic relations are mediated - historically and today - through a *moral* economy which is not reducible to orthodox Marxist formulations of base and superstructure. The sense of justice and injustice my interlocutors feel about the transformation of council housing through housing policies such as RTB, and thus the ways in which they act in relation to this, unfold in relation to a set of economic, historical and cultural determinants which cannot be reduced to a public-private binary.

Key to this moral economy, and the economy of moral judgements that it gives rise to today, are racial distinctions and exclusions. Thus the economy of moral judgements I have mapped out in this chapter is specific to my white, working class interlocutors. I did not detect its operation among the few interlocutors of Bangladeshi ethnicity whom I spoke to about the topic of RTB. For example, Aaraf, a youth worker with a number of different local business interests, told me that RTB gave him his “start” as a businessperson. Over time he had been able to purchase the leasehold on four ex-council properties which he rented out. He did not betray any of the sensitivity or defensiveness on this topic that my white, working-class interlocutors did; he was much more matter of fact. That said, Aaraf was keen to tell me about how he endeavoured to be a fair landlord, charging rents that he was sure that his tenants could afford to pay, donating some of the money that he made to charity, and even starting work on a project to build social housing in Bangladesh, in his family’s village. Further empirical research would need to be carried out to come to any firm conclusions about what this says about orientations to RTB more generally among Poplar residents of Bangladeshi ethnicity. But the general sense of ease about the topic among the few people I spoke to was in keeping with what one might expect given the historical exclusion of immigrants from Britain’s colonies from the substantive moral economy of council housing in operation in the post-war period: The RTB did not represent the same challenge to their conceptions of what council housing ‘ought’ to be.

Chapter 4: Urban Restoration

The previous three chapters have been primarily concerned with excavating the histories of whiteness and class loss informing my white, working-class interlocutors' relationship to urban regeneration. From Jimmy's archive to Tommy's Tea Rooms, this has entailed an ethnographic focus on relatively bounded, intimate environments where white, working-class people and their specific conceptions of heritage predominate. Across these chapters I have endeavoured to engage with my interlocutors' concerns seriously and sympathetically, while maintaining a critical attention to the ways in which formations of class inequality intersect with those of race. Such sympathy is not something that I have found difficult to sustain; I developed good relationships with my core group of white, working-class interlocutors and shared political affinities. Contrary to dominant stereotypes of the 'white working-class racist', I found my interlocutors to be open-minded, insightful and non-racist. While they might have been nostalgic for a historical moment in which white racism exerted a stronger hold over the local area, this does not mean that what they specifically desired was a return to heightened white supremacy.

This is not to say, however, that questions of heritage were not articulated with racism and racialised forms of exclusion in Poplar during my fieldwork. This chapter branches out from the small community that gathered around Tommy's Tea Rooms to consider how questions of heritage and whiteness are entangled within larger scale projects of urban regeneration in Poplar. Through an examination of contestation around the redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market - the biggest live regeneration issue during the time of my fieldwork - I show how the decaying materiality of the market, practices of heritage and discourses of "decline" entwine to generate a form of urban regeneration premised on the exclusion and erasure of Bangladeshi claims on the market and the East End more broadly.

In the previous chapter I distinguished my approach to council housing as an "affective infrastructure" from the use of this concept by scholars such as Alice Street and Hannah Knox. There, rather than primarily concerned with its material qualities, I was interested in the affectivity of council housing primarily as it pertained to questions of property ownership, tenure and moral economy. Conversely, in this chapter I pick up and develop Street's use of the term affective infrastructure in relation to the affectivity of Chrisp Street as a run-down, decaying and 'historical' marketplace. Building on Anne Stoler's concept of "imperial debris",

Street (2012, p. 48) analyses how a public hospital in Papua New Guinea, hailed upon its opening in 1961 as a “monument of modernity” (48) but since allowed to fall into a deteriorated state, impresses feelings of “disappointment and dismay” (ibid., p. 53) on those who inhabit it today. This is accentuated by the building of new, private hospital wards on the same site: while the hospital management express the view that new building projects will improve staff morale, Street shows how the contrast between the private and public hospital wards in fact accentuates feelings of disappointment, with the hospital “now caught up in an endless dialectic of hope and failure” (ibid., p. 50). In this way, Street argues that attention to the “layered effect of the postcolonial landscape” demonstrates how “enduring racial and class inequalities” are experienced by those who inhabit it (ibid., p. 44).

Following Street (2012), Chrisp Street Market can also be seen as an “affective infrastructure” through which enduring racial and class inequalities are experienced by its users. But beyond this, I argue, this affective infrastructure is also involved in the active perpetuation of these inequalities through the ways in which the affects generated by the material spaces and architectural forms of the market place feed into contestation around the redevelopment proposals. More specifically, drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2004) concept of “affective economies”, I examine how these affects were channelled into a campaign in support of the regeneration proposals, articulating a broadly experienced sense of the market’s material decline with a racialised concern for ‘heritage’.

The activation of this affective infrastructure challenges scholarly attempts to claim traditional retail markets as distinctive sites of “convivial multiculture” (Gilroy, 2004). The sociologist Alex Rhys-Taylor (2018, p. 129) has recently made this argument regarding the markets of east London in his innovative multi-sensorial study of food and multiculture. While acknowledging that east London’s markets have, over the course of their history, been subject to “incursions” by the far-right, and continue to host forms of white racism and resentment today, Rhys-Taylor is optimistic that the material spaces of markets themselves - and the forms of exchange across difference that they facilitate - are generally conducive to the formation of a “culture” of the East End based around a “pragmatic amenability to difference”. In contrast, I show that while Chrisp Street Market can, to some extent, be said to host forms of fragile convivial multiculture, this sits atop deeply embedded histories of whiteness and racism which threaten to topple it at any moment.

This affective infrastructure also challenges the general tenor of much of the writing about resistance to gentrification in Britain, and London particularly. This tends to divide the terrain of contestation into two main sets of actors: property developers and their municipal

enablers on the one side, working-class residents at risk of displacement on the other (eg. Mould 2018b). But as we shall see, at Chrisp Street Market the assembled actors did not conform to this model, with a campaign against the regeneration proposals led by Bangladeshi shopkeepers and traders met with a counter campaign - at the orchestration of Poplar HARCA - which saw predominantly white residents coming out in favour of the regeneration proposals. In this chapter I explore how and why this was the case, thereby contributing to efforts expand and refine critical attention to racial inequalities and power structures in the generally class-focused literature on gentrification.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part, 'Markets and Multiculture', situates the regeneration proposals for Chrisp Street Market within research literatures on "retail gentrification" and scholarship which has examined the various social and economic functions of traditional retail markets in working class urban areas. This includes arguments about markets as sites for the creation of "convivial multiculture". I explore the extent to which this applies to Chrisp Street Market, emphasising how recent histories of white hostility and violence towards the Bangladeshi presence at the market continue to mark the present affectively. In part two I relay the story of contestation over the regeneration proposals at Chrisp Street Market, from the time that I first was introduced to the market in the summer of 2015 by a group of white housing activists, to the eventual passing of the regeneration plans by the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee in July 2018. I attend to the ways in which 'heritage' became an important terrain on which both campaigns for and against the regeneration plans were fought, and how this ultimately worked to delegitimate Bangladeshi claims of ownership and belonging within the market, polarising the local population into two racialised collective bodies. In part three, drawing on fieldwork undertaken in 2019, I seek to uncover the precise mechanisms and materialities through which this polarisation took place. I show how white racism, articulated around fears of a Bangladeshi 'take over' of the market was one element of this - notably one which was allegedly encouraged by agents working on behalf of the housing association. But I also show how, through the ways in which discourses and practices of heritage constructed the problem of the market's material decay and decline, a broader white constituency (beyond those who articulated explicitly racist sentiments) was mobilised in support of the regeneration proposals.

4.1 – Procession of the cross, Chrisp Street Market

4.2 – Procession of the cross, Chrisp Street Market

Part 1: Markets and Multiculture

“Good Friday”, 19th April 2019.

Led by a man carrying a large wooden cross on his shoulder and a boy banging a mistimed rhythm on a small hand-drum, around fifty people walk around the perimeter of Chrisp Street Market. Members from eight local churches are taking part in an inter-denominational “procession of the cross” (marking the crucifixion of Christ, preceding his resurrection on Easter Sunday). At various points along the way the assembled group stops to sing a hymn or say a prayer, each led by a representative of a different church. Meanwhile, underneath the shelter of an enclosed walkway linking the pedestrianised market square to the East India Dock Road, a group of women are toasting hot cross buns on a gas barbecue and handing them out to passers by.

Spanning Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and Salvation Army denominations, the assembled group encompass people of a wide range of ages and ethnicities - particularly people of white British/Irish and black African/Caribbean appearance. All around them, regular users of the market go about their shopping and socialising. In the centre of the pedestrianised market square, male Bangladeshi market stall traders sell fruits, vegetables and household items to women in hijabs and niqabs, some pushing prams. Groups of middle aged and elderly white people, a high proportion in wheelchairs, sit outside the various food stalls that line the perimeter of the market. A couple of teenagers - one white, one black - whizz around on BMXs.

The congregation finishes its loop, stopping for a final series of prayers and hymns next to where the women have been giving out hot cross buns. I notice that a white woman in a wheelchair has moved from her usual position outside a food stand to get closer to the assembled group. Sensing an opportunity to strike up a conversation I go to stand next to her.

“This doesn’t happen every day, does it?” I begin.

“It’s really nice isn’t it?” she replies, smiling. She shows me a printed out list of all the services happening over the Easter Weekend across the various local churches.

“Are you part of any denomination?” I ask.

“No no” she says shaking her head, perhaps a little bemused.

The group begin to recite the Lord's Prayer. "Oh I like this one" she says, before joining in the recitation. My boyhood years of going to Roman Catholic mass every Sunday come in handy as I decide to join in too.

The prayer finishes. "Oh this is lovely isn't it? Everyone is getting involved" she says.

"I think this market is really great generally" I reply. "It's got a really nice atmosphere".

"Yeah it does", she agrees, before continuing: "it doesn't matter your colour, nation, creed. Everyone gets along here. We're all just getting through life, rubbing along together. I don't think there's any racism here or anything like that". She pauses for a moment, "but it's coming down - have you heard?", she says gesturing to the buildings in front of us. "They're redeveloping it all and this is all going to go".

"I had heard. I hope people are able to hold on".

"No… I've seen it before". She mentions Watney Market and another market, the name of which I didn't catch. "That's all gone now".

Someone comes over and asks us if we want a hot cross bun, dripping with butter. We take one each.

"You'd be surprised how many people just come here to find support" she continued.

"To meet people they know?"

"Yeah, exactly", she nods.

Our attention turns back to the assembled crowd as they begin a rendition of the hymn "Amazing Grace".

Prospects for Multi-Ethnic Solidarity Amid Retail Gentrification

In chapter two we saw how Wayne and others' attempts to build "community cohesion" through a community cafe which also doubled up as a pub - The Tommy Flowers - limited the extent to which these efforts could involve the Aberfeldy Estate's large Muslim population. Such a lack of shared social infrastructures appeared to be a barrier to building forms of solidarity across Poplar's multi-ethnic working-class population in the context of gentrification induced displacement. But might Chrisp Street Market perhaps comprise one

such social infrastructure? As the above ethnographic description attests, it certainly is used by a wide variety of local people. And it is possible to find people at the market who want to celebrate this fact; the white woman I spoke to at the market on Good Friday 2019 stating: “It doesn’t matter your colour, nation, creed. Everyone gets along here. We’re all just getting through life, rubbing along together.” She paints a picture of the market as a space where everyone might feel welcome, and where people in need might go to “find support”.

Going with the grain of this woman’s testimony one might develop a critique of the redevelopment proposals for Chrisp Street Market in terms of “retail gentrification” (Gonzalez and Waley, 2013; Gonzalez, 2017; Hubbard, 2019). A decade ago Gonzalez and Waley (2013) identified traditional retail markets - “indoor and outdoor markets selling food, household goods, clothing and the like” - as a “new gentrification frontier”. A long-standing feature of towns and cities across Britain, these traditional retail markets have suffered from decades of disinvestment, leading to their classification by local authorities as in need of modernisation - a process which normally involves rent rises alongside efforts to generate a different retail “mix”. Such processes threaten to displace traders, and in turn the people who rely on them for affordable and culturally specific produce. Retail gentrification is often connected to broader regeneration projects which also entail residential gentrification. Indeed, at Chrisp Street Market the regeneration proposals involve attempts to make the retail offer appeal to a more affluent clientele, alongside the construction of hundreds of new units of private housing on a site which, at present, is predominantly populated by social tenants, ex-council leaseholders and precarious private renters.[51]

The literature on markets as sites of retail gentrification has emphasised how such processes threaten the important functions that such markets offer to their predominantly working class and ethnic minority clientele and tradespeople. These valued functions include access to affordable goods and opportunities to trade them, but also extend beyond the narrowly economic to encompass markets as important sites of sociality, belonging and citizenship (Dines, 2007; Hall, 2021; Watson, 2009a). Research conducted in London and other large British cities has emphasised this in relation to ethnic minority groups particularly.

[51] On the residential side: the plans involve the construction 649 housing units: 163 social rent, 37 shared ownership and 443 private sale. The number of social housing units will be slightly increased but the vast majority of new housing built on the site will be for private sale.
On the retail side, ground floor shop units will be refurbished, with the addition of a new community hub, cinema, restaurants and market canopy. The plans emphasise the development of a night time economy to complement the existing retail offer (Poplar HARCA, 2020b).

For example, Suzanne Hall (2021, p. 1) examines retail markets as a space characterised by what she calls the "migrant paradox" in which the figure of the migrant is caught between "the brutal contradictions of border-preserving politics and border expanding economics". In keeping with Hall's insistence on street markets in Britain's deindustrialised cities as being characterised by histories of migration, displacement and emplacement, recent contestation around proposals to redevelop and retail markets in London has seen ethnic minority groups come to the fore, with campaigns emphasising the particular ethnic identity or multi-ethnic character of markets under threat. For example, the long-running campaign against the redevelopment of Wards Corner in the northeast London borough of Haringey has stressed the importance of this indoor marketplace as a meeting place and source of livelihood for the local Latin American community. This is reflected in the campaign tactics employed, with the redevelopment proposals being successfully challenged at the Court of Appeal in 2010 for failing to comply with equalities legislation which requires planning authorities to consider the impact of proposals on ethnic minority groups (Gonzalez and Dawson 2017, p. 65). Meanwhile, at Queen's Market in the east London borough of Newham (adjacent to Tower Hamlets), Nick Dines (2007, p. 269) describes how campaigners saw "the multi-ethnic composition of the market… as a key resource for mobilising support for the campaign" against proposals to redevelop it into a shopping centre dominated by a large supermarket. He contrasts the campaigners' "embodied, everyday experience of ethnic diversity" with the developer's "disembodied, supra-quotidian vision" (ibid., p. 270) of diversity, arguing that part of the reason for the success of the Friends of Queens Market campaign lay in how the embodied, working class "convivial multi-culture" (Gilroy, 2004) of the market informed a "rooted opposition" to the redevelopment (Dines 2007, p. 264).

Like all other working-class retail markets in London, Chrisp Street is ethnically diverse. The extent to which it hosts forms of multi-ethnic solidarity in the context of gentrification is, however, a different question. Contestation around the proposed regeneration of the estate - from the time that the first details of the plans emerged in 2015 to their ratification by the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee in 2018 - saw the emergence of not one but *three* distinct campaigns; two in opposition and one in favour. The first campaign, spanning 2015 and 2016, was initiated by white housing activists involved with the London-wide Radical Housing Network. A public meeting was held in October 2015, with speakers from other London-based housing campaigns - including that of Friends of Queens Market - but the campaign fizzled out with delays in Poplar HARCA publishing their plans for the redevelopment and a lack of local leadership willing to take things further. Then, in early 2018, just as the proposals for Chrisp Street Market were due to be finally heard by the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee a second campaign emerged. Spearheaded by a group

of Bangladeshi shopkeepers, this campaign was much better rooted in the sociality of the marketplace and succeeded in its aim of having the plans deferred until the summer, with Poplar HARCA required to respond to committee members concerns about the “delivery of affordable housing, the public consultation, car parking and the proposed concentration of food and drinks uses” (Ackerman and O’Mahony, 2018). However, this was not the end of the story. In advance of the subsequent July planning meeting, at which revised proposals would be considered, Poplar HARCA orchestrated a counter-campaign - “we say yes to Chrisp Street Market” - succeeding in drawing support from predominantly white traders and users of the marketplace. At a noisy and at points bad tempered planning committee meeting, supporters of each campaign, wearing opposing green and white specially printed T-shirts, jostled for entry and held up signs for and against the plans. This time the planning application passed unanimously with only slight modifications.

4.3 – Tower Hamlets Council Planning Committee meeting, 2018 (Mike Brooke / East End Advertiser)

What we have here, therefore, is far removed from the binary story of the people versus the developers which generally structure discussions of resistance to gentrification. Rather than solidarity along lines of class, contestation around the regeneration of Chrisp Street Market saw the campaigns split along ethnic lines. Hopes that the 2018 campaign against the regeneration proposals was evidence that “London is finally fighting back against

gentrification" (Mould 2018b) - as the headline of one article argued - were short lived and, in turns out, out of keeping with the dynamics on the ground.

While some literature on traditional retail markets in London has characterised them as sites of "convivial multiculture" (Dines, 2007; Rhys-Taylor, 2013; 2018) - a concept developed by Paul Gilroy to describe "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere (Gilroy, 2004, p. xi)" - other scholarship has stressed markets as sites of embedded forms of white resentment and racism. Wells and Watson (2005) deconstruct what they call a "politics of resentment" in the "talk" of shopkeepers in an anonymised multicultural London neighbourhood. Far from celebrating everyday multiculture, "multiculturalism" is seen by the shop keepers to have contributed to an increasing sense of disorder and loss of their social position. The authors show how the shopkeepers' interview responses demonstrate a conception of legitimate belonging to place based on three overlapping criteria: being Anglophone, being Christian and being white.[52]

I encountered similar sentiments when talking with white shopkeepers, stallholders and shoppers at Chrisp Street Market. For example, at a food stand selling traditional 'Cockney' East End cuisine I had a long conversation with the proprietor and her friend and co-worker - both in their 50s or early 60s. This initially revolved primarily around the proprietor's complaints about how the regeneration of the market had been handled by Poplar HARCA and her reflections on how the market had declined over the decades in terms of footfall and upkeep (her family having run the stall since 1951). But after a break, the conversation took on a more racialised tenor, with increased contributions from the co-worker. They moved from complaints about the management of the market to complaints about what had changed "culturally". They argued that, previously, non-white immigrants had "wanted to mix" with the broader community, but now "they don't want to mix", "don't want to speak English", and "don't want to talk to you". After clarifying that I was indeed "English", the language used by the co-worker became increasingly severe, suggesting that immigrant groups "were destroying our culture" and expressing sympathy for the far-right activist Tommy Robinson.[53]

[52] While the latter criterion is complicated by the shopkeepers' habit of extending 'Englishness' to specific non-white, Anglophone and Christian people, Wells and Watson (2005, p. 270) argue that the "inclusion of some black people" operated primarily to "reinforce the exclusion of other black and Asian people".

[53] I was surprised at how open these women were in their racism, happy to have me standing in front of them with a notebook recording their words – the mere fact that I was white and English seemingly providing enough reassurance of a sympathetic listening.

While people's reasons for supporting Poplar HARCA's regeneration proposals were undoubtedly multifaceted - and it's important to note that in this instance my interlocutors did not in fact support the regeneration wholeheartedly - as I will come onto show, such sentiments were undoubtedly one factor motivating white support for the regeneration plans. Indeed, Poplar HARCA were even accused by one activist involved in the traders' campaign of deliberately stirring up these sentiments to bolster support for their regeneration plans - a point I will return to later.

In this context, it would be perfectly possible to represent Chrisp Street Market along the lines that Watson (2009b, p. 138), in a later text, describes Queen's Crescent Market in Camden, north London: "an iconic space of the traditional white working class where a real and imagined sense of homogenous community could exercise its exclusionary powers". Watson contrasts Queen's Crescent in Camden to Ridley Road Market in Hackney as examples of multicultural failure and success respectively. In the latter "casual encounters and 'rubbing along'" are performed in a space "not steeped in tension, hostility or complex power relations" (ibid., p. 137). She puts this success down to Ridley Road's "long history on the margins, where new migrants found a place, work, a voice and sociality" thus preventing it from being claimed as the property of an imagined indigenous group in the manner of Queen's Crescent.

But while Watson's emphasis on the historical specificity of markets is useful in terms of situating the presence (or lack thereof) of forms of convivial multiculture today, such a binary picture of multicultural success and failure also has its limitations. As the vignette with which I opened this chapter shows, Chrisp Street Market hosts both forms of multicultural "rubbing along" - indeed the woman I spoke to used these exact words - alongside forms of white

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Incidentally, this was not the only time I heard someone expressing sympathy for Tommy Robinson at Chrisp Street Market. On the same day at the inter-denominational "procession of the cross" event with which I opened the chapter I overheard a group discussion about the practice of giving weekly donations at Catholic mass and how these donations were spent by the church. A woman taking part in the conversation argued (with some pushback from a teenage boy also at the table) that the church gives too much money to humanitarian projects overseas and how "this country needs to look after its own first". Moving on to talk about Tommy Robinson she argued, "They're trying to shut him up, but he ain't talking bullshit though". She then proceeded to tell an anecdote about once attending a boxing match between a white boxer and a black boxer in which she alleged the black boxer had racially abused the white boxer, before being beaten in the fight with her cheering on. The incident took a further perverse twist when this same woman subsequently got up from the table to greet a black woman who was walking past - perhaps a neighbour - chatting with her apparently on friendly terms. This anecdote gives a sense of how everyday multiculture and ingrained racism (in the form of less than subtle fantasies about reverse racism and the re-establishment of white supremacy) can coexist in one place.

resentment and hostility. How then, might it be possible to account for the presence of both? How might we both examine and acknowledge the role of race and racism in how contestation around the regeneration of Chrisp Street Market plays out, while also recognising it as a site of multiculture on which forms of multi-ethnic solidarity might yet be built? In this chapter I am interested in the complexity and contingency of racial formations. Drawing on ethnographic material collected between 2015 and 2019 I attempt to trace how a racially exclusionary whiteness ultimately wins out over Chrisp Street Market's everyday multiculture, but in such a way that leaves open the possibility that things may have played out differently.

Convivial Multiculture?

Alex Rhys-Taylor's (2018) multisensory ethnography of food and multiculture in east London is an important reference point in approaching the complexity and contingency of race and multiculture at Chrisp Street Market. Rhys-Taylor starts from Les Back's observation of a "metropolitan paradox" characterising contemporary cities such as London where "transcultural and transnational social formations [coexist] with entrenched senses of social distinction and separation" (ibid., p. 21). He proposes that food and culinary culture allow for a distinct insight into this metropolitan paradox; testament both to complex histories of cultural exchange and the articulation of national and regional boundaries. Furthermore, attention to food - and specifically the senses of smell and taste - allows us to develop an understanding of the ways in which the body is enrolled within this process of making connections and disconnections, or as Rhys-Taylor puts it: how sensibilities are constructed "able to accommodate the convergences of multiple identities, histories and cultures around a particular location" (ibid., p.124) as well as inverse "sensory constructions of 'them' and 'us'" (ibid., p. 121). For example, at Ridley Road Market (introduced above) Rhys-Taylor (2012, p. 394) attends to processes of what he calls "transculturation". This includes the "somatic labour" of traders who must develop a "literacy with the sensuous worlds that [their] customers inhabit" (ibid., p. 400) in order to ensure that their produce appeals to the wide variety of tastes of the people who shop at the market. Meanwhile, in depth analyses of the moral panics around "horse meat" (Rhys-Taylor 2018, ch. 4) being sold to British consumers and the media construction of the "problem" of fried chicken fast food in Britain's urban areas (ibid., ch. 5), explore the ways in which racial distinctions are generated through sensory constructions of disgust and distaste.

But while Rhys-Taylor is attentive to questions of race and how it is mediated (with an emphasis on the mainstream media), running through his book is an argument that, at some more fundamental level, the market places and independent food shops of east London are "convivial" spaces. He argues that historically, with some exceptions, "market places have been sites of dialogue, genuine exchange, cooperation and cross-cultural productions", and that "this is true of the commercial spaces covered in this book, all of which play vital roles in the development of a 'convivial' multiculture" (ibid., p. 129). Rhys-Taylor suggests that this is something especially distinctive about east London. He provides a rough sketch of London's "inheritances" as a result of being a gateway to Empire, dividing them up between east and west London; while the latter is characterised by "various types of capital and control derived from its position atop centuries of maritime Empire", the former is characterised by a:

> "pragmatic amenability to difference… [formed through] the crystallization of centuries of emotional and somatic labour. Embedded in ways of 'being together' and 'rubbing along', the steadfast sensibilities of local culture in the city's east have long enabled communities to withstand often rapid changes in the texture, cadence, smell and flavour of the city. Importantly, and unintentionally, the city's history has bequeathed many of its working class neighbourhoods with resources for the twenty-first century's increasing compulsion for us to live with difference" (Rhys-Taylor, 2018, p. 128)

This attention to the East End as a site of "pragmatic amenability to difference" is particularly clear in Rhys-Taylor's chapter "Eels and East Enders" which represents his most direct engagement with questions of working-class whiteness. This focuses on "Tubby Isaac's", a seafood stall based in the same location in Aldgate since 1919 selling "cockles, whelks, crabs and eels" but which in recent years has suffered a decline in business, ultimately leading to its closure in 2013. The stall's decline is a big topic of conversation among the owner and his white patrons; conversations which have a tendency to narrate love of such food as "transmitted intergenerationally through the blood and culture of an island race" (ibid., p. 102) with immigration blamed for the loss of this cultural heritage. But rather than categorising the seafood stand as therefore existing outside of, or separate from, formations of convivial multiculture, Rhys-Taylor is at pains to show how these narratives exist alongside what he calls the seafood stand's "pragmatic conviviality" (ibid., p. 114). For in fact Tubby Isaac's regular customers include not just white people but "an assortment of Polish electricians, Nigerian carpenters and Chinese sightseers" (ibid., p. 111) and others, many of whom bring (and share with Rhys-Taylor) their own memories of eating such seafood in other times and places. While present political and economic circumstances mean that

“narratives about an island nation have found a special political utility” (ibid., p. 115), Rhys-Taylor holds out hope that such diverse narratives of “cosmopolitan community” (ibid., p. 114) - presented alongside the historical transnational stories through which such seafood became an East End staple in the first place - offer an alternative and more inclusive story of place to be taken up by the East End’s white inhabitants.

Rhys-Taylor’s attention to the construction of local racial formations through discourse, materiality and the senses opens up productive avenues for examining the complexity and contingency of race and multiculture. Rather than presenting racism and conviviality as mutually exclusive, each applying to some spaces and not others, his method allows for an examination of how they might co-exist in the same place, with the salience of race at a particular time and place dependent on a multitude of factors. Such an approach has much to offer an analysis of how contestation around the proposed redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market unfolded. That said, with reference to Chrisp Street it is important to question the relative weight and significance that Rhys-Taylor gives to racially exclusive formations. Alongside his argument that the marketplaces of the East End are characterised in some fundamental sense by a tendency towards conviviality, Rhys-Taylor presents the far right as something ‘external’ to them:

> “It is perhaps because of their role as spaces of encounter and active transformation of culture that the muscular guardians of more exclusive forms of association have so often descended on the East End’s markets and ramshackle high streets in order to shake them up… the British League of Ex-Servicemen, the British Union of Fascists, the National Front, the British National Party and more recently the English Defence League have all, at various times, marched into the East End…These have been some the cruder efforts to stifle the East End’s quiet acceptance of difference. However, despite the violence they have caused such efforts have generally fallen a long way short of actually transforming the culture of the city’s east” (Rhys-Taylor, 2018, pp. 129-30)

It is notable that Rhys-Taylor’s survey of east London’s markets and high streets focuses on the inner East End: places such as Petticoat Lane, Spitalfields and Ridley Road which have long histories of extensive non-white immigrant settlement. If Rhys-Taylor had strayed further east and included Chrisp Street Market in his survey, his depiction of a “culture” of the East End based around a “quiet acceptance of difference” in the face of “far right incursions” would be much more difficult to sustain. Across the 1970s, 80s and 90s, Chrisp

Street Market and its surrounding estates were sites of everyday racial hostility and violence - not “incursions” but deeply embedded racism and support for the far-right.

Something that helped me to grasp something of this history was a TV news feature on the Teviot Estate from the 1980s, uploaded to YouTube and posted on the Bengali East End Heritage Society Facebook page in January 2021.[54] (The Teviot Estate is located a few minutes’ walk to the northeast of Chrisp Street Market). It reports the relocation of a “Bengali” family from the estate after “being subjected to persistent racial harassment”. The journalist describes how:

> “In effect they are being evacuated. The Ali [family] case is not an isolated one. On this estate over the last year there has been a total of forty-six attacks. Injuries and hospital treatment are set against the background of daily abuse, property damage, attempted arson. Originally there were six Bengali families living in these blocks. Now they are all gone. On this London estate the racists are winning”.

The report then goes on to describe how the next council property allocated to the family is vandalised, with pigs trotters - marked with the symbol of the National Front - nailed to the door. This news report is in keeping with stories I heard from a member of my own extended family who was involved with anti-racist efforts in east London in the 1980s. On hearing that I was conducting research at Chrisp Street Market they told me about their experiences participating in the organised defence of families under attack – including in the flats in the immediate vicinity of Chrisp Street Market. Therefore, it is important to locate the racist sentiments expressed by my white interlocutors at Chrisp Street Market not as external but as internal to the history of the marketplace – in continuity with its history. Or perhaps, in the context of Poplar HARCA’s orchestration of a campaign in support of the regeneration proposals (and more or less explicitly - *against* the Bangladeshi traders) a reanimation and re-awakening of it.

History, race and affect

During fieldwork I was told related stories of the racist violence and hostility experienced by Bangladeshis and other non-white groups in Poplar in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. But - in terms of understanding how these stories impinge on questions of race and multiculture at Chrisp Street Market today - I suggest that just as important as the detail of *what* I was told was the

[54] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3VADvL8PG0

way I was told. After a meeting of the Poplar Neighbourhood Planning Forum at St Matthias Community Centre I got chatting to a south Asian woman called Gurinder. Now in her 40s, Gurinder had lived at the adjacent Will Crooks Estate all her life which today is primarily inhabited by Bangladeshi residents. She was holding a Penguin book of political history under her arm, explaining to me that working as a coordinator for a television news programme it was important for her to be politically and historically informed. Her immediate response to me upon introducing my research topic was: "We [Asian people] used to get attacked by the National Front in the 1980s". In contrast to my white interlocutors who would often compare the present unfavourably to the past, Gurinder talked about how - on this issue at least - things had gotten better over time now "the racists moved to Barking or Dagenham or wherever"; an outmigration that she associated with the closure of the docks.

Out of all the places that I regularly frequented during my fieldwork, the fact that this candid interaction took place in St Matthias Community Centre is no surprise. Originally built as Poplar Chapel in 1654 by the East India Company, the building fell into disuse in the 1970s before being refurbished and reopened as a community centre with funds from the London Docklands Development Corporation in the 1990s. Through the leadership of Sister Christine MBE, an Irish nun in her early eighties who has been heavily involved in community work and activism in Poplar for over fifty years, St Matthias has flourished into a space used by people of a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.[55] St Matthias is also a focal point for community meetings and activism, bringing together people from across these groups: The Poplar Neighbourhood Planning Forum is the latest iteration of Sister Christine's involvement in housing activism locally after having been heavily involved in campaigns to ensure the local community got a fair deal during the LDDC led redevelopment of Canary Wharf in the 1980s and 1990s. Working alongside Sister Christine is Nizam, a man of Bangladeshi ethnicity in his 30s, who manages the community centre day-to-day. One evening while volunteering at the weekly homeless shelter at St Matthias, Nizam explained to me and a young Bangladeshi volunteer - a school aged boy volunteering as part of his 'Duke of Edinburgh' award - how Sister Christine is held in high regard by many Bangladeshi people locally for having been a champion for the Bangladeshi community in the days when it was more marginalised within Tower Hamlets local politics than it is today.

In this space, and perhaps partly also owing to her education and work experience, Gurinder felt able to communicate this history of racism to me directly. However, this was not typical of

[55] This includes events and activities aimed at older people (who tend to be white British and Irish) and events and activities catering for families and school children during the school holidays (who tend to be Bangladeshi).

how non-white Poplar residents talked about this history in my presence. For example, during a group conversation in the Tommy Flowers about histories of gang violence in Poplar, Nazia (introduced at the beginning of chapter two) mentioned how, sitting on a bus on the East India Dock road, she had once seen a man being beaten up by a gang at the entrance to Chrisp Street Market. Sensing that perhaps Nazia was talking about a racist attack, but without having mentioned so explicitly, I asked why she thought that this attack took place. To which she confirmed: “Oh, no reason. Because of the colour of his skin.”

On other occasions racism was brought up early in a conversation, suggesting that my interlocutor thought it was an important subject in the context of my research, but was discussed cautiously and euphemistically. This was the case in a conversation I had with Faruk and Jamal - both members of the management committee of a small but expanding mosque, opposite the Will Crooks estate. In their office over cups of tea, Faruk explained that he’d lived in Poplar since the 1980s and had seen many changes. Back when he was growing up there were parts of the borough of Tower Hamlets where it was dangerous to go as an Asian person. Faruk mentioned the “Teviot boys” as being a particular problem and how “if we wanted to go to the market we wouldn’t go on our own as we’d get picked on. We’d go as a group”. Faruk’s use of the term “picked on” stood out to me as especially euphemistic; a term usually used in the context of low-level school playground bullying which doesn’t convey an idea of the kind of attacks described by Nazia and in the news report presented above.

Thus histories of racism were often submerged within my interactions with non-white interlocutors; affectively present if not always explicitly discursively articulated. The concept of affect is important for capturing something of this absent-present history. For Shoshan and Muehlebach (2012, p. 323) affect (in their case “post-Fordist affect”) names the presence of:

> “psychic (and at times somatic) remnants that, while often palpably felt in everyday practice, are not- or often not fully- available for discursive elaboration”.

Notably, Rhys-Taylor (2018, p. 8) distances himself from the so-called ‘affective turn’ in the humanities and social sciences when outlining his conceptualisation of the relationship between the senses and multiculture, arguing that it unhelpfully creates separations between the senses and discourse. But to my mind, the most interesting and useful aspects of the literature on affect do not stress non-discursivity in order to argue that sensations stand apart from, or precede, discourse. Rather they do so in order to highlight, in a more

psychoanalytic vein, the role of the *subconscious* in the formation of sensations and emotional states. For example, in her work on the affective spaces of post-conflict Northern Cyprus, Navaro-Yashin (2009) outlines a historical and collective conceptualisation of affect, traversing the spatial and the psychic, the material and the subjective. Here affect is less a question of discursivity versus non-discursivity than of what is said and what remains unsaid, what is explicitly acknowledged and what is not acknowledged; in short, all the ways in which history exceeds the dominant account of the past in the present.

I suggest that such a historical and collective conceptualisation of affect is required to adequately grasp the historical embeddedness of race and racism at Chrisp Street Market and its role in how contestation over the regeneration plans played out. But to say that race is historically embedded is different from saying it is fixed and static. How, then, might it be possible to keep hold of Rhys-Taylor's emphasis on the complexity and contingency of racial formations without underplaying the historical embeddedness of race in the context of Chrisp Street Market? Helpful here is Sara Ahmed's concept of "affective economies" (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed argues that the circulation of affect (a term which she uses interchangeably with emotions) "[plays] a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies" (ibid., p. 117). She is particularly concerned with bodies that are racially classified and the circulation of emotions such as love, hate and fear that bring them into being. "Emotions work by sticking figures together" (ibid., p. 119), Ahmed argues, drawing on psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious to develop this point:

> "Psychoanalysis allows us to see that emotionality involves movements or associations whereby 'feelings' take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present. This is what I would call the ripple effect of emotions; they move sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present - hence 'what sticks' is also bound up with the absent presence of historicity)" (ibid., p. 120)

Importantly, for Ahmed these affective economies "need to be seen as social and material, as well as psychic" (ibid., p. 121) with what gets stuck together "shaped by multiple histories" (ibid., p. 126). Rather than a strict psychoanalytic model which would locate the movement between signs within the psyche, Ahmed argues that this movement "is a trace of how histories" - and here Ahmed is talking primarily about histories of race and racialisation - "remain alive in the present" (ibid., p. 126).

Ahmed elaborates her model in her discussion of the relations between “fear and the materialization of bodies” (ibid., p. 124), drawing on the examples of the narratives of UK politicians about “asylum seekers ‘swamping’ the nation”, Fanon’s analysis of the black man as an object of fear in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and the orchestration of “global economies of fear” around Islamist terrorism post- 9/11. In each case Ahmed shows how the formation of racialised individual and collective bodies is both contingent - dependent on the linguistic and symbolic construction of particular figures as objects of fear, love, hate etc - *and* something which is deeply historically embedded. Thus linguistic and symbolic construction relies upon “past histories of association” (ibid., p. 127); past histories which do not have to be explicitly articulated to prove effective in sticking signs, figures and objects together.

In the next two parts of this chapter, then, I take forward Ahmed’s concern with affective economies and the formation of racialised individual and collective bodies in examining the contestation around the regeneration proposals at Chrisp Street Market. I suggest that such a historically grounded conception of affective economies adds important nuance to our understanding of how the contestation around the regeneration proposals played out, allowing us to account both for the apparent solidity and historical persistence of race and its contingency. Rather than attempting to parcel out the extent to which white support for Poplar HARCA’s counter-campaign can be explained in terms of racism and white resentment, I show how the campaign worked as an affective vector of racialisation, tying together white fears of a Muslim/Bangladeshi ‘take over’ of the market with more apparently prosaic concerns about the market’s state of material decay and questions of architectural heritage. Ultimately I show that even if convivial multiculture was not much in evidence during my fieldwork at Chrisp Street Market, one can at least point to moments where the salience of race is reduced or heightened and attempt to delineate the processes through which this comes about.

Part 2: Contestation (2015-2018)

4.4 Stills from "Their Majesties in Poplar" (1950) (British Pathe)

> *"They're building in Poplar to replace the nearly 10,000 homes destroyed in the blitz. In the Lansbury neighbourhood a self-contained community is rising that will feature in the Festival of Britain Live Architecture Exhibition. A new school rises on Ricardo Street where 500 boys and girls will grow into the citizens of tomorrow. Poplar is old, its homes cramped and old-fashioned. 1300 high explosives, 50 V weapons and 30,000 incendiaries destroyed half the houses in Hitler's attempt to stampede east London. In their place, complete villages will be built, with blocks of flats, houses, schools, shopping centres, markets, pubs and clubs… In time there'll be neighbourhoods like Lansbury. It's the dawn of a new era for London's East End!"*

The newsreel footage announces the pioneering work that is going on at the Lansbury Estate. It jumps between clips of labourers digging the foundations for the new estate; bombed-out buildings; children playing at the new school; working class East Enders socialising at the market; a woman trying on a coat, giggling in front of the camera; crowds gathering for the Royal visit; King George and Queen Elizabeth surveying a model of the new estate…

It's late summer of 2016 and the Lansbury Micro Museum has opened its doors for the first time. Its launch coincides with this year's "Open House" weekend - two days when buildings

in London that are usually closed to the public open their doors to visitors. It's first exhibition - "Neighbourhood Number Nine" - concerns the origins of the Lansbury Estate and its adjoining Chrisp Street Market as a flagship project in London's post-war reconstruction. Through a series of images and text, a television showing a series of looping short newsreel items, and a display case stocked with pamphlets, souvenirs and other objects, visitors are informed of the origins of the estate as the first completed section of the modernist 1943 County of London Plan and the site of the "Live Architecture Exhibition" section of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

I am one of the volunteers helping to staff the museum on this opening weekend. Every two hours a group of visitors assemble for the next tour of the estate, following the footsteps of those who came as part of the Live Architecture Exhibition. Led by one of the curators, the tour takes in the pedestrianised market-place (the first purpose built pedestrianised market place in the UK), the festival pub, the local primary school, two churches, rows of mid-rise flats, two storey terraced houses and higher rise 'point blocks'. We're invited to gaze at the decorative brickwork and the neo-Regency bay windows in the flats above the market place and, at the end of the tour, to ascend the "civic clock-tower" on one side of the market square - normally closed to the public - for an aerial view.

4.5 - Floorplans, illustrations and model plans of the Lansbury Estate (Dunnett 1951)

4.6 – Lansbury Micro Museum

4.7 – Lansbury Micro Museum display case

Neighbourhood Number Nine

Situated in a disused retail unit at Chrisp Street Market, the Lansbury Micro Museum was a collaboration between Poplar HARCA and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A); a large, publicly funded west London based institution which is in the process of opening a new site - "V&A East" - in Stratford, on the site of the 2012 Olympic Park. Across three exhibitions on display between 2016 and 2017, the Lansbury Micro Museum celebrated the Lansbury Estate as a site of "ongoing significance… as a microcosm of planning ideas for London" (Manton 2016). While the first Micro Museum exhibit focused on the origins of the Lansbury Estate in the County of London Plan and Festival of Britain, its second exhibition focused on the "decline" and transformation of local industries over the subsequent three decades (1950-1980). A third and final exhibition displayed materials generated through artist-led workshops with local community groups about their aspirations for the future of the marketplace.

But why, if Poplar HARCA were attempting to substantially redevelop the estate, were they interested in celebrating its distinct architectural heritage? This runs counter to a substantial literature which has shown how demolition and redevelopment of modernist public housing is often justified and enacted in relation to constructed representations of these spaces as irreparably decayed and as sites of planning 'failure' (Arrigoitia, 2014a; 2014b; Campkin, 2013; Hall, 2012; Watt, 2021, ch. 3). One straight forward reason for Poplar HARCA's approach to the redevelopment of the Lansbury Estate and Chrisp Street Market is that the normal path of denigrating and then demolishing the site was not possible: in 1997 a large section of the estate, including Chrisp Market and its surrounding buildings, was designated a conservation area by Tower Hamlets Council. This "aimed to preserve and safeguard the original character and integrity of this exemplary post-war housing" (LBTH, 2007, p. 4) and meant that any redevelopment proposals would have to take architectural heritage into account. Building on a hierarchy of architectural value inscribed in the council's conservation area documents, Poplar HARCA's regeneration plan therefore carefully distinguishes between elements of the estate which were part of the 1951 development - which are deserving of protection - and those parts of the estate which were built subsequently, which are not.[56]

[56] In these documents the "original" development is contrasted with "subsequent developments [which] have added to the hotchpotch appearance of the Lansbury Conservation Area" (LBTH, 2007, p. 7). The document goes onto state that: "the 19 storey Fitzgerald House dominates the

But the planning restrictions put on Poplar HARCA's ability to demolish the site and start afresh (something that one Poplar HARCA employee told me *was* the original idea) do not alone explain why they might want to actively celebrate the estate's architectural heritage. In order to understand this, the Micro Museum needs to be situated within Poplar HARCA's broader 'culture-led' approach to urban regeneration and, within this, how heritage has been mobilised to build support for the redevelopment proposals among specific segments of the local population as well as potential newcomers to the area. Through their dedicated 'Accents' team, Poplar HARCA seek to support "the social, economic and cultural regeneration of Poplar within the large-scale physical change in the area" (Poplar HARCA, 2017). This team specialises in organising and facilitating a range of 'pop-up' or 'meanwhile' exhibitions, performances and structures which are used to promote Poplar to larger audiences.[57] These arts and cultural activities can be understood within a broader 'creative city' agenda - pursued with particular intensity in east London in connection to the 2012 Olympic Games - which dictates that "cultural planning" is an important aspect of encouraging people and businesses to locate to an area (Harvie, 2013, p. 117).[58] Scholar-activists have also labelled such activities as "art-washing", arguing that they are designed to distract from the violence of gentrification-induced displacement which estate regeneration entails (Harling 2017; Mould; 2017 2018a; Pritchard, 2020).

But while encouraging artists to move to Poplar and undertake projects might be considered primarily a ploy to market Poplar to external audiences rather than for the benefit of long-standing residents of the area, the Micro Museum can be seen to speak to both groups

skyline although its architecture is not as memorable as the nearby Clock Tower, which is now an essential part of the architectural identity of modern Lansbury" (ibid., p. 7).

[57] For example, as well as the Lansbury Micro Museum social housing estates owned by Poplar HARCA have played host to the "Poplar Pavilion" (a series of small wooded buildings, planters and benches assembled near Chrisp Street Market during the summer of 2017), the installation of a boxing ring in the middle of the market place during the one off "Chrisp Street on Air" festival in 2014, and a series of performances of Macbeth spread through several floors of Balfron Tower the same summer. Poplar HARCA have also provided artists with rent-free studio and living spaces in the Balfron Tower pending its redevelopment.

[58] Often these activities are intended as precursors to future physical regeneration projects. In the spring of 2017, a number of shipping containers hosting a temporary kitchen and classrooms were set up outside a row of garages on the Teviot estate, where artists and architects from the organisation "public works" ran workshops for the local community based around environmental awareness and reusing materials. This project was the prelude to a project to replace the garages with a £3.9 million Fashion Hub with permanent classrooms and studio space run in collaboration with London College of Fashion.

simultaneously. At the same time as raising the profile of Poplar to new audiences through events such as Open House weekend, the Micro Museum exhibits also resonated with some of the local white population, for whom the history of the estate in the post-war period was something around which they could anchor their own memories and family histories. For example, during the Open House weekend, a young father out shopping with his wife and children came in to have a look around. Gazing at the displayed images of the estate being built, he told me that his grandparents had been part of the first generation to move onto the new estate and that he now lived in the same flat with his partner and young daughter. He said he liked this sense of intergenerational continuity; the fact that his daughter now bathed in the same bath that her grandfather would have bathed in when he was a child over sixty years ago. Meanwhile, another visitor in his sixties showed me photos on his phone of the pre-fabricated bungalow where his parents had lived during the 1950s, expressing a sense of pride at being able to connect his family history to both the hardships faced by East Enders during the Second World War and the subsequent era of bold urban planning experiments.

The Micro Museum's focus on post-war architecture complements Poplar HARCA's broader vision for the redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market which they say will involve a "greater focus on our heritage". The scheme will retain all of the remaining features of the 1951 Festival of Britain development: the yellow brick, Georgian maisonette blocks at the north end of the market, raised above the shopping precinct below on thin green pillars; the two pubs at either side of the market (the Festival Inn and Callaghan's, known locally by its former name, the Festive Britain); and the showpiece clock tower - modelled on the Scottish urban planner Patrick Geddes' concept of the "outlook tower" which, in allowing citizens to view the city from above, is supposed to cultivate a sense of civic consciousness. Closed to the public soon after the estate was completed on public safety grounds, Poplar HARCA have promised to restore the tower and make it publicly accessible once again.

Notably absent, however, from both the Micro Museum exhibitions and Poplar HARCA's commitments to 'heritage' are any references to the histories of migration from Britain's former colonies and the large Bangladeshi population of users and traders at the market today. The exhibitions more or less ignored the demographic change that the area has undergone and steered clear of the racism experienced by those who came. The curators of the exhibitions might perhaps justify this exclusion on the basis that the Micro Museum was a place to consider planning history specifically, rather than a social history of the area more generally. But the

effect of this exclusion was to curate a history of the Lansbury Estate which closely resembles the dominant narrative among local white people about the area; one in which a 'Golden Age' in the post-war period is followed by years of "decline", coinciding with large scale demographic change.[59] Meanwhile, in Poplar HARCA's promotional materials for the regeneration, "Pie and Mash" is emphasised alongside Festival of Britain architecture but Bangladeshi owned shops and market stalls selling fruit and vegetables, fresh fish, halal meat and sarees are not present.

Poplar HARCA's claim that the regeneration plans will involve a "greater focus on our heritage" therefore warrants a large degree of scrutiny, with the large Bangladeshi population of users and traders of the market seemingly not included in the collective noun "our". This underscores the ways in which, in the words of critical heritage scholar Rodney Harrison (2014, p. 4), heritage is not a "passive process of preserving things from the past… but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present". As such it is an important site for discerning the workings of power within urban regeneration processes. As I will now show, this exclusion of Bangladeshis from the category of heritage in the years prior to the regeneration plans being submitted to the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee was subsequently consequential, as contestation over the plans intensified. I suggest that this exclusion was likely not accidental but formed part of an attempt by Poplar HARCA to build support for the regeneration proposals among a specific subset of the local population - support which could then be relied upon to counteract resistance from a Bangladeshi 'minority'.

[59] Perhaps as a result of these exclusions, in my experience very few non-white local people visited the space. One exception was Nirav who wandered over one Friday morning from the estate agents opposite at which he worked. Taking only a quick glance at the displays Nirav then engaged me in conversation about the crisis in affordability of housing in London and our shared scepticism that the Chrisp Street regeneration would help to mitigate this.

4.8 - Publicity materials for Chrisp Street Market regeneration (Jitesh Patel)

“Save Our Historical Market”

On a cold morning in January 2018 around forty people have gathered for a protest outside of Poplar HARCA’s office on East India Dock Road. Local market traders and their supporters - almost exclusively Bangladeshi - hold placards which read “Save our Historical Market”, “More Social Housing”, “Stop Misleading the Resident[s]” and “HARCA!! Talk To Us,,”. Also in the crowd are politicians from the People’s Alliance for Tower Hamlets (PATH) which is contesting upcoming local elections in May with a field of entirely Bangladeshi candidates. Taking photos are two white housing activists supporting the campaign while hovering at the edges of the demonstration are a small group of Poplar HARCA employees giving out leaflets - “All you need to know about the proposed regeneration of Chrisp Street Market”.

A mega phone is being passed around between the demonstrators. “This market has been established since 1951, long before most of us was born”, begins Salam, a shopkeeper, dressed in a smart winter jacket and Islamic prayer cap. “We are not against the regeneration, we welcome the regeneration, but we don’t want to be deprived of our rights! The residents, the shopkeepers, the stall holders should be consulted properly ….to be treated equally”. Others make similar statements: “these market traders have made the market what it is today!” pronounces one of the politicians. The megaphone passes again: “We just want Poplar HARCA to listen to us, to respect our community, to respect the value of our community”, says Dulal, another PATH council candidate.

After each person speaks the crowd gives a little cheer. After some hesitation and encouragement a young white woman in a puffy winter jacket and wool hat takes the megaphone. It seems that she has come on her own to participate in the demonstration. “I use the market a lot and I need the market to stay here because I want cheap fruit and veg” she says. The crowd gives a loud cheer and applause. Then just as we are getting ready to disband, an older white woman comes forward. In a strong cockney accent, she says: “Just to say people, that I’ve been in this borough sixty three years - and I want the market to stay as it is!”.

“Yeahh!” Cheer the crowd, clapping and shouting. “Well done!” shouts a man to my left. Before she is allowed to slip back into the crowd one of the photographers gets the woman to remain posed with the megaphone so he can take a picture. Finding herself still ‘on stage’ she bellows into the megaphone: “It’s our market - and that’s what we want!”. A joyful cheer and much laughter erupts from the crowd. As she moves back into the mass of demonstrators a Bangladeshi man walks over to give her a hug. It feels like a good note to end on.

◊

Spearheaded by a group of Bangladeshi shopkeepers and traders, the “Save Chrisp Street Market” campaign sparked to life just as Poplar HARCA’s plans for the redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market were due to be considered by the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee. The campaign raised several points in opposition to the plans: 1) increased rent and service charges, 2) removal of parking facilities for traders and shoppers, 3) a concern that the plans would push local residents, local business and stall holders out of the area, 4) a lack of

meaningful consultation over the plans, and 5) a concern about the tactics used by Poplar HARCA in meetings with traders to encourage them to sign new leases or face compulsory purchase proceedings.

Previous attempts to organise a campaign in opposition to Poplar HARCA's redevelopment proposals had failed to get off the ground. In the summer of 2015, I had first been introduced to the Lansbury Estate and Chrisp Street Market by a group of white housing activists organising under the umbrella of Tower Hamlets Renters, affiliated to the London-wide Radical Housing Network. Ostensibly a group committed to improving the condition of private renters in Tower Hamlets, members of the group had become interested in trying to organise alongside residents in the borough's extensive social housing estates. During that summer I accompanied activists from Tower Hamlets Renters going door to door in the housing blocks which are due to be demolished and standing at a stall in the marketplace engaging with passers-by. Other activists went to speak to shopkeepers. We tried to survey local knowledge and sentiment regarding the redevelopment proposals and assess the appetite for a campaign. But while an initial community meeting was held in the autumn of 2015 there was not sufficient enthusiasm or local leadership to take things further.[60]

Two and a half years later a new campaign had arisen, this time much more rooted in the sociality of the marketplace, and specifically those of Bangladeshi businessmen and politicians. These networks were in evidence at a public meeting held at St Matthias church the following week, where around one hundred people, again mostly of Bangladeshi ethnicity, attended a public meeting about the plans for Chrisp Street, putting their questions to a representative of Poplar HARCA and the then Labour mayor of Tower Hamlets John Biggs. Reporters from a Bangladeshi and Sylheti language TV channel were present with professional camera equipment and the audience again heard interventions from Bangladeshi politicians standing in the upcoming local elections. The traders were also supported in their efforts by a handful of white housing activists and politicians. This included: Terry, an Irish man in his late 60s and veteran of the campaign to prevent the stock transfer of council housing stock to Poplar HARCA in the early 2000s, who spoke at both the protest and the public meeting; Rab, an artist in his thirties, who made a film with the traders, "The Battle of Chrisp Street", and sought to promote

[60] Since I was at the time enrolled on a PhD programme in the USA, and had to return there in September I did not experience first-hand how things panned out, but remained in contact with some of the housing activists via social media.

their cause through social media;[61] and Sister Christine, introduced earlier, who arranged for the public meeting to take place at St Matthias Community Centre, where she also spoke in support of the traders.[62]

Support for the traders' campaign was squarely rooted within the local Bangladeshi population and community networks, but to increase its effectiveness it needed to reach out into the broader local population. The involvement of a handful of white housing activists at the public meeting and protest can be seen as an effort towards this, with Terry informing me that he got involved in the campaign after a conversation with the Bangladeshi proprietor of the photo and printing shop at the market. So too can the decision to hold a public protest. Here the lack of provision of additional social housing was emphasised by the speakers at the protests, with participants holding signs demanding "more social housing". This could be seen as an attempt to bring together the concerns of traders (many of whom I gleaned from my conversations did not currently live in the immediate neighbourhood) with those of diverse local residents for whom, regardless of ethnicity, the shortage of social housing is a priority. The traders also emphasised the "historical" qualities of the marketplace. We might interpret this as an attempt to inscribe themselves in the history of the marketplace as traders; inheriting it from those traders who came before them. This responds to the discourses of heritage surrounding Chrisp Street Market and its regeneration but, in contrast to Poplar HARCA's rendering of it, situates the current traders at the heart of the market's historical identity. Meanwhile the loud cheers reserved for the two white women who each take a turn on the megaphone could be seen as a celebration of the fact that the campaign was having some success in reaching beyond the traders' immediate networks.

But the traders' attempts to extend the breadth of the appeal of their campaign ran up against forces operating in the other direction. Some of these are discernible in the description of the protest above. For example, the only political party represented at the protest is the People's Alliance for Tower Hamlets (PATH) - widely considered a Bangladeshi political party, fielding only candidates of Bangladeshi ethnicity at the 2018 elections. Preceded by Tower Hamlets

[61] Rab initially came to Poplar through a Poplar HARCA initiative to provide accommodation and studio space for artists in the Balfron Tower but subsequently became active in campaigning against Poplar HARCA's approach to urban regeneration.
[62] Christine Shawcroft, formerly a Labour councillor and at the time a member of Labour Party National Executive Committee and director of the left-wing Labour affiliated group Momentum, also spoke in support of the traders at the public meeting.

First and since succeeded by a new political party - Aspire - PATH is one iteration of a history of political parties operating in Tower Hamlets which make a strong appeal to voters on the basis of Bangladeshi ethnicity and Islamic religion, going back to the establishment of Respect in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. But while Respect was a socialist political party, officially allied both to the Muslim Association of Britain and the Socialist Workers Party, PATH and its associated parties, while left-wing, have generally eschewed the language and iconography of traditional left wing political ideologies, focusing their efforts on the local Bangladeshi and Muslim population rather than attempting an appeal to a broader working class political constituency. This has been proved electorally successful: Lutfur Rahman - the founder of Tower Hamlets First and Aspire - winning the mayorship in 2010 and 2014 (before the latter result was declared void amid allegations of electoral fraud) and again in 2022, alongside a majority for Aspire in the council elections. But such an approach clearly cuts against the formation of multi-ethnic alliances based on class. [63]

The ambivalent ideological positioning of the traders' campaign can be further drawn out with reference to the language employed at the protest. While the demand for more social housing perhaps indicates a desire to broaden the appeal of the campaign on a class basis the Bangladeshi speakers make no reference to class or their being 'working class' and neither does the word class appear on any of the placards held up by the protesters. One PATH politician talks rather of a need for Poplar HARCA to "respect our community" and "respect the value of our community" - the word 'community' ambiguous, potentially referring to a wider 'local community' or narrower 'Bangladeshi community'. Meanwhile a shopkeeper's assertion that they should not be "deprived of our rights" and should be "treated equally" further also reflects the language of liberal multiculturalism rather than multi-ethnic class politics. The traders' campaign was arguably caught between two political strategies: While the loud cheers at the two white women's involvement in the protest suggest a desire for the campaign to encompass

[63] As Ashraf Hoque (n.d.,` personal communication) has argued, in the case of Lutfur Rahman this has involved sometimes taking ambivalent political stance. While describing himself as an "old Labour" leftist in his mayoral campaigns in 2010 and 2014 he actively courted the support of the Islamic Forum for Europe (IFE), an Islamist organisation with links to the far-right Bangladeshi political party, Jamaat-e-Islamic. However, in the recent 2022 elections, Lutfur Rahman and his Aspire Party pivoted to a more explicit "democratic socialist" position, perhaps sensing an opportunity to capitalise with left-wing disillusionment with the Labour Party after the end of the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and its rightward turn under Kier Starmer. This more explicit socialist positioning is also in line with the election in 2019 of Apsana Begum as Labour MP for Poplar and Limehouse in 2019 – a Bangladeshi woman, an avowed socialist and the first MP to wear a hijab.

traders and users of the market beyond Bangladeshi networks, the political forms and vocabularies employed in many ways run counter to this desire. In his comments at the protest and in the text of his film, Rab - the white artist - does use the language of class and gentrification. But this was out of keeping with the general tenor of the protest and, coming from a white activist, serves to underline the ambivalent relationship between the traders' campaign and such political categories.

This ambivalence of the traders' campaign with regards to the language of class of course needs to be understood in relation to the ways in which Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets have been historically excluded from the institutions of the working class - whether that is trade unions (as discussed in chapter one) or municipal housing (as discussed in chapter three). These forms of exclusion have also operated in the political sphere: Sarah Glynn (2017, ch. 7) describes how Bangladeshis had to fight to be allowed to join Tower Hamlets Labour Party branches in the 1970s and then, once they had become members, to be put forward as candidates in local and national elections. Indeed, Lutfur Rahman's successful campaign for mayor in the 2010 election came about after he was excluded from standing as the Labour candidate by the London Labour Party, amid accusations about "the eligibility of participating voters" (East London Advertiser, 2010) and counter-accusations of discrimination and smear campaign (Seymour and Kumar, 2014), demonstrating that the relationship between the Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi community and its mainstream political parties remains fraught with tension.

In the next section I turn to my engagements with Bangladeshi traders in the aftermath of the traders' campaign, attempting to trace how these histories of race and racism shaped how the campaign played out and structured my interactions with them. I show how these histories are submerged in my interactions with the traders and in my experience of the market more generally. In contrast, white renderings of history as 'heritage' are more open, explicit and hegemonic. I then turn to examine white perceptions of the decline of the marketplace, how this was articulated in relation to 'heritage' and how this influenced support for the regeneration proposals - ultimately repeating histories of racial exclusion in Tower Hamlets.

4.9 – Traders' campaign, entrance to Chrisp Street Market

4.10 - Poplar HARCA campaign (Poplar HARCA)

Part 3: Affective Economies

Aftermath of the Traders' Campaign

It wasn't until a year after the ratification of the plans for Chrisp Street Market that I set out to conduct more intensive fieldwork there. I was interested in what remained of the traders' campaign and how traders and users of the market felt about the impending redevelopment. Hoping for an introduction, I asked Sister Christine at St Matthias Community Centre who she thought I should talk to. Sister Christine recommended that I go to speak to the two men in the photo shop. She also said that I should go in with a "neutral perspective":

> "What can't you buy at Chrisp Street Market? It's not the case that it's just fruit and veg, or only things for the Asian community. People just make the judgements that they've already decided upon".

Here she was responding to frequent complaints that are made about the market by long-standing white residents - and echoed in the discourse of Poplar HARCA - that the market has 'declined' over the past decade or more. This sense of decline is often expressed in terms of a more limited choice of products and stalls, but also more generally that the market now caters the local Bangladeshi population rather than white or 'English' people.

I called in at the shop she suggested and spoke to a man behind the counter. He was guarded and gave the impression that he didn't really want to speak about the campaign but gave a humble smile at my mention of Sister Christine's recommendation that he was the person I should speak to. He said he didn't live in the area so could only speak from a business perspective. "But I have served the community for over thirty years", he said, reconsidering. He told me that he was feeling negative about the regeneration - the whole experience of the campaign had had a negative effect on him emotionally. "The developers got their way" he said. "We tried to do something for the community, but where were the residents? Most of them probably don't even know that they are going to be putting a cinema in here." He said that he wondered whether the whole campaign had been in vain. But he added, "at least they added a bit more social housing." We agreed I would come back and speak to him in more detail at some point in the future.

I decided to call in to a discount shop a few doors down, having recognised another one of the traders who had been prominent during the campaign adjusting displays outside. He seemed pleased to have been recognised as one of the leaders of the campaign and launched into an account of how badly the traders had been treated by Poplar HARCA: alleging that they were bullying traders into signing new leases under the threat of compulsory purchase orders; that he was suddenly being chased for an apparently missed payment from 2009 which he does not believe he missed; and even that Poplar HARCA purposely employed the same legal firm that had been assisting the traders pro-bono, just so that this firm was no longer able to help them. He also talked a bit about himself and his connection to Poplar: “I might not look like it” he said, pinching the skin on his arm, but I’m a local boy, a Poplar boy”. He said he was fed up of continually hearing about families being moved out to Barking and elsewhere because they weren’t able to be housed in the area, while developers build luxury flats for “yuppies”. We agreed that we’d sit down and speak properly another time when he wasn’t serving customers. However, we were never able to set this up and, after trying a few times, I eventually got the message that he didn’t want to speak. Similarly, the trader in the photo shop kept putting me off. I heard some months later that in signing new leases they were subject to a non-disclosure agreement.

Feeling like I was not getting very far with these ad hoc conversations with traders, I asked Faruk from the mosque if he might take me around the market and make some introductions. He kindly agreed to take me around the market one Saturday afternoon. We worked our way up the row of shops at the north side of the market: a dry food store and halal butchers, a newsagent, a sari shop. At each stop Faruk would first speak in Sylheti, introducing what I was doing and asking if it was OK for me to ask some questions. He’d then give me a nod to start speaking in English. Faruk was not so much there as a translator, as there was always someone in the shop who spoke with me in English. But having him there helped me to bridge a gap I felt, as a white English person, between myself and the Bangladeshi traders.

In the butchers we got speaking to a worker on the shop floor. He explained that a big issue with the redevelopment for their businesses was the removal of car-parking and the loading bays at the back of their store. He explained that lots of their customers buy in bulk as it is cheaper. He pointed to the price list on the wall: the price of a ten-kilogram bag of rice compared to a one kilogram bag, or the price of half a sheep (twenty five kilograms) compared to one or two kilograms. “How are you going to carry it?” he asked me. It turned out this wasn’t a rhetorical

question, as another man who had been standing behind the counter joined in, walking over to the freezer and pulled out an enormous whole fish - around a meter long - and placed it in my arms. The first man picked up a five-litre bottle of vegetable oil, lifting it up and down by the handle to ascertain its weight.

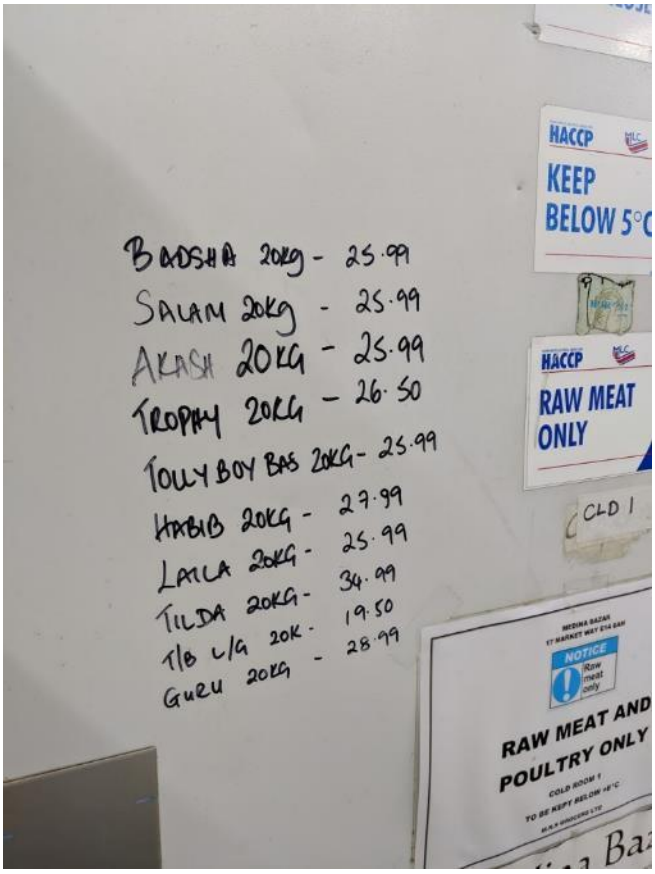
“So if you had ten kilograms rice, fish, one kilogram onions, this oil, some meat… would you be able to carry it? No!” He continued: “It’s the sisters that do most of the shopping, with the children too. The sisters can’t carry all of that. Right now they give us a call to have the stuff ready and they drive around the back to pick it up, you see?” - he said, pointing out the back door of the shop.

Listening and nodding I responded, “Ah, I see, I understand better now you’ve explained to me why the car parking is so important”.

“We explained before - they just didn’t listen”.

The importance of the marketplace in its current configuration as an economic infrastructure, allowing for the exchange of physical and sometimes heavy goods over space, was thus explained to me very clearly.

4.11 – Frozen fish



4.12 – Bulk prices on whiteboard

Back out in the market square, Faruk suggested we go and speak to some stall holders. At a stall selling mobile phone accessories we spoke to Abdul. He was fearful that the market was going to be taken away and thought that would be a great shame - not just in terms of traders' livelihoods but for all the people who come to the market to socialise and meet people. Sure, people could just get things delivered instead by ordering online, but "it would make people lazy if there is no longer a market", he said. If people just stayed in their houses, not only would they move around less, impacting on their physical health, they might also lose contact with friends and acquaintances:

> "You can call someone, but it's totally different speaking to someone face to face rather than over the phone. Sometimes you see people you haven't seen in a long time. It's nice."

“Do you think that meeting people face to face at the market is especially important for particular groups of people?” I asked. By particular groups I had in mind the elderly or social groups more prone to loneliness and isolation. However Abdul interpreted the question differently, answering:

> “No, no it’s for all people, it doesn’t matter what colour you are. You can see lots of different people, people sitting outside of the cafes”.

He pointed behind me at the row of three lock-up cafes where there is a regular crowd of mostly older white women sat there most days. During the weekends or school holidays they are joined by their children and grandchildren. He continued:

> “It’s not just Bangladeshis, it’s everyone. You can have a bite to eat. It’s a day out. There’s exercise for kids, there’s a play area”.

Playing the race card

My walk around Chrisp Street Market with Faruk illuminates many important functions of the market as it exists today for Bangladeshi traders. The market operates as an infrastructure of social and economic exchange which - the traders demonstrated to me - is threatened by the redevelopment proposals. It also illustrates a certain understandable guardedness and defensiveness on the part of the traders upon being questioned about their views on the regeneration by a white researcher - many of whom having already had experience of students and researchers coming to ask them questions over the previous months. “We explained before - they just didn’t listen”, was one trader’s pithy response to my comment about how their physical explanation of the need for car parking had helped me understand their arguments better. Meanwhile, Abdul at the mobile phone accessories stall interprets my question about the importance of the market for particular groups of people as a comment about ethnicity when in fact I had been thinking in terms of age. And the two shopkeepers who were most involved in the campaign are clearly reluctant to engage with me; perhaps feeling exposed at having taken the risk of opposing Poplar HARCA, only to have been denied solidarity from local residents - and particularly those predominantly white residents who supported the counter-campaign.

This reluctance to engage and sensitivity around the topic of the regeneration in my presence makes more sense in relation to what I heard from Terry - the white Irish housing activist introduced earlier - about some of the tactics employed by Poplar HARCA during the counter-campaign. Since 2016, Terry been intermittently publishing The Housing Times, a self-authored newspaper focusing on London's housing crisis - particularly with regard to council and social housing. In 2018 he published an issue dedicated to the regeneration proposals at Chrisp Street Market with the provocative headline "Poplar HARCA is accused of playing the 'race card' in its bid to win planning permission for the regeneration of Chrisp Street Market", superimposed onto the equally provocative image of the charred remains of Grenfell Tower. In the main body of the text he states that:

> "In a final effort to win support for the plans, people hired by Poplar HARCA, went knocking on doors asking residents whether they were in favour of the regeneration of Chrisp Street. Shopkeepers in the market also received a visit from representatives of Poplar HARCA and were encouraged to display a poster saying 'yes' in the window of their shops to the plans. In both instances if people were unresponsive to the requests it was intimated that the area would become just like Brick Lane, or as it come to be known Bangla (deshi) town. (The electoral ward for the area is called Spitalfields and Banglatown)" (McGrenera, 2018).

When I asked him where he had heard this he told me that he had confirmed it with "three separate sources". Terry's allegations marry with a story that I heard from Sister Christine who had spoken to one trader in her office "who was almost in tears" about how Poplar HARCA had acted. He felt - and Sister Christine shared this fear - that they were stoking community divisions by making out that it was the "Bengalis" who were against improving the market.

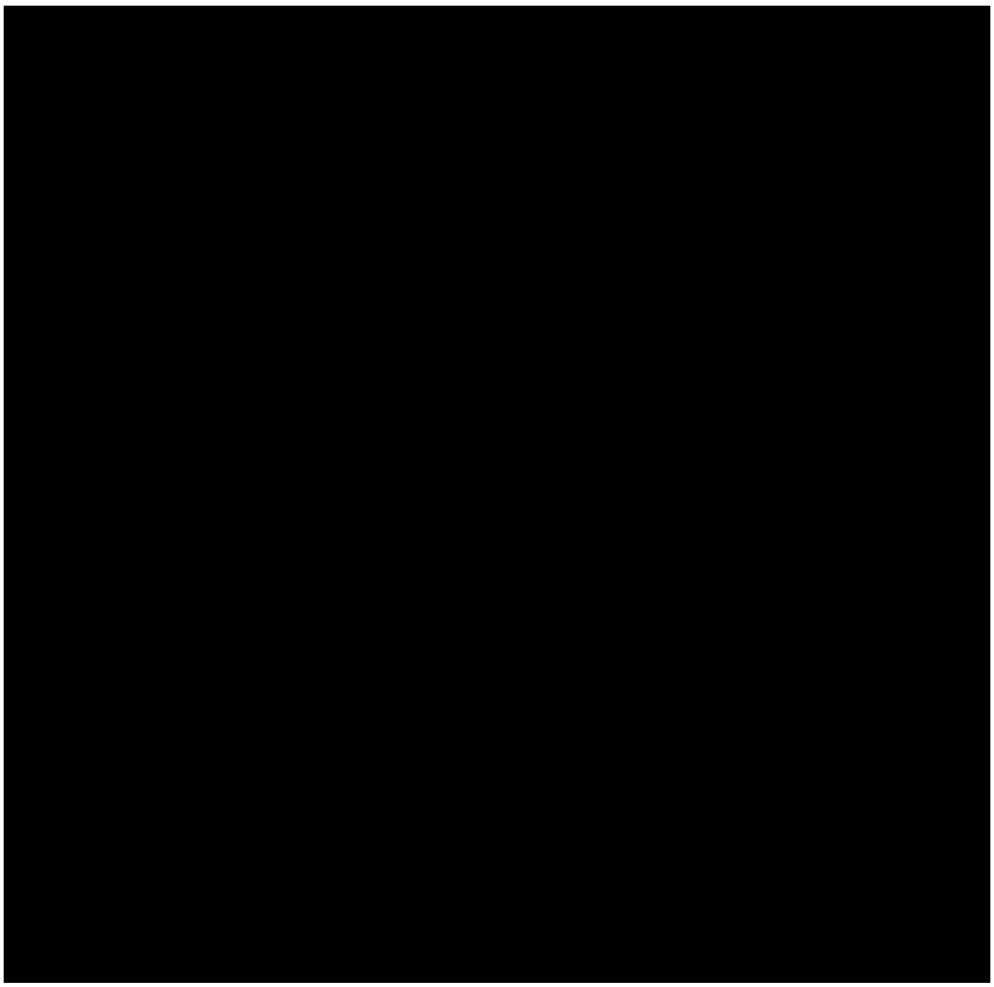
I have already discussed a couple of occasions when I encountered racist sentiments by white traders and users of the market. This gives an indication of the kinds of "community divisions" at the market place that the people working for Poplar HARCA might have been tapping into. These moments already described can be supplemented with reference to online discussions about the market on local history Facebook pages (introduced in earlier chapters). Comments posted under contemporary images of the market make frequent unfavourable comparisons to how it was 'before' - comparisons which are frequently racialised. For example, under one image someone comments "It's rubbish now Dagenham market is better", another asks

“Where’s all the cockneys?” while a stream of other comments describe the market as “cheap”, “nasty”, “crap” and “shit”.

These themes are repeated in comments underneath another contemporary image of the market:

- Crap street market more like
- Nothing left of it except [places owned by white traders and high street brands]. The rest is just cheap shit.
- And the deli the only English butcher’s in the area. The card shop is closing down and the halal butcher’s next door wants it to open as a fresh fish shop as if we need another halal food shop.
- So I heard that the regeneration has been put on hold as the stall holders are moaning about the parking
- [a different person responds, perhaps sympathetically] And they want more social housing

The racism on display in such comments would sometimes lead to the page receiving warnings from Facebook about being shut down, leading to a page administrator requesting that people only post old images of the market.



4.13 – Photo of Chrisp Street Market in 1994, posted to local history Facebook page

A proportion of these Facebook users - and perhaps the majority no longer live in the area. This is in evidence in the way that users seem surprised to see the contemporary images, asking things like “Is that what it looks like now?” and “Not like I remember it what a shame”. Therefore, there is a substantial doubt as to the extent to which we can take this as representative of white opinion at the market. That said, the fact that many of these users do seem to have up to date information on what is going on with the regeneration suggests either continued residence in the area or close links to others who continue to be residents. And similar racist sentiments appear on an online petition initiated by a Poplar HARCA employee in support of the regeneration proposals - arguably the sort of page more likely to be frequently by people who maintain an active relationship to the area. For example:

> "I've grown up with this marketype [sic] my nan mum cousin and uncle worked in it and I hate what it has become it's become poplardesh"[64]

The conclusion therefore cannot be avoided that racism is an important explanatory factor in how Poplar HARCA were able to effectively mobilise a counter-campaign in favour of the regeneration proposals. Indeed, if Terry's publication is to be believed, it seems that they themselves sought to tap into this current of malign sentiment, channelling it into support for their regeneration proposals (and in opposition to the Bangladeshi traders who were making a case against). But racism was not the only factor at play in support for the regeneration proposals. While the material decline of the market is racialised in the Facebook comments presented above, the material decay is itself real - and acknowledged to be so by traders and users of the market of all ethnicities. How the question of material decay and decline was articulated with racially exclusionary questions of heritage, and how this in turn generated support for the regeneration proposals beyond those who might normally express racist sentiments and attitudes, I will now turn to consider.

4.14 – Rubbish and broken tarmac in loading area, Chrisp Street Market

[64] https://www.change.org/p/support-the-redevelopment-of-chrisp-street-market/c (accessed 21/01/2023)

Decline and Regeneration

Most people that I spoke to at Chrisp Street Market - white, black, or Asian - recognised a 'decline' in the market. However, the specific experience and interpretation of the nature of this decline - and what underlay it - differed, particularly between white British and Bangladeshi traders and users of the market. For example, Ammar - one of the traders involved in the campaign against the redevelopment - described to me what he saw as a deliberate "running down" of the area by Poplar HARCA over the last decade or more. He saw uncollected rubbish in his loading bay, broken curbs and tarmac and the dilapidated state of the public toilets, as a cynical strategy pursued by them over the past several years to build a case for urgent redevelopment. Other traders of Bangladeshi descent noted falling numbers of customers, but again pinned the blame on Poplar HARCA's management of the market.

In contrast, white British traders and users of the market tended to narrate the decline of the market over a longer period of time. A frequent point of reference was the last redevelopment of the market which took place in 1993. This was when the current market canopy was installed and a row of arcades built as part of the 1951 development were demolished. One woman told me that after the 1993 redevelopment some of the stall holders had never returned. Regarding the canopy, almost everyone who mentioned it would add something to the effect of "and they never even finished it!", pointing to the free-standing pillars positioned around the outside of the canopy. A Poplar HARCA employee who grew up in the area told me that these free-standing pillars were in fact part of the original design: however, they were almost universally misinterpreted by white traders and users of the market as a symbol of a break from the past that occurred sometime in the early 1990s.

For some white traders the proposed regeneration was a chance to reverse this long running cycle of disinvestment and dwindling footfall in a manner that may even prove good for business. This was the case with Joe, an owner of a tanning salon at the north side of the market. Rather than a retail business his tanning salon was in the service economy and therefore not likely to be negatively impacted by reduced access to car-parking and loading bays. He considered that the higher concentration of "working professional people" living near the market might increase his target market, or as he put it, "[replace] those who've left" due to the ongoing outmigration of long-term white residents to places further east. But as well as

4.15 - View of Chrisp Street Market canopy and pillars from clock tower

4.16 – Chrisp Street Market canopy and pillars

making the case for the regeneration in business terms, he also saw the regeneration as a way of halting the "slow decline" of an area that he felt a strong attachment to:

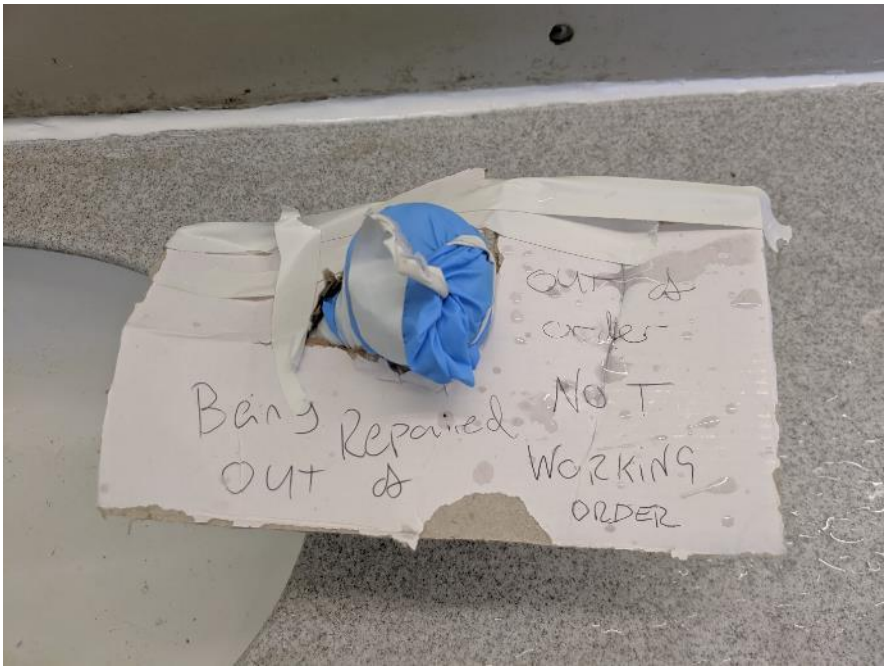
> "I've tried to explain it to a few of [the other shop keepers] - you look at it like people are coming and developing stuff and its gunna be bad times. To me this is already bad times. I've seen this area when I was seven, eight, ten years of age, I've seen the market down there when there was a thousand things to buy not just the same thing everywhere, I've seen it when it was cleaner, I've seen it when old people used to come out and clean their step, like you see in the old thing... So for people to try to convince me that we're in the good times now and these people are coming with all their money and ruining it, doesn't hold water with me… You don't see a lot of that [people cleaning their step] anymore. You see plenty of people throwing rubbish bags from the seventh floor and aiming for the bin. You see plenty of things like that. And for me, I've had it for so long that I'm sort of bored of it, in a way."

This narrative of decline and possible regeneration is aesthetic as much as it is economic. Joe contrasts a time when women used to scrub their front door steps and the market was cleaner to a contemporary moment when people "[throw] rubbish bags from the seventh floor and [aim] for the bin". And it was such a promise of aesthetic rather than necessarily economic regeneration, I suggest, that appealed to white supporters of the regeneration proposals.

This aesthetic aspect of the appeal of the regeneration proposals - as well as how it could work to persuade white users of the market of the necessity for regeneration who might otherwise be sceptical or unsure - was evident in a conversation in the upstairs office of St Matthias community centre, between Sister Christine, an employee of Poplar HARCA and a white volunteer at the homeless shelter. The conversation began with this woman's account of the problem of drug use and drug dealing on the street where she lived and at Chrisp Street Market which she said that was spoiling the area and setting a terrible example to local children. The conversation then turned to the topic of the redevelopment of Chrisp Street Market and other local projects. Sister Christine and the Poplar HARCA employee were having a friendly disagreement about the proposals. Picking up a copy of Terry's "Housing Times" that happened to be on the table in front of her, the woman expressed a sense of foreboding that Poplar HARCA were going to "get rid of the market". To which the Poplar HARCA employee responded: "No - we're not getting rid of the market. Don't believe what you read in that booklet". Taking a moment to reconsider, the woman's demeanour then abruptly switched. Dropping the pamphlet back down on the table she said: "Oh what

the hell - let's knock it all down. We've got to get rid of these people and sort the place out", adding that the demolition of part of the Robin Hood Gardens had helped, as she saw it, with the problem of drug dealing there. She went onto complain that "it used to be great market but ever since they added that covering they ruined it" and that "now all the stuff they sell is the same".

Here we can see how a visceral sense of the market's decline seemed to work to tip the balance in terms of this woman's support for the regeneration proposals. Her concern about the threat of the market's disappearance is overridden by her disgust at the problem of drug dealing and drug use at the market and its general material decay (the infamous roof covering gets another mention) with the regeneration seemingly promising to restore some long-lost sense of order. This woman's disgust at the perceived problem of drug dealing and drug use at Chrisp Street Market and her overwhelming desire for it to be "[gotten] rid of" recalls research which has drawn on Mary Douglas' writing on dirt as "matter out of place" and Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theorisation of the abject to analyse processes of urban change (Campkin, 2013; Jackson, 2014). Interestingly however, her emphasis was on knocking the market down more than it was on building it back up. She did not express much of a hope that the regeneration would result in a wonderful market, resembling something of its former greatness. Rather it seemed that she was prepared to take the risk of the market being lost if by consenting to the regeneration at least something was done about drug dealing and drug use in the locality.



4.17 - Broken tap in Chrisp Street Market public toilets

“I got kind of swept up with it”

I will now draw on one final anecdote to elaborate further on the relation between the material decay of the market, heritage and ambivalent support for the regeneration. Like Joe and the volunteer at St Matthias, Jimmy was also concerned about the market’s material decline and decay. This in turn fed into his support for the regeneration proposals; support which was not passive but involved him attending the second planning committee meeting as well as writing a letter to the committee in advance of the meeting expressing his support. In this letter Jimmy writes:

> “I have been a lifelong resident of Poplar and am now in my sixtieth year. I have noticed with much sadness how Chrisp Street Market has declined over recent years. With fewer visitors and a general lack of maintenance the market now seems far removed from its original vigour and vitality which characterised its original inception in the halcyon days of the Festival of Britain in 1951.”

Jimmy told me about this letter on one our early audio recorded walks around Poplar. Returning to join me outside after using the public toilets at Chrisp Street Market, Jimmy said:

> “I wrote an email to Tower Hamlets Council in support of Poplar HARCA’s regeneration plans for Chrisp Street Market. I tried to put a literary flourish on it - the halcyon days of the 1960s. I’ve just been in that toilet and, wow, that is - that is the decline of a civilisation that is. That toilet. That is astonishing. I’ve not been in there for a few years - that is just dreadful. I know its condemned to be demolished. But I’d have thought it wouldn’t have taken much to bring it up to a decent standard. I’d have thought there are probably some statutory requirements that are being transgressed. Wow. Wow. Wait until I tell my dad. My dad always goes on about - bless him - he always goes on about how at the end of each day they would wash the market. A little lorry would come down and wash the floor, the pavement. I can remember in the 60s there was a sense of the market at closing time. Wow….”

Experiencing the dilapidated state of the Chrisp Street Market toilets - its broken windows and cubicle doors, graffitied mirrors, boarded up sink and mouldy walls - reminded Jimmy of his letter and most likely redoubled his feeling that he was right to support the regeneration proposals. But what is distinctive about Jimmy’s perceptions of decline and support for the

regeneration is the way in which he explicitly articulates it in relation to the notions of heritage - and specifically architectural heritage - that were circulating in relation to the regeneration plans. Thus in his letter he writes of how the “market now seems far removed from its original vigour and vitality which characterised its original inception in the halcyon days of the Festival of Britain in 1951”. Meanwhile on experiencing the dilapidated state of the toilets he remarks, “that is the decline of a civilisation”. Even though Jimmy is not naive to the fact that Poplar HARCA must bear some of the responsibility for leaving the toilets in such a poor state - a state that he thinks cannot be justified by the fact that it is “condemned to be demolished” - he supports their regeneration plans (which in his letter he talks of being “greatly impressed” by) on the basis that they will involve a renewed care towards this unjustly neglected place.

I did not ask Jimmy about what he thought about the traders’ campaign against the regeneration proposals and neither did he volunteer his thoughts on this. In our conversations about the proposed regeneration of Chrisp Street Jimmy’s emphasised his positive desire to see the place better cared for and better maintained rather than - as with some other white supporters of the proposals discussed earlier - a more negative desire to deny the claims on the marketplace of the predominantly Bangladeshi traders’ campaign. That is not to say that “demographic change” at the market wasn’t a concern to Jimmy; it was (see also the discussion in chapter one in relation to the question of pubs). But Jimmy did not articulate his support for the regeneration in these terms.

Helpful here in discerning and disentangling the various motivations that predominantly white people had for supporting the Chrisp Street Market regeneration proposals is Ana Carolina Balthazar’s recent anthropological study of “nationalist populism” in Margate, a coastal town in southeast England (2017; 2021). While acknowledging the racism of the campaign to Leave the European Union before and after the referendum vote in 2016 and the role of a nostalgia for Empire in motivating elements of the vote to Leave, Balthazar (2017, p. 223) argues that nationalist populism is a question of “multiple nostalgias” coming together to “produce the same event”. She develops this argument with reference to her white working-class interlocutors’ concern for objects, buildings and places with “character”. Character indexes the ability of an object to create links to the past that are considered important - for example because they index valued forms of craftmanship and labour, or memories of working-class ancestors and the kinds of lives that they lived. It is through care of such objects, buildings and places that her interlocutors make connections to the past that are simultaneously personal and ‘national’ and negotiate historical change and continuity in the present. In this way, Balthazar argues, her white working-class interlocutors’ votes to Leave

were “more the consequence of a native logic of building connections and an issue of poor political representation that they are about excluding migrants - even if excluding migrants could be one of the outcomes” (ibid., p. 220).

We could apply the same analytical framework to the campaign in support of the regeneration proposals at Chrisp Street Market. Here, just as with the Brexit vote, a highly racialised, negative desire among some for the exclusion and even expulsion of migrants comes together with a more positive concern for the care of the marketplace as a site of ‘heritage’, encompassing architectural, cultural, and personal/biographic dimensions. If the former reflects a nostalgia for white supremacy, we might think of the latter as a nostalgia for post-war social democracy. And yet I think it’s important to recognise the ways in which these multiple nostalgias are never entirely discreet but are rather connected with the frame of the nation common across them. Thus, whereas Balthazar stresses the ethical component of the Brexit vote, here I find it important to also emphasise the affective dimension of white populism at Chrisp Street market. Following Ahmed, I suggest that it is precisely through the ways in emotions circulate across multiple domains - or as she puts it, across multiple figures, objects, bodies, and signs - that this affective economy, this coming together to “produce the same event”, draws its power.

That there was such an affective economy operating in the context of the contestation over the regeneration proposals at Chrisp Street Market is suggested by Jimmy’s subsequent ambivalence. In a conversation about RTB at Jimmy’s flat, Jimmy brought up his attendance at the second planning committee meeting in support of the proposals. He talked about how a woman - a white leaseholder - had come along to the meeting to object to the proposals:

> “She said in her objections to it, amongst other things, that when she bought her right to buy she didn’t buy it just as mere property speculation, to make a few quid, to buy somewhere else, she said she bought that to hand down to her children. Because she said I like living here and my children want to live here. Now they won’t be able to. You don’t get enough [money in compensation] to stay in the neighbourhood. I take her on her word, she sounded quite passionate, she felt that she wanted to buy the place to hand on. And I think that was probably how it could have been. What I was struck by was the development plans were all about - like - numbers of units and extra social housing and need for regeneration. And when this woman spoke it kind of personalised it. Before that it was rather abstract. But when she spoke it was her own story. I remember I felt at the time a lot of sympathy for her point of view and it made me wonder, er, you know, this will change Chrisp Street. It will. They say it

won't. They'll say we'll still keep [Jimmy trails off]… But it will. It will in my view. Yeah, it will. I thought the way she put her point over was well done. And I thought oh… quite sad."

Jimmy went onto say how, after hearing this woman's testimony, he had "a little bit of regret" about having gone along to support the regeneration plans, stating perhaps in mitigation that "I got kind of swept up with it because I was doing a bit of volunteering for Poplar HARCA and they were looking for bodies, as it were".

With a bit of distance from events Jimmy felt differently about his support for the Chrisp Street Market regeneration. We might see this as the affective economy at play during the contestation around the regeneration as having lost some of its power - Jimmy's reflection that he "got kind of swept up in it" suggestive of affective forces in operation shaping one's perceptions and decision making. Jimmy's hopes that the regeneration might restore some of the lost "vigour and vitality" of Chrisp Street Market continued to diminish over the subsequent months. The last time we took a walk around the market together in March 2022 Jimmy had come around to Wayne's view that: "Poplar has just become a place for property investors to make money, to sink their cash into building taller and taller blocks of flats and try to turn a profit". Compounding this feeling, Jimmy noticed that an archway - an original feature of the 1951 development - had been removed as they redevelopment had gotten underway. "Fuck 'em" he exclaimed, as we turned to make our way back to the train station.

Conclusion

In this three-part chapter I have examined how contestation around the regeneration proposals for Chrisp Street Market, far from bringing together Poplar's multi-ethnic working-class population in solidarity against gentrification, saw opposing campaigns emerge, starkly divided along racial lines. I have shown how these divisions both reflect histories of racism at Chrisp Street Market - and east London more broadly - and the ways in which certain histories are made present or remain submerged through the practice of heritage in relation to the regeneration plans. In particular, I drew attention to how Poplar HARCA's articulation of heritage, assisted by the curation of the Lansbury Micro Museum in collaboration with the V&A, was in keeping with a predominant story of the marketplace among white users and traders in which nostalgia for a post-war Golden Age - "the halcyon days of the Festival of Britain in 1951" - is contrasted to a subsequent period of decline and degeneration. This allowed for Poplar HARCA to present their regeneration plans as providing a "greater emphasis on our heritage", coming to the rescue of an architecturally and socially distinctive

marketplace which had been unjustly ignored and left to decline. This articulation of heritage succeeded in drawing support from sections of the local white population for whom the current decayed state of the marketplace is a source of dismay and disgust. This articulation of heritage worked hand in hand with allegations of more underhand tactics. While the Bangladeshi presence in the marketplace is absent within Poplar HARCA's official articulations of heritage, intimations that Chrisp Street would become another Brick Lane in the absence of regeneration operate on a more explicitly exclusionary register, tapping into persistent racist and white supremacist sentiments of some white users and traders at the marketplace. Drawing on Ahmed's concept of affective economies it has been possible to show how these two registers of heritage worked together in the course of contestation around Chrisp Street Market. While there were multiple nostalgias at play in motivating support for the regeneration plans, I suggest that they are not entirely discreet but partially connected through a racial logic.

At Chrisp Street Market in the context of the contestation around the regeneration proposals the "convivial multiculture" that Rhys-Taylor associates with other east London marketplaces is not readily apparent. As recently reviewed by Sivamohan Valluvan (2016), at the heart of Gilroy's concept of conviviality is the absence of whiteness as the standard against which ethnic difference is assessed. Here "ethnic differences do not require accommodation, remaking or respectful recognition vis-a-vis the white majority, but should simply cease to require scrutiny or evaluation in the first place" (ibid., p. 207) while "all claims to communitarian identity (as they emerge within the intertwined formations of nation, ethnicity and race) are troubled in the interests of *actively* negotiating *new* forms of solidarity" (ibid., p. 209). In the ethnographic material presented in this chapter this is far from the case. However, this does not mean that there are not moments where the salience of race is lessened and the possibility of alternative, non-racialised collective formations emerges. For example, the description of the traders' protest outside the offices of Poplar HARCA both speaks to the historical embeddedness and persistence of race, but also - in the short speeches of the two white female attendees - moments of solidarity across such divisions. I have therefore endeavoured to avoid any one characterisation of the market in terms of its success or failure as a site of multiculture, so as to hold open the possibility that Chrisp Street Market might host forms of convivial multiculture that I did not myself encounter (a substantial possibility) or might do so in the future.

With regards to the last ethnographic anecdote, Jimmy's subsequent demoralisation with the Chrisp Street regeneration arguably points to the contingency of affective economies and therefore - perhaps - of the racialised collective bodies that emerged through them. Jimmy's disillusionment seems to suggest that the affectivity of decline and decay at Chrisp Street Market could be channelled differently if another campaign - organised on a multi-ethnic class basis - was able to engage with the issue as effectively as Poplar HARCA did. That said, it is worth noting that it is the testimony of the white leaseholder which gives Jimmy pause for thought, rather than the representations of the Bangladeshi traders' campaign. This perhaps suggests an alternative conclusion which underlines the persistence of race and the barriers to solidarity across ethnically and racially construed divides.

Chapter Five: Experimenting with Exposure

In the last chapter we saw how white nostalgia and heritage, as it manifested in what I analysed as a form of "urban restoration" at Chrisp Street Market, excluded Bangladeshi traders and broader Bangladeshi claims on this 'historical' marketplace. But this will likely have adverse effects beyond any one ethnic group: the redevelopment proposals will likely gentrify and markedly change the character of the area, putting many working-class users and traders of the market of all ethnicities at risk of displacement. We also saw how, even if Jimmy was on the 'winning side' of the contest between the campaign in favour of the proposals and the campaign against, this did not provide him with a lasting sense of agency regarding urban regeneration in Poplar. Rather Jimmy reports feelings of regret about his support for the proposals after getting a better sense of how the character of the area will be transformed and how long-standing leaseholders will be displaced. One might conclude from this analysis of urban restoration at Chrisp Street Market that the sorts of white, working-class nostalgia in evidence here are therefore inherently harmful and as such something to be 'overcome'. But as argued in chapter two, and more broadly across all of the chapters of this thesis, matters of nostalgia in situations marked by class injury and loss are not so easily resolved. If therefore nostalgia is not something simply to be overcome, the question thus becomes – how might this nostalgia be channelled differently? How might nostalgia and a concern for heritage be channelled in such a way that, rather than contribute to the forms of racial and class inequalities associated with urban regeneration, it comprises a resource against them?

In this chapter I attempt a modest and partial answer to these questions through reflection on my 'multimodal' fieldwork engagements with my white, working-class interlocutors in Tommy's Tea Rooms and, in particular, a collaborative film-making project that I developed with Jimmy. I am interested in how our film-making collaboration provided an outlet for Jimmy's nostalgia, offering a more enduring sense of agency regarding urban regeneration than he attained through his participation in the Chrisp Street Market campaign. It is my contention that frustrated agency and a sense of powerlessness is an important way in which class inequality manifests in contexts of urban change and regeneration – including in Poplar. Jimmy's nostalgia might in some ways be seen as a 'symptom' of this situation – a symptom that, as we saw in the last chapter, can have knock-on effects in terms of racial inequality. But rather than a symptom to be diagnosed and cured, I am here interested in the symptom in the Deleuzian sense; as that which "expresses a desire or life force trapped and

twisted at an impasse, awaiting a chance to break through" (Biehl and Locke, 2010, p. 332). Thus, while nostalgia might well be a symptom of frustrated agency and a sense of powerlessness it is at the same time *through nostalgia* – through experimentation with nostalgia as a mode of existence – I suggest, that this situation might be remedied or ameliorated.

In order to develop this analysis of nostalgia as a mode of existence I draw on Deleuze's conception of affect (which he himself draws from Spinoza). In his lectures on Spinoza, Deleuze (1978) writes of joy and sadness as the two "fundamental affects" comprising "the two poles of variation" in the body's power of acting. For Deleuze, when the body (and the "characteristic relations" that define it) has an encounter which increases its capacity of acting, this is associated with the affect of joy. Conversely, when the body has an encounter which decreases its capacity of acting, it undergoes an affect of sadness. While nostalgia is often associated with negative affects and a decrease in one's powers of acting (with this perhaps one of the reasons for 'progressive' hostility towards it) I show how practices of nostalgia can also be a source of vitality and the growth of one's capacity to act.

The increase in one's capacity to act through nostalgia that I am interested in here must be distinguished from the political mobilisations in the last chapter, in which forms of resentment were never far from the surface. The joyful affects associated with a body's increased power of acting are the antithesis of resentment. Deleuze distinguishes his concept of capacity" (*puissance*), a term which he distinguishes from that of "power" (*pouvoir*) (Blake, 2013).[65] For Deleuze while the enactment of capacities entails an affect of joy, the exercise of power is, in contrast, characterised by a sad affect. There is perhaps a hint of this sadness in Jimmy's regret about his attendance at the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee Meeting, in support of Poplar HARCA's regeneration proposals; by no means can it be said that there is any lingering joy for Jimmy in having been on the winning side of that particular battle.[66]

Another way of talking about these joyful affects is in relation to Deleuze's conception of health and the healthy life. As summarised by Daniel Smith in the introduction to the English translation of *Essays Critical and Clinical*:

[65] Here I am using the translation of the French provided by Terence Blake on his blog Agent Swarm. In the English translation of *l'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Gilles Deleuze from A to Z (Deleuze and Parnet, 2011 [1996]), puissance is instead translated as "power of acting".
[66] For Deleuze (and Spinoza) the distinction between capacities and power is an ethical distinction. "there are no bad capacities". Rather "that which is bad" are those forms of power which "[prevent] someone from doing what they can…[prevent] someone from acting, from enacting their capacity" (Blake, 2013).

> "The 'Bad' or sickly life is an exhausted and degenerating mode of existence, one that judges life from the perspective of its sickness, that devaluates life in the name of 'higher' values. The 'Good' or healthy life, by contrast, is an overflowing and ascending form of existence, a mode of life that is able to transform itself depending on the forces it encounters, always increasing the power to live" (Smith, 1998, p. xv).

The question of health is particularly pertinent to Jimmy's nostalgia and his own relation with it, for it is in connection to his sense of loss of home and place that Jimmy would often describe his struggles with mental health and illness. "I'm fed up with Poplar", he announced one afternoon on walking into Tommy's Tea Rooms, and it was these feelings of being "fed up" and estranged from the place he had lived all his life, and his sense of nostalgia for how it once was, which formed the core material for our collaborative film making project. In this chapter, then, I situate nostalgia as a site where a struggle between a "'Bad' or sickly life" and "'Good' or healthy life" plays out, arguing that through our collaboration Jimmy experimented with the production of affect, attempting to find a new way of relating to urban change and regeneration.

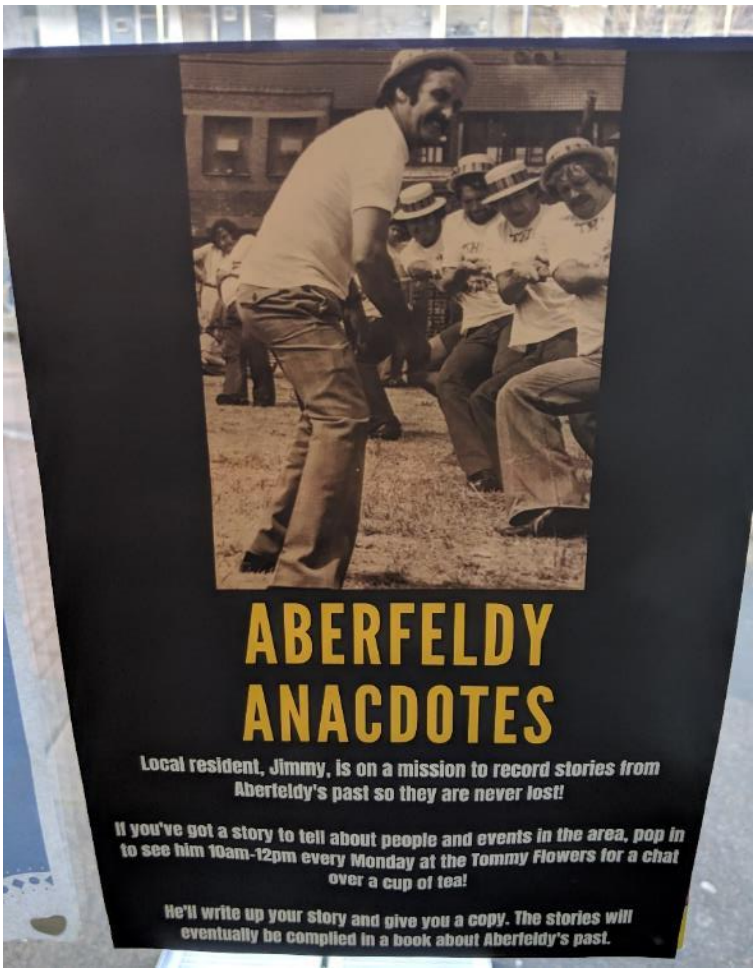
Returning to the Enclave

In chapter two we saw how Wayne's efforts to "create some community cohesion" through Tommy's Tea Rooms to contest Poplar HARCA's approach to urban regeneration were limited by the use of this pub/cafe/heritage project as an organising base. But rather than dismiss these efforts as a failure, I sought to re-evaluate my interlocutors' practices as carving out an "enclave" amid the redevelopment of the Aberfeldy Estate. I positioned this enclave as a space of temporary shelter for a group of white, working-class men experiencing varied forms of displacement. And I analysed how nostalgia and heritage operated as a medium for bringing these men together around a shared sense of loss, providing part of the basis for the ethos of care and companionship that I argued characterised Tommy's Tea Rooms.

Now I return to this scene, examining my own role in this space and its functioning as a heritage and regeneration project. Although I entered Tommy's Tea Rooms with my own research project and questions, I was open to my research practices being co-opted, to some extent, by my interlocutors. This led to my becoming a kind of informal resident oral history researcher. I hadn't specifically thought of my fieldwork as having an oral history component before embarking on it, but this was a very reasonable interpretation of my

“Poplar Stories” flyer that I handed out to people to explain my research and provide my contact details. As it happened, Tommy’s Tea Rooms was already host to another incipient oral history project, initiated by Jimmy: on my first visit to Tommy’s Tea Rooms, I noticed a flyer blue-tacked to the inside of the window for an oral history project called “Aberfeldy Anecdotes”. On my next visit, however, the flyer had been taken down. Wayne explained that Jimmy (who at this point I had not met) had lost confidence in the project after no-one had turned up to the first couple of sessions. Seeing that this might be a fruitful direction in which to allow my fieldwork practices to be led, “Poplar Stories” became a kind of successor project to Aberfeldy Anecdotes, providing a platform for Jimmy and others to produce oral history and local heritage. Examples of these pieces of oral history include: an audio recorded group conversation between myself, Jimmy, Wayne and Bob about the history of local pubs; a conversation written up as a blog post with Derek about his interest in Tommy Flowers and his efforts to have this important local historical figure properly commemorated; two blog posts about Bob’s working life, first at the West India Docks and subsequently the Bromley-by-Bow gasworks; and an interview with Wayne about the pubs and music venues of east London of his youth, conducted while driving around in his car.

My interlocutors generally insisted that they their stories and perspectives were captured via an audio recording, expressing an aversion to being photographed or appearing on video. Derek, for his part, insisted that our interview was not audio recorded but that I take notes. I understood my interlocutors’ aversion to being photographed or video recorded as a means of protecting themselves from exposure to the potential judgement of imagined audiences. Visual representations produced by artists and social researchers are laden with power relations, and so it was with the visual representations and other recordings I produced during my fieldwork. As we saw in chapter one, the working classes have often been subject of unflattering and scornful representations in the British public sphere; representations that separate out the respectable from the non-respectable, the deserving from the undeserving. In this context, avoiding being photographed or videoed perhaps offered a degree of protection from the ‘bourgeois gaze’ (Fisher, 2014b; Skeggs, 1997).



5.1 - Aberfeldy Anecdotes flyer on window of Tommy Flowers / Tommy's Tea Rooms

For Jimmy, however, the camera held a certain attraction. He first expressed an interest in using a camera to take still images of the Aberfeldy Estate, after showing me a series of photographs he had taken in the 1990s (presented at the beginning of chapter one) and expressing a wish that he had taken more. This quickly progressed into Jimmy appearing in front of the camera - "Jimmy's Lament" marking this moment of transition. After this first video, what I have since come to describe as our "collaborative film making project" developed in an ad hoc manner, with Jimmy's experience of watching the footage back sparking an interest in recording more videos - both out in the streets of Poplar and inside his flat. This collaboration (still ongoing) has so far resulted in the production of a series of short videos posted to a Poplar Stories Facebook page (alongside some of the other oral history materials generated through the activities described above) as well as a twenty-five-minute film, "Jimmy's Archive", subsequently screened at academic film festivals, conferences and in classroom environments.

I/we did not explicitly set out to make an “ethnographic film”. The method we employed is better understood in terms of what Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2019), describe as the creation of “anthropological encounters”. In their call for a multimodal anthropology orientated around a “politics of invention” Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019, p. 223) state that:

> “The question is less one of devising and implementing collaborative methodologies in order to achieve certain disciplinary goals than creating anthropological encounters in which the very question of what matters, and to whom, can be asked - situations, in other words, in which new horizons of possibility can be imagined and enacted”.

I suggest that mine and Jimmy’s collaboration functioned as an anthropological encounter in these terms, creating a space where Jimmy was able to ‘work through’ his feelings of loss and nostalgia. Through an iterative process of shooting videos, reviewing the outcome, shooting further videos, and finally sharing the outcomes on Facebook and through in-person screenings we experimented with the production of affect. If my other interlocutors at Tommy’s Tea Rooms were averse to appearing on video for fear of being exposed to the potential judgement of imagined audiences, Jimmy *sought exposure* of a certain kind, while at the same time struggling with self-judgement and critique.

This chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section I situate my analysis of our collaborative film making project in relation to recent theorisations of multi-modal anthropology and the literature on the “anthropology of becoming” (pioneered by those working in the subdiscipline of medical anthropology), drawing out the centrality of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze to both. The subsequent section then brings insights from these literatures to bear on my collaboration with Jimmy, articulating what was centrally at stake; namely how Jimmy reflexively engaged with his own feelings of nostalgia and struggled with forms of self-judgement. I then analyse Jimmy’s struggles in relation to Deleuze’s essay “To Have Done with Judgement”, taking up Deleuze’s concept of “combat” to explore how Jimmy sought to “defy” judgement through our film collaboration, developing this analysis in relation to two videos. In the conclusion, I reflect on the challenges of sustaining fieldwork encounters - and the social and affective forms that they generate - once fieldwork has officially been completed, and question how a multi-modal anthropology orientated around a politics of invention should relate to matters of “critique”.

Invention and Becoming

In the inaugural article of the "multimodal anthropologies" section of American Anthropologist, Samuel Collins, Matthew Durington and Harjant Gill (2017, p. 142) argue that multimodal anthropology needs to be understood in both a "descriptive and prescriptive" sense. Descriptively, it foregrounds the "centrality of media production to the everyday life of both anthropologists and our interlocutors".[67] Prescriptively, multimodal anthropology seeks to decentre what these authors call the "finished, reified products of fieldwork or labwork" (ibid., p. 142) - products which are very usually single-authored and largely shorn of the complex, collaborative processes through which they have come into being. Anthropological fieldwork leads to "multiple outcomes", and we are asked to "take these outcomes and processes seriously as meaningful interventions that nudge anthropology into more collaborative, innovative and reflexive directions" (ibid., p. 142). In a subsequent intervention, Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019, p. 220) join Collins et al in their enthusiasm for the collaborative possibilities of multimodal anthropology, arguing that it is the potential for such approaches to "contribute to a politics of invention for the discipline" which comprises its most promising contribution. Drawing on theorisations of invention and "inventive methods" by scholars across sociology, anthropology and philosophy, Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019, p. 221 highlight the opportunities within multimodal anthropology for "inventive engagements that, rather than attempting to capture pre-existing ideas or relations through representational techniques" - as perhaps a more traditional social science approach might endeavour to do - "aspire instead to contribute to enacting new entities, new relations, new worlds" (emphasis removed). Central to this work of multimodal invention are the ways in which employment of different media forms, beyond text, open possibilities for a "reversal of the anthropological gaze" such that our interlocutors might be acknowledged as "skilled theoreticians" themselves. While "[academic] texts, for the most part, are the opposite of good collaborative devices", they argue, other media - for example "web 2.0 enabled (social) media" - "offers new ways to engage with students, research participants, and various publics about questions of mutual concern" (ibid., p. 222).

A good example of this multimodal approach, and one which holds particular relevance for thinking through my collaboration with Jimmy, is Dattatreyan's own collaborative ethnofiction project, *"Desiring Bollywood"* (Dattatreyan, 2020). This project saw Dattatreyan collaborate

[67] While the subdiscipline of visual anthropology has attended to the role of visual images in social life and made the creation of visual images a core part of anthropological practice, multimodal anthropology attempts to draw attention to a broader scope of engagements, across "multiple platforms and collaborative sites, including film, photography, dialogue, social media, kinesis, and practice" (Collins, Durington and Gill 2017, p. 142)

with Jason - an aspiring filmmaker and actor from Nigeria - to write a script for a film based on Jason's experiences of racial discrimination in Delhi, India; subsequently working with a cast of amateur actors from Mozambique, Nigeria, and India to devise the scenes. Dattatreyan (2020, p. 1) develops the concept of "re-staging" to describe the "collaborative, performance-based multimodal method" employed to produce the film, encompassing the process of writing the script, the recruitment and direction of actors, rehearsals and improvisation, and their subsequent collective playback/feedback sessions. Bringing together participants with different positionalities pertaining to the question of anti-Black racism in India, Dattatreyan shows how this method created opportunities "through embodied improvisation and collective witnessing, [for participants] to reflexively explore their own understandings of racialized difference" (ibid., p. 2). Thus, rather than present the collaborative ethnofiction project as a means of revealing anthropological insights to primarily be elaborated and shared in academic environments, Dattatreyan emphasises the fieldwork encounter itself as a site of collaborative pedagogy, in which research participants play a central role in shaping the line of enquiry.[68]

My approach in this chapter is heavily influenced by Dattatreyan (2020), but I try to push further in my analysis of the specifically affective and therapeutic dimensions of my collaboration with Jimmy. Dattatreyan gestures to the affective aspects of what emerged in the process of making Desiring Bollywood. For example, when discussing a scene which re-stages Jason's arrest and subsequent imprisonment on spurious grounds, Dattatreyan describes how the participants' shared involvement in the re-staging of Jason's traumatic experiences generated a particular intimacy among the group, allowing the participants "a chance to extend care to each other and, in particular to Jason", for whom the experience was "cathartic" (ibid., pp. 9-10). But this is described as a "therapeutic by-product" of the collective endeavour, rather than its *modus operandi*. The specific affective processes and struggles at play here largely remain outside Dattatreyan's conceptualisation of "re-staging" which is more orientated to the forms of (self) knowledge discursively articulated through playback-feedback sessions.

To further develop this line of thinking about the affective dimensions of multimodal collaborations and their "politics of invention" it is helpful to draw on the literature from medical anthropology on the "anthropology of becoming" (Biehl and Locke, 2010). João

[68] See also: Dattatreyan (2018) for another where the fieldwork setting - in this case the hip hop "cipha" - is positioned as a site of collaborative ethnographic projects, and Estalella and Sanchez-Criado (2018) for a conceptualisation of "joint problem-making" in anthropological fieldwork.

Biehl and Peter Locke's articulation of an anthropology of becoming has many points of affinity with Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón's "politics of invention" (with both drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze). Each conceives of a social field constituted by ongoing processes rather than static entities (becoming rather than being), is concerned with questions of ontology alongside epistemology, and carries the conviction that the task of the social analyst is not only to describe a pre-existing set of affairs but to attune oneself to that which is real but not yet actualised (the virtual). But the specific focus on questions of illness and health within the articulation of the anthropology of becoming re-situates the matter of invention at a subjective or phenomenological level, which falls outside of Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón's articulation of multimodality's politics of invention.[69] For example in his ethnographic section of the paper co-authored with Locke, Biehl describes the research relationship that he developed with Catarina - a patient living at a rehabilitation centre called Vita - and how he came to see her speech and writing not just as the symptoms of mental illness in the conventional clinical sense but as "an abandoned person who was claiming experience on her own terms" (ibid., p. 318). Biehl interprets this speech and writing as a form of critique of the institutional and political economic context of social abandonment in which Catarina finds herself, but also as something more than this - as a form of subjectivity which overflows the mechanisms of control that she is subjected to in which she "writes to remain alive… creatively [redirecting] disciplinary clinical elements into a literary-therapeutic line of flight" (ibid., p. 326).

Locke's ethnographic material drawn from his fieldwork in Sarajevo similarly illustrates matters of (mental) health and illness as sites of becoming and invention. He examines the ways in which, in the aftermath of war, dominant discourses locate the source of contemporary "social-structural and political-economic problems… almost exclusively *on a clinical register* through which Bosnian voices seem to emit only signs of lives blocked by collective illness" (ibid., p. 329, emphasis in original). For example, articulations of loss and yearning for the social securities of pre-war Yugoslavian communism, known locally as "Yugo-nostalgia", are frequently condemned as "another kind of pathology of memory parallel (or part of the complex of) mass PTSD" (ibid., p. 331). Against this tendency, Locke argues for a need to address these symptoms through a different mode of listening, one

[69] Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019., p. 221) state that their "interest… is on how multimodality can offer an approach to the sensible that moves away from phenomenology (which tends to privilege a more or less unitary knowing subject…)". However, I suggest that the medical anthropology literature on the anthropology of becoming offers an approach to subjectivity which is neither unitary nor emphasises questions of knowing over feeling, sensing, becoming etc.

attuned to the symptom in Deleuze's conception as that which "express a desire or life force trapped and twisted at an impasse, awaiting a chance to break through" (ibid., p. 332).

Both Biehl and Locke conclude their single-authored ethnographic sections with reflections on how anthropological research might relate to these practices of becoming. For Biehl, "Catarina refused to be merely an object of understanding for others" and therefore "challenges us to inquire into the benefits that can come from anthropological knowledge making" (ibid., p. 327). Meanwhile for Locke, the anthropology of becoming requires an "additional step beyond *explaining* the dark realities to the work of *imagining*, in collaboration with its interlocutors, concrete ways in which things could be otherwise" (335, emphasis in original). It is here, I believe, that the multimodal and the "politics of invention" outlined by Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón comes back in, offering a set of methodological and conceptual tools that are better able than traditional participant-observation based approaches to participate in this work of anthropological becoming.

Judgement

Similarly to in Dattatreyan's (2020) collaborative ethnofiction project, central to the anthropological encounters staged through mine and Jimmy's film making were the creation of opportunities for self-reflection through the watching back of footage. I began by sharing the video material that we shot together via a shared cloud storage folder, giving Jimmy the opportunity to watch the footage in his own time and form his own impressions of it before we met to discuss the videos in person. Meeting at his flat a week after filming "Jimmy's Lament" (see chapter one), Jimmy described to me how he had been "shocked by the video". Seeing himself and his feelings of nostalgia represented back to him through video ushered forth a strongly negative reaction:

> "I've had a chance to look at that video we made…It seems absurd that I'm kind of upset about the loss of something… it's just gone, it's gone. And other people have come to terms with it I'm sure, and other people have passed away, and I'm standing on the corner bemoaning something that is about thirty-five years ago. It's like a man in Rome today saying - 'they used to do charioteering here! Have you seen Ben Hur?!" It's absurd. It probably says more about me, that I haven't really come to terms with change... Don't know whether or not I should have. But that's how I felt - that I look ridiculous on that film..."

He goes on to describe the video as a “wake up call”, making him “realise that perhaps I dwell too much on the past”. And he pledges to no longer “expose myself to things that make me unhappy”, for example by no longer walking down Brownfield Street.

On one level the experience of watching the video back and talking to me generated “insight” of a certain kind, in Dattatreyan’s terms. Jimmy said that, seeing himself on video allowed him to make a more “objective” assessment of himself - as if the person the video was somebody else. And this person, Jimmy concluded, had not “come to terms with change”, and that it was “absurd” for this person to have expected things to have stayed the same. In short, Jimmy seemed to be saying that it was his expectations and attachments that were the problem, not the world around him. The problem was his nostalgia.

However, throughout our conversation and in the weeks afterwards I developed the feeling that this was not so much an insight as a form of self-judgement; a form of self-judgement that in fact might be blocking forms of insight while diminishing Jimmy’s capacities and vitality. As the conversation progressed Jimmy oscillated between self-critical comments about himself as someone who “[dwells] too much on the past”, followed by further ruminations. He identifies his constant thinking about the past and constant analysing of the working-class world he inhabits - something that often leaves him feeling somewhat outside of it - as a cause of his suffering, as a reason for “not always enjoying life as much as I should”. He talks about the bad choices he made, how driving a London black cab - the job he did for thirty years, stopping just a few years ago - wasn’t a good job for “a lazy person like me”: rather than work hard to save money he had been happy just to work to cover his rent, bills and a bit of extra money for the pub at the weekend. And he reflects that perhaps the reason he is involved with Aberfeldy Big Local is to:

> “Mitigate the fact that I didn’t move twenty years ago. And I've got to be brutally honest, it probably makes me feel like I'm a bit important, and I'm not. Maybe it gives me a sense that I've got some say in what goes on in the neighbourhood. And I don't really think I do.”

Jimmy’s self-judgement as someone overly concerned and overly attached to the past - as nostalgic - can therefore be seen to be connected to a host of other self-judgements, criticisms, and regrets. In each, Jimmy locates himself as ultimately responsible for his feelings of - what I called in chapter one - “affective displacement”.

This logic of individual responsibility might be said to reflect dominant contemporary forms of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1996) as they manifest, for example, through Jimmy's experience of the benefits system. Reluctant to apply for disability benefits for fear that he would not make the infamously high threshold for qualification, during my fieldwork Jimmy was in the incredibly precarious situation of claiming Job Seekers Allowance and relying on a 'sick note' from his doctor to continue to receive his weekly payments. That this precarious situation was further detrimental to Jimmy's mental health was patently clear, with Jimmy living in fear and anxiety that his fortnightly benefits might be stopped at any moment. Within such a punitive benefits system there is very little space for the acknowledgement that sickness and unemployment are anything other than personal failures. Mark Fisher (2009; 2011; 2012; 2014a; 2014c) throughout the last decade or so of his life, cut tragically short by suicide, wrote persistently on how this logic of personal responsibility has become so embedded in the culture and politics of post-Fordist Britain, particularly regarding the interlinked domains of mental health and precarious employment/unemployment. For Fisher (2014c), this logic of personal responsibility manifests in an ideology of "magical voluntarism" - "the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be" - the flipside of which is depression "whose underlying conviction is that we are all uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it".[70]

Far from creating a space of agency and invention, then, it seemed to me that our film-making collaboration at this point threatened to simply reinforce these dominant neoliberal logics of responsibility and their interlinked affective disorders. Rather than generating an increase in capacities, in Deleuze's terms, this threatened to diminish Jimmy's powers of acting. This can be seen in Jimmy's self-critical and fatalistic comments on his involvement with ABL - "it probably makes me feel like I'm a bit important, and I'm not. Maybe it gives me a sense that I've got some say in what goes on in the neighbourhood. And I don't really think I do."

Jimmy's self-judgement can therefore be understood in relation to dominant contemporary forms of neoliberal governmentality. But it is also helpful, particularly in moving to consider how such a state of affairs might be resisted, to situate these forms of self-judgement in relation to a further theoretical reference point, namely Deleuze's essay "To Have Done with Judgement" from his collection "Essays Critical and Clinical". In this essay Deleuze (1998, p.

[70] In 2022 Jimmy was able to finally start claiming incapacity benefit with no obligation to look for work.

126) traces the development of a theological “doctrine of judgement” from “Greek tragedy to modern philosophy”. Deleuze argues that rather than evaluate the health of an activity or mode of existence according to, immanent criteria, its “tenor of life”, this doctrine of judgement evaluates according to “transcendent or universal criteria” (Smith, 1998, p. Liii). Characterised by an “infinite debt” to a deity judgement “becomes a final authority” that is difficult to escape. Such a mode of evaluation, Deleuze (1998, p. 135) argues, “prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence”. He describes how the philosophers Spinoza and subsequently Nietzsche broke with this tradition in providing a critique of judgement and shows how this critique is taken up as a form of “combat” in the literary work of DH Lawrence, Kafka and Artaud (each of whom, Deleuze notes “singularly suffered from judgement” for example in the form of “accusations of immoralism”).

With Deleuze we can think about Jimmy’s nostalgia not simply as a pathology to be diagnosed according to pre-existing criteria but as a “mode of existence”, the health of which needs to be evaluated according to “its capacity to construct… lines of flight, to affirm the power of life, to transform itself depending on the forces it encounters” (Smith, 1998, p. Lii). With Deleuze, I suggest that part of what Jimmy struggled with was not his nostalgia per se, but feelings of judgement regarding his nostalgia which transformed this into an impoverished mode of existence. Our film making collaboration, then, provided a space in which Jimmy and I experimented with the capacities and affordances of this mode of existence.

If Jimmy’s response to our first video contained many judgements about his nostalgia - as something “absurd” and “ridiculous” - it did not deter him from collaborating further in creating further videos. I now want to develop an analysis of Jimmy’s nostalgia as a mode of existence in relation to two further videos that emerged through our film making collaboration. For Deleuze, “it is combat that replaces judgement”, and in what follows I show how Jimmy engages in distinct forms of “combat” in these videos. The first video, that Jimmy jokingly nicknamed “spleen venting revisited”, sees Jimmy revisit the site of “Jimmy’s Lament”, providing a commentary on his prior ‘performance’ and attempting to find a sense of resolution in his loss. The sense of resolution Jimmy seeks, I suggest, would see him not so exposed to the feelings that overcame him in the process of recording “Jimmy’s Lament”. I analyse this video in terms of what Deleuze calls “combat against”. The second video, meanwhile, is the full 25-minute film “Jimmy’s Archive”, constructed primarily out of a continuous sequence I filmed of Jimmy telling stories about a series of objects that he pulls out from a cupboard in his flat. This sees Jimmy at ease in and with his nostalgia, drawing a

certain vitality from his objects. I analyse this film in terms of what Deleuze calls “combat between”.

"Spleen Venting Revisited" (Combat Against)

WATCH*:* https://vimeo.com/783936646/5e3ad024af

5.2 – Spleen venting revisited part 1 Vimeo page

In this video Jimmy adopts a ‘character’ of sorts. In place of his loose-fitting black polo shirt, Jimmy wears a smart brown jacket and straw hat. He draws attention to the fact he is being filmed. This creates a certain distance between the topic of discussion and Jimmy the person - an effect which is accentuated through the ways in which Jimmy allows his narrative to be interrupted by small digressions. Responding to a feeling that he appeared “ridiculous” and “absurd” in the previous video - judgements that he presumably assumes that an imagined audience might make of him - Jimmy here assumes new defences. We might think of these “postures” as a form of “combat-against” in Deleuze’s terms. Referencing the work of Kafka, Deleuze writes that in the combat against:

> “all gestures are defences or even attacks, evasions, ripostes, anticipations of a blow one does not always see coming, or of an enemy one is not always able to identify: hence the importance of the bodies postures”.

Thus whereas “Jimmy’s Lament” manifested a raw emotion that Jimmy experienced on walking along Brownfield Street, here his emotional response is heavily filtered through this character - somewhat reminiscent of an upper middle-class TV architectural critic such as Jonathan Meades, known for his playful and ironic approach to architectural criticism, delivered while walking about on location. This character isn’t in any hurry to saw what he has to say. He is, in a sense, emotionally removed from what he observes around him, casting judgement from “above”.

The only time that this character briefly breaks down is when he sees someone he knows, and we have to dart up a side street so that Jimmy doesn’t have to talk to them. But, after someone in a car shouts out “can I be on the camera as well?” he quickly recovers his stride:

> “See, everybody wants to be in show business. But you’ve gotta do ya time, ya see? I didn’t get where I am by just riding around in cars, asking to be photographed. I worked at it, you see?”

Then in a tangent about the experience of childhood today Jimmy perhaps risks revealing a certain bitterness about the opportunities that were denied to him when growing up:

> Where’s all the children? When I was a kid they were all over, kids playing around, jumping off balconies and climbing up lampposts and doing all kinds of slightly antisocial things. I suppose they’re indoors doing their homework? Aspirational, you see. They’re probably, at school now, telling them they can become lawyers and architects. When I was a kid all people wanted to do was become dockers or painters and decorators. This is the aspirational culture now where they’ve got to do better, they can’t just be satisfied with having a job and having somewhere to live, they’ve got to get their A-levels and go to University and get on the ‘property ladder’ and move away from where they live and, sort of, occasionally visit their parents, you know?

But being ‘in character’ again provides a degree of protection. At the end of his short speech, Jimmy quips ironically, “I’m getting rather controversial there. I can blame it on the lockets [cough sweets].”

WATCH*:* **https://vimeo.com/783941654/8f72cc28aa**

5.3 – Spleen venting revisited part 2 Vimeo page

In the second part of "Spleen Venting Re-visited" Jimmy's use of sardonic humour and ironic critique is further in evidence. He notices an estate agent's sign outside the block of flats that was once the Prince of Wales Pub which reads "Prime Land, Guaranteed Rent":

> "It's now Prime Land. Guaranteed Rent. You won't lose money, investing in this neighbourhood. You're guaranteed. It's *prime* land. So areas that people used to have an emotional connection with, a continuity, where perhaps their grandparents lived a bit further up the road, now it's like an investment opportunity. Prime land, you can buy a flat there, live there for a couple of years, and then go somewhere else. *Go somewhere else*. Guaranteed rent. You're *guaranteed* rent… Isn't that ugly?"

A little later on, Jimmy resumes his critique, but in a more surreal and absurdist fashion. Aware that some of the passers-by are looking at him and wondering why he might be being filmed, Jimmy breaks out of his address to camera and, while pointing at a block of flats in front of him shouts for everyone in the street to hear:

> "In six months' times they're knocking all this down. They're knocking all this down in six months' time."

Turning to point at another block of flats he continues:

> "And over there, in a year's time they're going to knock all that down as well. I think within two years this is all going to be knocked down. And they're going to build a soya farm. I think that's what they're going to do. Yeah it's all coming down. Even that block over there, they're going to knock that block down as well. And they're going to plant soya beans."

Returning to his address to camera in a more serious mode, Jimmy reasons:

> "I don't know if it's called - it's not a soya farm, is it? What are they doing in the Amazon? They're burning the Amazon, so they can grow soyabeans. To feed the cattle that will be slaughtered - to provide burgers for fast food restaurants. Which will make people obese. So, there's a kind of cycle."

Jimmy here draws an analogy between urban regeneration in Poplar and the destruction of the Amazon rainforest to create mono-crop plantations. Jimmy seems to be saying that, through urban regeneration, the vitality of this urban milieu is being commoditised and hierarchically ordered, contained and controlled, drawing connections between different spaces within a global capitalist economy. Here he shows that he is not naive regarding how power operates - not weak or defenceless - but has weapons to deploy in the form of irony and critique.

Jimmy's Archive (Combat Between)

Through revisiting the site of his "lament", Jimmy sought to inhabit his feelings of nostalgia regarding urban regeneration differently. His adoption of a character and use of sardonic humour allowed him to achieve a degree of distance from the raw emotionality and vulnerability of Jimmy's Lament, perhaps protecting him from the judgement that he is a cliched ageing white man who, as he puts it, "hasn't come to terms with change". But if it is negative affect which makes Jimmy's nostalgia hard to bear, it is unclear how much this new mode of inhabiting his nostalgia will provide relief. For it too is characterised by feelings of bitterness, albeit now directed more clearly outward at those who turn places that people "used to have an emotional connection with" into an "investment opportunity" through which one is "*guaranteed* rent". Moreover, "Spleen Venting Revisited" in many respects reinforces Jimmy's forms of self-judgement - the whole endeavour motivated by a sense that he had come across as "bitter", "absurd" and "ridiculous" in the original video. And while Jimmy

attempts to create a sense of resolution, to draw a line under the issue by theatrically doffing his cap at the site of the former pub and saying goodbye, willing a resolution to one's emotional distress is quite different to achieving it.

Deleuze (1998, p. 132) speaks to this predicament when he writes of how:

> "it is combat that replaces judgment. And no doubt the combat appears as a combat *against* judgment, against its authorities and its personae. But more profoundly, it is the combatant himself who is the combat: the combat is *between* his own parts, between the forces that either subjugate or are subjugated, and between the powers that express these relations of force" (emphasis in original).

Deleuze creates a distinction between the "combat against" judgement and a form of combat which takes place within the combatant themselves. This form of combat, Deleuze argues, is the most important, the most 'profound'. As he continues:

> "The combat-against tries to destroy or repel a force…but the combat-between, by contrast, tries to take hold of a force in order to make it one's own. The combat-between is the process through which a force enriches itself by seizing hold of other forces and joining itself to them in a new ensemble: a becoming (ibid., p 132)."

It is only through such a joining of forces, rather than destruction or repulsion of forces, Deleuze suggests, that we attain a process of "becoming". And it is through such a process of becoming that a body is most able to increase its capacities, to increase its powers of acting. In contrast, judgement hinders the development of a body's capacities for acting. As Deleuze (1998, p. 134) states at the end of the essay: "No one develops through judgement, but through a combat that implies no judgement".

What, then, might such a "combat that implies no judgement" entail? On the same afternoon that Jimmy delivered his withering judgement of "Jimmy's Lament" we did some more filming. This was initially on my suggestion. I filmed him talking about a trade brochure from the firm Falkus Construction, with whom he'd worked as an apprentice painter and decorator in the late 1970s. Jimmy is quite formal in this video. Afterwards I tried filming Jimmy in a more traditional interview format, asking him questions about his working life. Again, the tone is subdued. We are interrupted by a phone call from Jimmy's parents. But after the phone call we resume, with Jimmy now taking a more active role, suggesting that I film him talking about his collection of 'Thunderbirds' DVDs - a British children's television show from the

1960s. Thunderbirds, Jimmy said, provided “a fascinating insight into the social mores of the 1960s.” Jimmy is particularly interested in the character called ‘Parker’; the reformed criminal and cockney working-class chauffer for the aristocratic Lady Penelope. This leads to Jimmy reflecting on the diverse types of people that he encountered while driving his cab, and to illustrate his stories he begins to pull objects out of a large walk-in cupboard next to his kitchen.

5.4 – Jimmy showing me a scene from ‘Thunderbirds’

The footage shot on that afternoon became the basis for what I would eventually edit into our 25-minute film “Jimmy’s Archive”, a more or less continuous sequence interposed with supplementary archival material taken from Jimmy’s own collections and other archival sources. Watching this footage back some weeks after filming, I was struck by how it captured something of Jimmy's vitality - a vitality which seems to grow through his engagement with the objects in his archive and the camera. I felt like there was a side to Jimmy captured in the film that it was important to hold onto - especially as, often when I saw him over subsequent weeks, months, and years, he often complained of being miserable, of struggling with the same things we had already talked about so much. I therefore decided, as I was coming to the end of my intensive fieldwork year, to use this sequence as the basis of a short film. Over two afternoons I quickly put a ‘rough cut’ together, interspersing some archival materials - mainly taken from Jimmy’s collections - to break up the continuous sequence. At the end of the film, I used a scene of Jimmy singing the David Bowie song

“Space Oddity”, overlaid with a montage of images I had taken from around the Aberfeldy Estate and the surrounding area.

WATCH*:* **https://vimeo.com/451886955/64048b380d**

5.5 – ‘Jimmy’s Archive’ Vimeo page

As I see it, the film can be divided into two main parts. The first part of the film sees Jimmy slowly and cautiously introducing us to objects from the cupboard. He picks out a few objects before putting them back again. He shows me a card trick. After I focus the camera on the postcards and images stuck to the inside of the door of the cupboard Jimmy begins to tell stories about his early life: where he was baptised, the school he went to, and the school that he didn’t go to - his dad not wanting him to attend a Catholic school, as he had done. Jimmy shows us a bible that he was given to on his first day of secondary school, fifty years ago, and reflects on the fact that even state schools that didn’t have a “particular religious structure” would give out bibles to all the new pupils, nonetheless. In the second part of the film there is a change of pace and direction. While rooting around in another, smaller cupboard which Jimmy says hosts his “Catholic collection”, he happens across an A5 plastic wallet. Jimmy is delighted: “Rob, I’ve just found something I’ve been looking for! I wanted to show you this.” Inside are a set of three unused ticket stubs for a series of film screenings, talks and performances about the guitarist Mick Ronson, held at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in 2013. This moment of serendipity determines the rest of the

sequence with Jimmy going on to pull out a series of posters and memorabilia relating to his favourite music of the 1970s and 1980s.

It is during this second part of the film where we really witness Jimmy in his element. How might we understand the vitality in evidence here? On one level, we could say that what we have here is an avid collector who is simply happy to have someone take an interest in his life, and with whom he can share his collections. In his early sixties, unemployed and struggling with his mental health and the drastic changes taking place around him, it makes sense that these collections might provide a sense of historical continuity which is missing outside his front door. Jimmy himself once suggested as much, telling me that collecting helped give him a sense of control over the past, guarding against a sense of loss which – referring to a friend's suicide – he said that at points in his life he had found difficult to bear.

We can develop this analysis further by considering the historical 'content' of the archive. In his extensive writings on music and popular culture, Fisher (2014a, pp. 22-23) writes about the post-war period, and particularly the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s, as characterised by a tendency that he called "popular modernism", in which "the modernist task of producing forms that were adequate to the present moment were taken up and renewed" by people outside of the elite spaces of high art and academia. Through access to grants to attend art school, cheap rents, and the dole, working class young people were given new opportunities to make art and "move outside of what would normally be expected of them", as Jimmy puts it in the film. And the art that they produced, Fisher argues, expanded people's perceptions of the possible, coming together with various strands of counter-cultural practice to gesture towards a "social and psychic revolution of inconceivable magnitude" (Fisher et al., 2018, p. 758) (a phrase that Fisher borrows from the counter-cultural feminist writer Ellen Willis). Following Fisher, if Jimmy feels a sense of nostalgia for this time, it might be understood *not* merely as a desire to return to a prior fixed and settled state of affairs, but as a desire to return to a moment before such possibilities were foreclosed through what Fisher calls the "neoliberal counter-revolution" (ibid., p. 757). As Jimmy states in the final line in the film: "I'm still waiting for that future".

Finally, there is also something important about the 'form' of the archive and the way in which Jimmy encounters it in the course of the film. The way in which the narrative of the film turns on a moment of serendipitous discovery - Jimmy finding the ICA tickets - epitomises the film's naturalistic quality. If in "Spleen Venting Revisited" Jimmy adopts a persona in order to engage in combat against judgement, here Jimmy's performance does not feel contrived; he is not preoccupied with presenting a particular side of himself. Rather we are

invited consider and share in Jimmy's love of his objects, without judgement. In this way, I suggest that Jimmy's Archive the film does not simply capture Jimmy's vitality but, through the relations created between camera, objects and Jimmy – actively enriches it, "seizing hold of other forces and joining [himself] to them in a new ensemble: a becoming" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 132).

Screening "Jimmy's Archive"

My suggestion that the making of Jimmy's Archive brought something new into existence, and as such comprised a "politics of invention" (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019), can be further developed with reference to our experiences of subsequently screening the film. In November 2019, having put together a 'rough cut' version of Jimmy's Archive, I paid Jimmy a visit to show him the film. When I arrived at his flat however, far from in his element Jimmy was in a downbeat mood. He told me about a walk he had done a couple of days before, from the library at Canary Wharf back to his flat, and how with so much new development taking place there were areas that he barely recognised. He said that he was struggling with the feeling that Poplar - once off limits to those with money - was now being "spruced up" for a different class of people. This feeling was reinforced by all the "paint by numbers street art" that Poplar HARCA were commissioning along Aberfeldy Street. It was a sign, he said, of a "neighbourhood that hasn't got its own identity anymore", symbolising a "lack of local ownership". He again spoke about his sense of powerless and lack of hope that ABL might be able to make an impact on these processes.

With Jimmy in this somewhat despairing mood, we settled down on the sofa to watch the film. "Look at my red face!" Jimmy cried as he first appeared in shot. "People will be thinking, 'he likes a glass of wine", he added. But as we watched, Jimmy's tendency toward self-critique lessened. He began to laugh along with the film and comment on things that he liked, such as the shots inside his cupboard. "I'm a classic English eccentric, aren't I?" he said at one point. He especially liked the final montage sequence - "oh yes!" he exclaimed as a shot of the modernist Balfron Tower faded into an image of him playing his guitar. By the end of the film, he was transformed. "I love it" he said, more than once. When I suggested that we try to organise a screening at the Tommy Flowers he agreed immediately, and we started to make plans. As I was getting ready to head home, Jimmy himself commented on how the film had made him feel differently, saying not to take too much notice of all the things he was saying earlier: "there's almost like, pre-screening me and post-screening me", he said.

> “What this film has done, it’s made me realise that rather than just be a passive observer of change, I can be part of what is going on. I need to be more assertive... The things you bring out in me Rob!”

Jimmy was effusive in his praise of the film and how it made him feel more positively about his situation. On this evidence, if one of the aims behind making and screening the film was to give Jimmy a platform from which to increase his sense of his capacities in relation to urban regeneration, this screening, and a subsequent screening at the Tommy Flowers the following month, could be considered a huge success. At the Tommy Flowers sixteen people saw the film across two screenings, each followed by a short question and answer session. In the second Q&A, Liz - who works behind the bar in the Tommy Flowers - asked Jimmy why all his objects were in the cupboard rather than displayed on the walls. He answered that he was a bit secretive about all these possessions, partly because when he was growing up, “you would get a bit bullied” for getting excited about things - music, books, art, artefacts - that were outside of what was considered ‘normal’ in a working-class environment. He was quite explicit with the metaphor: keeping these objects in the cupboard paralleled the way, throughout his life, he’d always had to keep a certain side of himself hidden away from public view. But now having been part of making this film, and presenting it to his peers, was a bit like finally “coming out of the cupboard” himself; a phrase he repeated to me later in the evening, as we bid farewell after enjoying a few drinks with others who had attended the screening.

5.6 – Screening 'Jimmy's Archive' at the Tommy Flowers

Conclusion: Coming Out of the Cupboard

The experience of making and screening Jimmy's Archive, then, allowed Jimmy to explore and share a part of himself that he had, for large parts of his life, kept "in the cupboard". Having harboured feelings of resentment about how the forms of artistic expression in his neighbourhood associated with urban regeneration were predominantly created by commissioned artists following a "paint by numbers" sort of approach, reflecting an area which "doesn't have an identity anymore", he now found himself, and his objects, centre stage. This, he said made him feel that "rather than just be a passive observer of change, I can be part of what is going on".

However, while it would be easy to end my account of mine and Jimmy's film collaboration on this note of "success". I want to add a note of ambivalence by reflecting on what happened to our collaboration over the next months and years. In March 2020, only three months after the Tommy Flowers film screening, the UK went into lock-down in response to

the Covid-19 pandemic. Varying restrictions on socialising and business activity lasted until July 2021. The pandemic called time on my fieldwork and my weekly presence in Poplar. It also forced the closure of the Tommy Flowers and Tommy's Tea Rooms - the former temporarily, but the latter permanently. Over this period, I stayed in touch with Jimmy by phone and email. Without spaces like Tommy's Tea Rooms to spend time with other people, it seemed as if Jimmy was spending more time alone at home. The infrastructures of care that I had participated in during my fieldwork seemed to have quickly fallen apart. Was there any 'legacy' to our collaboration? Or had everything returned to how it was before? Or actually got worse?

Now with some distance from my fieldwork I began to think more critically about the hopes that I had invested in the film-making collaboration. Was there an element of what Berlant calls "cruel optimism" at play here, both on my part and Jimmy's? Our screenings of the film had produced in Jimmy a surge of optimism, but if these were not to be sustained by infrastructures of care, perhaps there was a certain cruelty in raising these hopes? Meanwhile, I began to question what the critical value of the film itself might be. This was particularly in relation to how questions of whiteness were becoming more central to my writing. Was my not explicitly addressing this in the film a failing of the film? Was I perhaps even inadvertently participating in the reproduction of an image of the East End as intrinsically white?

Such concerns about the value of our film making collaboration and its 'outcomes' call to mind Claire Bishop's critique of the "social turn" in contemporary art. Commenting on a tendency for artists and art critics to prioritise "collaboration", Bishop (2005) expresses the concern that in the process questions of the aesthetic value of a work of art are ditched in favour of a set of overarching ethical/moral criteria. Within this regime: "There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond" (ibid., p. 180), as long as they can demonstrate "collaboration". Was there a parallel danger in my approach to evaluating "Jimmy's Archive", with its ability to generate (seemingly short-lived) excitement and optimism in Jimmy becoming the criteria the only way in which I could evaluate its success?

Such critical questions are, of course, important. But what seems imperative to me is to find a way to bring such questions in without losing touch with the work itself. In other words, to critique without slipping into a form judgement, evaluating a work according to fixed criteria rather than according to its vitality, its "tenor of life". Or to put it another way, to avoid what Eve Sedgwick (2003) calls a "paranoid reading" – one which is very good at finding limits,

flaws and weaknesses according to a particular theoretical schema, but less good at telling us anything else. I think this might be something that Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019, p. 226) are gesturing to when they state that the "rewiring of the anthropological project" that they advocate "signals a move away from critique, debunking, demystifying, and so on, and features cocreation and invention as its central axioms." The broad project of critique is of course indispensable to anthropology, but what I think these authors point to is the danger that a certain kind of critique becomes an obstacle to other, more inventive lines of enquiry.

While keeping whiteness in the picture is important, this can be achieved through how the film is presented, such as I have endeavoured to do in this thesis. And while the effect of the work on Jimmy was temporary this doesn't make it worthless. Indeed, the power of Jimmy's Archive to inspire Jimmy was retained in subsequent screenings. In late 2022, just as I was at the verge of completing the writing of this thesis, a former colleague at Goldsmiths invited Jimmy and I to screen our film to a class of undergraduate students at UCL. This was to be the first screening that we would both attend since the event at the Tommy Flowers, three and a half years earlier. In advance of the screening, I sent Jimmy a few of my draft chapters; the screening provided the impetus for me to finally send them as I felt that, if we were going to field questions together from an academic audience it was important for him to have more of an insight into how the film related to my broader PhD research. As I am sure all anthropologists who share their writing with their interlocutors are, I was concerned about how Jimmy would find the way I had represented him in the text. Moreover, I was concerned about how he would feel about the overarching framing in terms of whiteness, something that had not been nearly as prominent about how I thought about my research at the time I was conducting fieldwork. But speaking on the phone a couple of weeks later Jimmy didn't say much about the chapters except once again commenting on the video "Jimmy's Lament". In an almost verbatim response, he said how thought he looked "absurd" in this video, and that through watching it he had been able to encounter it "objectively", as if the person he was watching was somebody else.

By the day of the screening Jimmy had had the chance to do some more reading. He suggested a few amendments but seemed on the whole happy with the result. While I had feared that he might react against my framing of the argument, he in fact seemed curious. He was interested in my "critique". This attitude of openness to the perspectives of others continued into the film screening itself. A class of around twenty students watched the film and engaged with it generously and thoughtfully in the subsequent Q&A. At the beginning of the Q&A Jimmy made a remark about how watching the film with everyone in the room

made him feel “exposed”. He made a gesture of ripping open his chest as if he were bearing his soul. I think that Jimmy’s honesty in the Q&A and in the film itself endeared him to the audience.

Similarly to the other occasions that I had viewed the film with Jimmy, the experience put him in a very good mood. Afterwards we wandered down to Senate House - a building that he said he had dropped people off while driving a cab on numerous occasions and was interested to go inside. He was impressed that it was open for members of the public to simply stroll in, even going up the carpeted stairs to the first-floor balcony, overlooking the main foyer entrance. He commented on the art deco architecture, the gold lettering on the ceiling and the cornices that he said were a nightmare to paint in his experience. We sat in an alcove for a little while. He said that making and screening the film had been important for him. How it was a kind of 'coming out' for him - allowing him to be a different person to working class Jimmy from Poplar that he had had to be for his whole life due to the social milieu in which he has inhabited. He mentioned a story he had told me a few times before about once having taken an Open University history book to the Builders Arms when he’d once tried to study for a degree (before giving up) and someone at the bar looking at it and saying "well this isn't history" because, in Jimmy’s words, it was about the “philosophy underpinning the discipline of history” and not "the battle of Hastings was in 1066". He said how he had been "put out" by this comment at the time. But that being part of the film had given him a new confidence about expressing his intellectual and artistic interests.

Such remarks about how the film had given him a new sense of agency were familiar from what Jimmy had said before. But a little later on, while we waited for my friend to join us for lunch, Jimmy said that he had been reflecting again on the video "Jimmy's Lament". And for the first time he expressed a sense of acceptance about this video. "Actually, I think I had a point", he said. And so, three and half years after we first filmed “Jimmy’s Lament”, our collaboration had come back to where we started, with Jimmy coming to understand this video that he had always been so self-critical about, differently. Watching and discussing the film with a generous academic audience enacted, I suggest, a form of multimodal invention which allowed for the exercise of critique without judgement.

Conclusions

This thesis explored the multifaceted relationships between urban regeneration, whiteness, displacement and heritage in Poplar, in east London's former docklands. Departing from the dominant tendency to conceive of urban regeneration as the *product* of neoliberal political economy and urban policy – and thus in many ways as synonymous with gentrification – I sought to engage with urban regeneration as a set of *practices* taking form across multiple sites and scales. Specifically, I examined the ways in which practices of urban regeneration are entangled with discourses and practices of heritage. This led me to question the habitual tendency to frame urban regeneration as something which flattens and erases place. Rather I suggest that urban regeneration takes form in and through place in important ways, with place a more recalcitrant object than dominant framings of urban regeneration allow. I argue that it is attendant upon urban regeneration researchers to empirically examine how place matters within urban regeneration so as not to inadvertently write place out of the picture in our rush to point to structural political economic forces at play.

But my argument that place matters within practices of urban regeneration is far from a straight-forward celebration of the fact. Rather I have shown that an appreciation of how place matters requires grappling with complex intersections of race and class; particularly the ways in which urban regeneration in Poplar is intimately tied up with whiteness and white nostalgia. Across the chapters of this thesis, I have shown how my white, working-class interlocutors' engagements with urban regeneration (whether in the form of resistance, active support for estate regeneration projects, or smaller-scale practices) are importantly conditioned by a story of the 'decline' of the predominantly white, integrated, communitarian Poplar of the post-war period. But while the telling of this nostalgic story can manifest in forms of resentment and the propagation of class and racial inequalities – particularly when it is exploited by institutional forces such as in the case of the regeneration of Chrisp Street Market – I have sought to attend to the ambivalence of nostalgia and its potential to operate as a site of vitality, care, and the growth of capacities to act in ways that work against class and racial inequalities.

To conclude I draw attention to three main sets of contributions that this thesis makes: two to the inter-disciplinary study of urban regeneration and, one within broader debates in anthropology and adjacent disciplines around affect and multimodal methods.

Infrastructure: beyond architecture and architectural history

I started this thesis with a reflection on *The Dockers* sculpture and the Robin Hood Gardens estate – two objects of material culture, the fate of which captured something about the disintegration of a set of bold, egalitarian, and optimistic architectural and planning ideas which reigned in the post-war welfare state period. But while there was an abrupt reversal in these reigning ideas, the buildings themselves tended to persist. It wasn't until 2012 that planning permission was granted for the Blackwall Reach regeneration project that subsequently led to demolition work on Robin Hood Gardens beginning in 2017 – the 2000s and 2010s seeing an acceleration of such estate regeneration schemes in London. This coincided with a revival in interest in the brutalist and modernist aesthetics of much of this architecture, encompassing a plethora of books, films, exhibitions, walking tours and campaigns to have buildings listed to prevent their demolition (Deakin and Nicolescu, 2022). Alongside and as part of this, academics and critical commentators sought to ground a critique of contemporary regeneration through the architectural aesthetics of these buildings – holding them up as "lost futures" (Hopkins 2017) that might be reclaimed for the present. David Roberts (2017) explores the possibility of reactivating the socialist history of the Balfron Tower through artistic performances, including organising a series of "re-enactments" centred on its charismatic architect Erno Goldfinger. Meanwhile, urban geographer Oli Mould (2016) attempts to "revive" what he calls the "brutalist ethics" of Robin Hood Gardens through textual analysis of the writings of the Smithsons (the architectural duo who designed the estate) and embodied *in situ* reflections on its architectural aesthetics and affects. Sociologist Nicholas Thoburn (2018) has also conducted architecturally-focused research at Robin Hood Gardens, drawing on interviews with residents and collaborating with a photographer.

On beginning this research, I found myself very drawn to these arguments about the architecture of the British welfare state. They were part of what developed my interest in Poplar as a fieldsite, seemingly unique in its clustering of significant examples of post-war modernist architecture undergoing redevelopment. I too found something inspiring about these buildings and was attracted to the idea that the buildings themselves might play a part in cultivating forms of resistance to the ongoing neoliberal remaking of urban space in contexts of regeneration. But as I began to develop my own methodological approach to engaging with questions of urban regeneration and heritage – particularly as it connects to material culture – I began to feel that a focus on architecture, and architectural history particularly, was limiting: always guiding our focus 'upwards' to great architects, their plans

and their visions, with empirical engagements with how these buildings are inhabited primarily serving to legitimate these ideas.

The concept of infrastructure, as I have employed it in this thesis, is my attempt to engage with urban form and its role in urban regeneration practices and contestations in a less partisan mode – keeping open the question of which sites might be important and why. This led me to engage with a broader range of sites than I likely would have done if I can kept architecture and architectural history to the fore – from sites regarded as architectural significant, such as Chrisp Street Market, to the not-so-architecturally-significant, such as the Tommy Flowers pub. Indeed, discourses concerning a site's architectural significance are just one among many that enrol the affective materiality of place within practices of urban regeneration. Thus, rather than use an architectural analytic which attends to urban form based on an outsider's hierarchical ordering of its social and political value, an infrastructural analytic starts from a flatter, more grounded perspective and, as such, is better able to grasp the interrelations between urban regeneration and place.

Urban regeneration: beyond gentrification

Gentrification is the dominant framing for discussions of urban and estate regeneration in Britain, and for urban regeneration and redevelopment processes around the world. With social housing tenants "being socially cleansed from inner London", Lees et al. (2015, p. 444) point to the political importance of highlighting that "urban regeneration *is* gentrification". They – and others - draw attention to how the language of urban regeneration is used by developers and state actors to erase the forms of violence and displacement that such projects bring about. Against this obfuscation and erasure, the concept of gentrification functions as a means of clarifying the political dynamics at play: allowing residents to "fight it for what it is, not what it is pretending to be" (ibid., p. 444).

I agree that gentrification is an indispensable analytic for deducing the power relations at play within estate regeneration programmes. But the critical tendency to see urban regeneration and gentrification as one and the same risks neglecting how urban regeneration articulates with other power dynamics - particularly race. What urban regeneration 'is' in Poplar looks very different when whiteness is brought into the frame. Thus, I make an argument for the merits of keeping open the question of what urban regeneration is, even in contexts where gentrification is clearly at play – investigating this ethnographically rather than reaching straight for a gentrification framing.

Urban regeneration in Poplar must be considered in the long durée: not simply as something which started with the current round of estate redevelopment projects, or even with the transfer of housing stock from the council to private social landlords such as Poplar HARCA in the late 1990s and 2000s, but as intimately connected to histories of class loss going back to the dislocations of the 1960s onwards. As Ben Campkin (2013) shows in his historical exploration of urban regeneration and visual culture in London, regeneration is only intelligible in relation to images of decline and degradation. But how decline – and therefore regeneration - is experienced and articulated in Poplar is heavily shaped by questions of race and whiteness. Indeed, one could even go as far as to reformulate Lees et al and say that, in this setting, urban regeneration *is* a set of white discourses and practices: urban regeneration *is* whiteness.

That the gentrification literature has been very effective at examining the class dynamics of urban change, but so far less adept at attending to how race sits within these processes has been highlighted (Lees, 2016; Fallon, 2021). In this context, Loretta Lees (2016, p. 213) has called for "a new research agenda for a properly global gentrification studies… that takes race and ethnicity seriously". But while she makes many pertinent points, she does not consider how the concept of gentrification itself may impose a limit on the questions we ask – a concept which has class (gentry) at its core and in relation to which race functions, perhaps necessarily, as an optional 'add-on'. Perhaps it is not possible to fully account for questions of race and urban change through this concept?[71] Bracketing gentrification allows other forces and other histories to come to the fore. Thus, in Poplar I have shown how contemporary dynamics of urban change are importantly shaped by long, intersecting histories of race and class, brought to the surface through practices of urban regeneration and heritage. Gentrification is certainly part of what is going on but I suggest that the power dynamics at play here cannot be contained within a gentrification framework alone.

Affect: beyond a symptomatic reading

My engagement with urban regeneration as it unfolds in and through place has involved paying close attention to affect - particularly the role of white, working-class nostalgia in shaping how urban regeneration is envisaged and practiced in Poplar. But in so doing I have tried to avoid what Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 15) calls the "closures of a symptomatic

[71] Writing about urban redevelopment in Chicago, Ananya Roy (2019, p. 227) has put forward the concept of "racial banishment" as an alternative to the concept of gentrification highlighting the particular forms of "state instituted violence against racialized bodies and communities" in such contexts and how these relate to racialised constructions of property and personhood (see also Roy, 2017).

reading": a mode of analysis which is exclusively concerned with drawing out the underlying causal structures and logics of social phenomena. Such an approach is at once fundamental to critical inquiry and poses a limit upon it. My engagement with questions of affect in this thesis has sought at once to situate the sentiments and emotions expressed by my interlocutors within broader social structures and processes and also move beyond this diagnostic register, attending to affect as a site of open indeterminacy rather than closure.

Attending to affective indeterminacy works against tendency within practices of critical inquiry to reduce people to their social locations. Berlant (2011, p. 15) talks of how their method seeks to avoid the danger of turning the "subjects of cruel optimism into emblematic symptoms of economic, political and cultural inequity". Similarly, my method has sought to avoid exposing my interlocutors as 'subjects of nostalgia' to the same fate, attempting to highlight how affect is a site of ambivalence, struggle, and agency rather than merely the symptom of oppression or social pathology. This, I suggest, is especially important when conducting research with people who, by virtue of their social location as white and working class, occupy an ambivalent space between deserving and undeserving (Shilliam, 2018); on the one hand heralded as the forgotten and 'left behind', while on the other characterised as uniquely racist and bigoted.

Multimodal research practices offer excellent tools with which to engage with affect as structured yet indeterminate. In this project, collaborative film making created an "encounter" in line with proposals for a multi-modal "politics of invention" (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019, p. 223). Such a space allows for an opening up of the "very question of what matters, and to whom" within projects of anthropological research. While I had my own set of research questions and interests, Jimmy had his too, and our film project created a space in which both of these lines of enquiry and experimentation could be pursued. This project was one of the ways in which I have been able to show how white, working class nostalgia – while something which can collapse into resentment and compound forms of exclusion, might also function as a site of vitality, joy and the enrichment of capacities in a manner which, I suggest, has the potential to work against the propagation of class and racial inequalities in contexts of urban regeneration. It this possibility that, in concluding, I want to leave open as an important topic for future analysis, critique and experimentation.

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Appendix One: List of Figures