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Whiteness and loss in Outer East London: tracing the collective memories of diaspora space

Abstract

This paper explores collective memory in Newham, East London. It addresses how remembering East London as the home of whiteness and traditional forms of community entails powerful forms of forgetting. Newham's formation through migration – its 'great time' – has ensured that myths of indigeneity and whiteness have never stood still. Through engaging with young people's and youth workers' memories practices, the paper explores how phantasms of whiteness and class loss are traced over, and how this tracing reveals ambivalence and porosity, at the same time as it highlights the continued allure of race. It explores how whiteness and class loss are appropriated across ethnic boundaries and how they are mobilized to produce new forms of racial hierarchy in a super-diverse place.

Keywords

Whiteness, memory, becoming white, diaspora, East London, race

Introduction

For two years, between 2008 and 2010, I worked as a youth worker at Leeside[1] youth club, London Borough of Newham, East London. Three times a week, I cycled over the River Lea leaving behind Canary Wharf's monuments to capitalist

wealth and entered a marginalized residential landscape that was once replete with its own symbols of iglobal power. For over a century, this crossing in its various forms has separated the inner-city from the fringe (Dickens 1857). From the bridge, to the north, I could see the Olympic development and the remnants of the industrial riverside; I could see the new dockland to the south; and, to the east a predominantly residential landscape smattered with high-rise blocks. At this intersection existed a fan of history produced through movement, dispersal and structural change.

Over the two years I worked in Newham, I learnt a lot about the memory practices of young people and youth workers at this intersection. I learnt about the various ways they re-articulated dominant forms of memory, and how they made and re-formed forgotten memories. I also learned about diaspora mnemonics, competing nostalgias of 'home' and anti-racist histories (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and Newham Monitoring Project 1991). These loud and silent, shared and exclusive memory practices were all part, and always had been part, of the place I worked. However, despite these practices, East London's past is more commonly reified as the home of white Englishness.

This under-complicated view of East London has cast the white working-class population as the bearers of a mythic past correlated with nationalist and far-right politics (Ware 2008). Based on ethnographic material collected during my time at Leeside youth club, this paper demonstrates how memory practices of white working-class youth workers and young people were more creative and

ambivalent that this simplistic portrayal suggests. It explores how myths of whiteness were created and layered (through practices of 'tracing'); how young people 'became white'; and, how black and minority ethnic young people practiced white memories by defining their autochthonous claim to the soil (Geschiere 2009; Yuval-Davis 2012). The paper also addresses how these memories were co-produced by a white researcher from outside the area. Overall, through an engagement with collective memory practice, this paper explores how racial hierarchies are re-formed, and how the ambivalence and allure of whiteness and class loss co-exist in a 'super-diverse' place (Vertovec 2006).

The paper also develops understandings of 'becoming white'. In US accounts, 'becoming white' addresses the 'racial uplift' of migrant populations in post-slavery America (Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2007). Australian literature discussed the making of the 'real Australian' (Hage 1998). In Britain, 'becoming white' shares some of these tropes but is also contextually specific. British debates are concerned with ideas of 'dirty whiteness', relating to the not white enough character of Jewish and Irish immigrants, and Britain's working and informal labouring classes in the Victorian colonial period (Nayak 2003; Humphries 1981). It has also been employed to explore how these dimensions intertwine in the locales of Newcastle (Nayak 2003), East Anglia (Rogaly 2011; Rogaly and Taylor 2009), Plymouth and Bristol (Garner 2010). This paper explores 'becoming white' in a very different context. It addresses the shifting allure of whiteness in a 'super-diverse' place.

This exploration is conducted in five sections. The first outlines the terms employed in the paper; the second provides a demographic history; the third addresses the ways East London is reified and conflated with whiteness; the fourth discusses youth workers' memory practices of whiteness and loss; and, the final section explores how these memories were traced by working-class young people of different migratory backgrounds.

Memory as dialogic practice

This paper addresses the collective memory practices of diaspora space. However, before starting, it is helpful to briefly explain what is meant by these terms. Firstly, the notion of memory as a 'practice' focuses on the lived production of memory as opposed to memory as fact or essence – history. 'Memory practice' places the emphasis on creativity, process, the everyday and the plural (Billig 1995). Secondly, memory as 'collective practice' draws on the idea that memories are not only individual but also practiced by groups (Halbwachs 1992). This entails the recognition of both individual and collective memory not the substitution of one for the other (Ricœur 2004, p.122-123). Thirdly, 'diaspora memory' references the formation of the past through the trajectories and interactions of multiple 'homes'. These homes come together in spaces of migration like Newham (Brah 1996). See also Ramírez in this volume.

It is also important to note that the view of collective memory taken in this paper is dialogic (Bakhtin 1986) rather than phenomenological. Phenomenological accounts hold subjective experience as primary (Halbwachs 1992; Ricœur 2004)

and as such they occlude historic meaning in favour of the present. In the phenomenological model, the subjective experience becomes the bearer of all mnemonic truths. This leads to a tyranny of the present – the problem of 'small time' (Bakhtin 1986). However, as identified by Benjamin through his metaphorical use of the 'fan of history' (1978), memory is not only a practice of the present. Rather, memories are folded one on top of the other into the collective memory space. In this process, some pasts are remembered, others forgotten, but none cease to exist. When people practice memory they 'trace' over history at the same time as they lay down new folds (Bennett 2005). The dialogic approach then allows for a framework in which memory practices over a much longer time frame can be explored.

Demographic histories

Memory practices of whiteness and class loss are not generalizable but are particular to time, place and history. The part of Newham on which this paper is based was largely unpopulated marshland prior to the 1840s. However, from mid-nineteenth century, industry, housing and migration came to the area as part of London's rapid Victorian development (the fastest in the world at the time). Parish records show how the population grew from 18,870 people in 1851, to 300,860 in 1912. International and national migrant workers came, stayed and went, providing cheap labour for global capitalism, as they do today. By 1931, 62 per cent of the population had been born in the borough, 34 per cent were English but born outside the borough (rural-urban migration), and the remaining 4 per cent included Scots, Irish, Indians, Sri Lankans, Europeans (including Polish and

Russians), Canadians, Caribbeans, Australians, Americans and Argentinians (HMSO 1931). By this point, Newham also had the largest black community in London (Bloch 2002, p.13). The histories of the borough and the Coloured Men's Institute reveal the conviviality and 'mixing' of black, white and Asian populations in this period (Bell 2002; Sadler 1991; Visram 2001;1986;2010; Wemyss 2009;2008. See also Nancy Sharpe cited in Visram 2001).

From marshland to industrial and colonial hub of metropolitan strangers, World War Two brought heavy bombing. Many of the foreign seamen were evacuated and didn't return (Bloch 2002, p.14). From 1960s onwards, the oral histories of Green Street document the arrival of Asians and Caribbean migrants to the borough (Bell and Garfield 2002). By 1981 out of approximately 210,000 residents, 26.6 per cent had been born in the 'New Commonwealth and Pakistan' and 2 per cent had been born in the rest of the world (ONS 1981). By 2001, Newham has the largest proportion of non-white ethnic groups in the country (61 per cent) (ONS 2001). 23 per cent of children and young people (aged 0-19) living in Newham were 'White British' and 77 per cent were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (LBN 2010a). Of this 77 per cent, the vast majority were born in the UK (87 per cent) with only 6 per cent being born in Africa and 6 per cent in Asia (LBN 2006, p.5).

These histories of mixing, movement and migration were played out in different ways across the three youth clubs I worked at. For the most part, the young people I worked with had been born in East London. Of those born in East

London, many were ‘mixed’ and nearly all had histories of migration that took them outside East London to the English regions, to Irish Gipsy and British Romany populations, to Ireland and Scotland, to Greece, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Albania, Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, France, Spain, Portugal, Jamaica, Barbados, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the list went on. Only a small minority were unaware of a family history outside East London.

East London and the ‘golden era’ in popular culture

Popular fictions of Newham do not take these histories into account. Rather, literature, film, television documentaries and academic texts (all rooted in the post-war period) portray East London as the original home of whiteness, associated with community and working-class morality. These fictions meld together a white autochthony that extends from Bethnal Green in the East to Barking and Dagenham in the Far-East (see Jones in this volume). A subgenre of books dedicates itself to the resurrection of this selective memory (Gudge 2009; Hector 2010; McGrath 2002; O'Neill 1999; Worboyes 2007). In film, similar tales play out in *Krays* (Medak 1990) and *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Ritchie 1998). Together, these narratives blend the Blitz with whiteness, ‘pluck, luck and resilience’ (Gilroy 2004, p.96) to reify an image of moral, traditional, white East London.

These memories are made sense of through the decline that followed. The memory of East London is whitened through forms of loss associated with non-

white immigration. Accompanied by Britain's popular pre-Raphaelite English National Anthem, 'Jerusalem', the title sequence of the controversial BBC White Series (2008) depicted the blacking out of a white man's face with scripts from non-English languages – a reference the erasure of a white memory through non-white immigration. In this way, East London functions to mourn Britain's loss.

However, investment in melancholic whiteness has also been maintained through selective sociological record keeping. *The New East End* (Dench et al. 2006) is well documented as providing an 'almost unqualified endorsement' (Farrar 2008) of 'indigenous' Eastenders' hostility to 'newcomers' (Alexander 2011, p.9). Other accounts on the area have focused on 'traditional' working-class practices written de facto as white (Hill 1976; Hobbs 1988). These accounts reject, through their retreat to racialized familiarity and intimacy, the urban as a space of strangers (Tonkiss 2006, p.26). They pay scant attention to the 150 years of migration that formed Newham. Raymond Williams has noted how nostalgias for Golden Eras recur through history to make moral judgements about perceived decline (1973). Located in the post-war conjuncture, these accounts are no different. They document the rise and decline of the post-war period dubbed the 'Golden Era' (Dench et al. 2006, p.18) or 'Classic Period' (Hobbs 2006, p.122), and in this way maintain the East End's place in post-war melancholy (Gilroy 2004).

Some works do, of course, address a history of migration in the area noting the 'imagined' existence of the white working-class community (Mumford and Power 2003; Foster 1999). While these texts pay attention to projections of

whiteness, rather than accept as de facto its historic legitimacy in the area, they nonetheless fall short of understanding whiteness as a layered process of racialization that exists in 'great time'. Contested hierarchies of whiteness and its reformation through migration remain absent, again reifying whiteness and legitimising an a priori indigeneity.

Youth workers tracing whiteness and loss

Having reviewed how whiteness and East London are conflated in popular culture and academia, the fourth part of the paper explores how youth workers' tracing of whiteness and loss revealed its porosity and allure, rather that its de facto existence.

As in popular culture, parents and youth workers who had grown up in post-war Newham relayed stories of the Golden Era. These were memories of full employment, national resilience and communal living, exhibited during and after the Second World War. Those that accessed these memories talked of the various chemical and rag striping factories that existed, and the possibility of leaving one job at lunchtime and getting another by the end of the day. They told of close-knit families, and of aunties, grandparents, cousins and friends just around the corner. These scenes of kinship and work life were remembered as part of innocent childhoods pieced together into coherent narratives to make sense of uncertain presents. Holidays were in caravans on Canvey Island, children played knockdown ginger, hop scotch and two balls up the wall, TVs were just coming into the area, the doors were left open, crime was honest and the local mob would get you deals

on your Christmas presents just as long as you didn't 'shit down their street' (Tessa).

Tessa, a female youth worker at Leeside, born and brought up around the Royal Docks, with a migratory history that took her to Scotland, explained how, at that time, everyone 'felt safe and secure'. The streets, the home, the workplace and the docks were the physical settings for her Golden Era. Highlights included England winning the 1966 World Cup, West Ham winning the 1966 FA Cup, painting everything 'claret and blue', the Silver Jubilee street party of 1977, and the 'bunting and flowers'. Again, these were not chronologically accurate but were 'splinters of messianic time' (Benjamin 1968) pieced together to make sense of the present.

Nostalgias for 'phantasms of home' (Boym 2001, p.13) were also made sense of in terms of the class loss that occurred after the end of the Golden Era. The 1960s onward saw the collapse of local industry and soaring unemployment. Lynn, a youth worker who had grown up in Leeside, and was from a Romany family, explained that while some from Newham had found jobs in different parts of the country, or through government schemes, many were left unable to feed their families. This dislocation was compounded by the effects of the slum clearance programme reinstated after the Second World War. Lynn told me how people left homes they had grown up in and moved to other parts of the borough to take advantage of new properties with indoor toilets, bathrooms, hot water and central heating. The result of these changes, she said, was the end of community spirit.

Although the locus of nostalgia for the Golden Era was remembered in terms of class loss, it was also remembered through loss associated with post-war immigration. The racialization of the immigrant as non-white, or in the case of Irish, Romany, Jews and Eastern Europeans, not white enough, developed alongside the whitening of those deemed indigenous to the area (see also Jones in this volume). In this way, immigration overlaid class loss and became a source of decline. Again, this was predicated on the fictional memory of a prior white terrain, and a rejection of the history of Newham as made through migration.

However, nostalgia for 'traditional' community and accompanying xenophobia was not the sole property of those who could lay claim to white belonging. Nostalgia and xenophobia were widely traced by people of various ethnicities and migratory trajectories. This is not to say the memory practices of black and Asian youth workers were the same as their white counterparts. They too mourned the loss of 'community', and the decline brought by immigration (particularly from Eastern Europe), but they did not mourn the loss of white community. The white community in Newham was a highly problematic place for many black and Asian youth workers. In the 1960s, black people living in the area had their windows put through, until they left. The descendants of the mob who gave out Christmas presents to lucky children were local National Front activists, and not so beneficent to young black and Asian kids. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s serious street level racism continued around Leeside.[2] Black and Asian youth workers commented on the area's reputation and the daily incidents of

racist abuse they endured. Not only did these youth workers not mourn the loss of the white community, they also thought it a good thing that the most ardent racists had left the area to the hinterlands of Essex and Kent.

Nonetheless, youth workers and parents of various ethnic and migratory backgrounds did mourn the loss of 'community'. They too told tales of childhood, morality and simple pleasures. These childhoods had common features. Youth workers, some only in their twenties, with histories that connected Jamaica with Ireland, England and India, told me how there used to be more innocence and less crime, drugs and gangs. They told me how children played on the streets and doors were left open. They also associated loss with new immigrants – particularly Eastern Europeans. They identified immigration with cultural decay: alcoholism, violence, the problematic occupation of public space (drinking in the park, hanging out on street corners), black market business practices, gangs and the lack of street safety. These ideas were further played out through discussions about welfare shortages and a lack of jobs for young people. One youth worker, who arrived in the UK from Guyana forty years ago, thought that new migrants hadn't been in the country long enough to start taking the 'food out of the mouths' of British people. In this way, the incompatibility of the old nation with new people was retraced and maintained across ethnic boundaries. In this way, the cycle of violence was continued – the exclusions and historic de-legitimizations enacted in the past were retraced for the present.

The breakdown in these Golden Era notions of community was verified by

the fact that people 'kept to their own', or didn't 'talk over the garden fence' anymore. Youth workers regularly commented on the loss of community and attributed it to the rise of consumer capitalism and individualism. However, the problem of 'people-keeping-to-their-own' was also used to identify the problematic memory practices of Asian communities. Perceptions of strong cultural memory among Asian communities were written over structural uncertainty and changing forms of social interaction. These memories were fetishized and envied for maintaining the close-knit community that the English could not redeem. For those who invested in St George's Day as a crumbling bastion of a purer past, the celebration of Eid and Diwali were symbols of this. The liberal middle-class rejection of St George's Day – 'political correctness gone mad' (pers. comm.) – then fed back into this racialized memoryscape, making nostalgia for the Golden Era all the more painful.

The dialogic formation of immigration and class loss, and its mutability across racial boundaries, was vividly demonstrated one evening at Leeside. Three youth workers: Neil, a first generation New Zealander who had lived in the borough for about twenty years; Jay, a second generation Indian born and brought up in the area; and Tessa, a third generation Scot, also born and raised in Newham, stood with me in the kitchen making a cup of tea. I am white was brought up in Hertfordshire, live in North London and have migratory history that connects South Wales to Bristol and South West London. The topic of conversation was the decline of East London community. The loss of community spirit was lamented and they concluded that it was unlikely to return while people didn't speak English or know

English history. They all blamed the Indians and Pakistanis for the language and cited a Polish worker on the second charge. He had apparently claimed that Henry VIII had killed the Pope. Sifting between World War Two and William the Conqueror, we all clutched for fragments of GCSE history, but it turned out that none of us had an accurate account of those events in the 1530s. Anyway, it didn't matter, and as they were concluding that it was a good thing they were all really accepting of difference, Neil said, 'shhh! Ed's mum is coming'. Ed's mum was black and everyone was quiet.

The conversation demonstrated the plurality of memory practices associated with whiteness and loss. The three youth workers of different migratory histories and different embodied experiences were able to collectively lament the decline of community located in the Golden Era. They did so with recourse to local stereotypes about Indians and Pakistanis that they linked to the newer violation presented by the figure of the Polish worker – who was seen simultaneously as an illegitimate presence and a threat to British 'history'. We were all accorded access to this conversation through our connection to Newham's past. As a new arrival in the borough my white skin and its relation to the melancholic nation gave me this dubious privilege. However, Jay's brown skin was notably not an inhibitor to this discussion. While he did not celebrate the same idea of white community, he was still able to access and use memories of whiteness to make his own claims for historical belonging.

The different exclusions entailed in their discussion became apparent with

the physical presence of Ed's mother's black body. Ed's mother's body, brought into relief the varying kinds of historic legitimacy enjoyed by Polish, English, Welsh, Scottish, New Zealander, Indian, and black Caribbean migrants in the area. While we all had access to white memories, the ways that we accessed them depended on our bodies, on the collectivity of the lament, and on the presence of 'others'.

Young people tracing whiteness and loss

My original interest in dialogic memory practices and their challenge to the popular fictions of the white East End did not start with youth workers but with young people at Leeside youth club. This final section of the paper explores how predominantly working-class young people at Leeside youth club traced whiteness in a 'super-diverse' place. The idea for this paper began while I was observing young people's rituals for St George's Day at Leeside youth club. At the time, I assumed that because the area was 'super-diverse', there would be little, if any, interest in the occasion. However, this was not the case. Many young people at Leeside participated in the rituals of the day. And these rituals provided them with an official language with which to trace their own versions of whiteness and class loss.

In the run-up to St George's Day the youth club had been decorated in the colours of the St George flag. Fifty children and young people of various national, ethnic and linguistic trajectories sat around the craft tables making a selection of red and white objects. This was the after school group rather than the whiter youth group I worked with. Tessa (who we have met before) was making a red and

white hat for Lynn (who we have also met) to wear when she called bingo at a local Working Men's Club. Kylie, eighteen, sat down with me on the sofa to watch what was going on. I asked her what she thought and she told me the rituals were important. 'They have their day, so we are going to have ours,' she said. For her, celebrating St George's day was a form of protest against the cultural erasure she associated with multiculturalism. Indeed, the displays of red and white that coloured the youth club lent to the same conclusion. Tessa and Lynn were making a statement that Leeside remembered England. The ambiguity laid in the openness of this exclusive commemoration – two women of Romany and Scottish heritage facilitating the enthusiastic gluing together of red and white flowers by tables of multi-ethnic children.

However, while these two events pointed back to the Golden Era and demonstrated the tracing of whiteness and loss in a super-diverse place, they also left a lot of questions unanswered. Over my two-years at Leeside youth club, the ambiguity of these rituals, and what they meant to young people, was filled in by everyday memory practices.

Kylie, Molly, Dawn, Samantha and Josie were aged between sixteen and eighteen. They had been born in the borough, were white, working-class and had parents, grandparents and great grandparents with migratory histories that connected Greece, Ireland, Bethnal Green and the Romany population. Kylie and Molly were friends and so were Dawn, Samantha and Josie. Dawn and Samantha had achieved some grade C's at GCSE and the others had fared less well. Samantha

was going to do fine art at university, and the rest moved between unemployment and further education courses. Molly, Dawn and Josie wanted jobs but along with 53.9 per cent of young people in the borough aged sixteen to twenty-four they were struggling to find work (LBN 2010b, p.44). Aside from Kylie and Molly, the young women were living with their parents or guardians. In addition to worries about employment and problems getting housed they had concerns about crime, and perceived the area to be in social and economic decline.

Like the accounts presented above, these young women used memory practices to make sense of class loss they equated with immigration.

Me: What do you think about migration in this area? Is there a lot?

[…]

Dawn: Lately it's been getting worse

Me: Like what? What's worse?

Josie: More cultures are coming and they're taking all the jobs.

Samantha: More Russians.

Me: More what?

Josie: More, Russians and Lithuanians and that; foreigners.

[…]

Me: Didn't it used to be like that?

Dawn: No.

Josie: Not as bad.

Samantha: When my dad grew up round here it wasn't. It used to be all one. I don't really mind but sometimes I do.

Me: Because of what?

Dawn: Crime has gone up.

Samantha: Yeah.

Josie: Crime has gone up a lot [pause]. That's like boys round here anyway.

Samantha: No… Yeah, there's a police thing on black crime, just on black crime only, so it must be affecting.

In another interview, Molly and Kylie provided a similar analysis:

Molly: Another thing that has annoyed me, right. As I said, I got kicked out by my mum and dad and as I said I am living in a B&B. Someone comes over from Lithuania, Poland…

Kylie: …they get a flat straight away.

Molly: …anywhere. They come over with their black bags and they're in a flat within two weeks. Why has it taken me so long? Because all of the people who come over from their countries get the flat and stops me from getting the flat. And I think they should prioritize. The people that lives in this country, the people that are born in this country should be prioritized before the people that come over.

Through these analyses the young women traced memories of loss, and as with the previous examples presented in this paper, they did so with reference to the figure of the immigrant. Samantha makes direct reference to this historically layered practice. Tracing the memories of her father, she says: 'When my dad grew up round here [crime, unemployment and immigration] wasn't [so bad]. It used to be all one.' In this way, Samantha shows how her father's memory practices of class loss and whiteness are being traced to make sense of her present situation.[3]

The young women also acknowledged the shifting parameters of whiteness

in Outer East London. Molly and Kylie are careful to distinguish between those 'born in this country' and 'people that come over'. In this way, they exclude the immigrant while they acknowledge that nostalgias for the Golden Era are not only available to those with white bodies. However, while the young women acknowledge the mutability of memory practices, within xenophobic parameters, they also demonstrate how these are constrained by older forms of racism. Their largely xenophobic narratives trace older racial tropes. Section four discussed how the body of Ed's mother drew attention to the different embodied locations from which claims to white memory were possible. Above also, Samantha, Dawn and Josie end their discussion of loss and immigration with a statement that takes them back to the young black male as a figure of loss associated with post-war moral panics and social decay.

These memory practices were also negotiated alongside the young women's own migratory histories. They were the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of migrants. That is, while the young women were negotiating 'becoming white', previous generations of their own families may not have been white enough. Indeed, they acknowledged how some members of their families had different claims to local belonging than themselves. Molly explained how her mother was Greek and how they had a Greek uncle living with them that didn't speak much English. She said he was 'so Greek' he was 'basically black'. She meant that while she was white and belonged, her uncle didn't because he was not white enough. In this case, his darker skin and inability to speak English denied him access, in her eyes, to Newham's past.

However, while her uncle made clear Molly's contested familial access to local forms of white belonging, he did not subvert her claim to the Golden Era. In fact, it was through the presence of her uncle that she negotiated her own place in Newham's popular history. It was through his abandonment that she became white. As with the figure of Ed's mum, and the criminal youth evoked by Samantha, blackness was used to code the absence of authentic belonging. This demonstrated how black and white were traced signifiers of abandonment and belonging in a 'super-diverse' place.

This articulation of whiteness was also classed. Becoming white enabled Molly to blame those not white enough for the economic and social hardships she dealt with. Whiteness and Greekness in this sense, had a very different meaning to the kinds of ethnic identity mobilized by the middle-class children discussed by Reay et al. (2007. See also Kulz in this volume). Molly's tracing of whiteness was a means by which she could explain herself in a history of class loss and local belonging. This, then, was a self-conscious whiteness rather than middle-class white blindness. Likewise, Greekness was not available to Molly as a form of middle-class multicultural capital, rather it was whiteness that provided her with mobility.

Through overlaying structural disadvantage with immigration, and racism with xenophobic exclusion, the young women traced forms of whiteness and loss that extended from the Golden Era. In this way, through their becoming white

bodies they remembered pasts not available to their parents and grandparents. While their parents and grandparents may not have been white enough to access the Golden Era memories of their times, the young women traced a connection to a phantom white past. This form of memory practice made sense of their precariousness in a super-diverse place. It also made sense because, not in spite of, their migrant backgrounds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, popular fictions of whiteness and loss present a much-reduced account of the collective memory practices of Newham. They forget the great time of Newham and occlude how youth workers and young people with different migratory trajectories and embodied experiences traced whiteness and loss from Newham's fan of history to establish new hierarchies of belonging in a super-diverse place.

The historical and social conjunctures in which these practices occurred were particular. While they were part of a national formation of post-war nostalgia they were also specific to Newham, and to Leeside. They drew attention to the history of migration in the area at the same time as they were predicated on forgetting that same past. They drew attention to the long history of economic stagnation, at the same time that they were predicated on replacing this notion of loss with the figure of the immigrant.

Popular and sociological accounts posit a white *history* of the East End that

forgets this dialogic creativity to serve national melancholias. Through ethnographic investigation, it is possible to unpick these reified pasts. Ethnography can uniquely reveal how racialized pasts are made and re-made in contemporary Britain. In this way, moving beyond historical analysis, it can provide a tool for contesting myths of racial belonging and for opening up alternative narratives of post-colonial Britain.

However, this is only a fragment of the work that needs to be done. The plural practices of whiteness and loss covered in this paper are a small part of Newham's great time. As stated in the introduction, Newham has been formed through 150 years of migration and contains much wider memories of home, movement, dispersal, collaboration and exclusion. Likewise, memory is only one relational strand among many. Certainly, it cannot be considered aside from forms of marginalisation, multiculture and politics alluded to in this text. This paper, then, represents only the start. It represents the beginning of an ethnographic unfolding of racial hierarchy in a super-diverse place.

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[1] Names of all youth clubs and people have been changed.

[2] See Campaign Against Racism and Fascism & Newham Monitoring Project (1991) for discussion of street racism, structural discrimination in eductaion and employment, and organised fascism in Newham during this period.

[3] Some of these memories travelled through London. As mentioned in *Family and Kinship in East London* (Young and Willmott 1957), there was a post-war labour migration from Bethnal Green to

Newham of which some of the young women's parents were part. This took with it memories of decline associated with earlier times, places and immigrations.

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