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'We thought she was a witch': Gender, class and whiteness in the familial 'memory archive'

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Abstract

'We thought she was a witch' uses my own 'memory archive' to give texture to the complex inheritance of gender, class and race that characterises the present. Drawing on interviews, archival data and fictionalisation, the article explores the role of gendered labour in securing dominant understandings of class progress. Starting from stories, my mother and I weave together of the history of 64 Chepstow Road, Newport (where her maternal family lived), I highlight the cost of historiography that does not pay attention to what is written out of family memory. The article draws on existing feminist memory work to flesh out an intersectional approach to the 'memory archive' we inherit and introduces the importance of an imaginative approach to the past.

Keywords

class, gender, generation, memoir, memory archive, storytelling, whiteness

Inheriting a 'Memory Archive'

A few years ago, I began working on a 'memory archive' that explores contradictory stories that circulate and are passed down in my family. I became interested in what Annette Kuhn (1995) describes as 'memory work' (p. 157) – tracking my own as well as others' family memories – as a way of giving texture to the complex inheritance of gender, class and race. I have been trying to retell the stories theorists have told about feminist and queer inheritance for some time, and until recently always in more conventional academic form. But I have become frustrated with the formal limits of purely theoretical tales, and increasingly drawn to both the creative edges of those stories, as well as the possibilities of alternate form for engaging the past.[1] What seems to fall outside of the text, to lurk at its edges or behind its presumptions has started to feel more and more pertinent to tracking contradictory histories of gender and sexuality, and so I have begun to look to both family story and to fictional intervention as ways of expanding my interest in the restlessness rather than certainty of what might be taken forward in accounts of the past.

This interest is a motivated one. I want to use multiple family stories and my memories of them as a way of challenging presumptions about linear histories of class transition and increased

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gender equality. I want to consider how bringing attention to the fractures in existing expectations and narratives recasts *gendering in particular* less as an outcome, and more as a process, a mode of mediating hopes and fears of class transition and its racialised hierarchies (see Carby, 2020). The 'memory archive' I am drawing on and developing thus explores the relationship between what Connell (1987) describes as 'emphasized femininity' (p. 183) and what Tudor (2019) (following Wittig) calls 'the labour of misogyny' (p. 371) as connected modes of gendered intergenerational storytelling that secure class-transitional progress narratives. This article thus pays close attention to the ways in which both tellers and recipients of family stories have specific gendered investments, certainly, and also to the ways in which the 'memory archive' itself is shot through with gendered dynamics that are essential for securing dominant power relations (Haug, 2008). But as others have also argued (see particularly Steedman, 1987) generating a 'memory archive' always does more than reveal historical patterns or burdens: it also opens up the ways in which individual lives demonstrate the irreducibility of experience to the structures we live within. While this work seeks to avoid fetishising exceptions as though they were rules, it is as interested in the failures of that gendered 'labour of misogyny' to secure stories of white class privilege as it is in its successes.

The 'memory archive' I have been tracking so far includes interviews with my parents; photographs and ephemera they have retained; official documents, such as birth and death certificates, wills and probate data, census and electoral register, and so on; letters, references and households accounts. It also includes my memory of stories told to me as a child and adult about other family members – often contradictory – and a series of short fiction pieces I have written to stage rather than resolve those contradictions. One aspect of my method has been *first* to write or gather stories (oral history, archival and fictional) and only *second* to reflect on the work they are doing from the perspective of my interest in stories of class transition, gender, sexuality and whiteness. This twofold process draws on theorisation of 'memory work' by Kuhn (1995), responding to her invitation to fold memoir and memory into history from a feminist perspective. But so too, but it mirrors and expands Haug's (1992) understanding of 'memory-work' as a method for *working on* narrative and memory to intervene in and denaturalise dominant history from a sociological perspective. For me, as for Haug, the archive is not transparent, but can only reveal its political construction (and potential to be read and rendered otherwise) through sustained reflexive attention. While my 'memory archive' does not precisely reflect Haug's sociological interests or methods, it is nevertheless concerned with the realm of fantasy as sociologically necessary to an archive that otherwise only reflects a partial view of experience. In addition, it is interested in multiple genres of storytelling and in ways of telling stories that might intervene to generate different futures as well as pasts. For 'We thought she was a witch', I draw primarily on the oral history interviews and related archival research I conducted with my mum about her family and work on these to investigate what they can tell us about gendered labour (my own as well as my family's) in the making of twentieth-century class transitional fantasies.

Before introducing that part of my 'memory archive', I want to provide some additional context for the work I consider myself in conversation with here. An extensive body of feminist work on family, memoir and memory, class and gender emerged in the United Kingdom from the late 1980s onwards. That work intervened in the dominant narratives of class transition that (white male) academics had been telling, ones in which women were largely absent (or mythologised for good or ill) and in which class *categories* consistently trumped experiences that ran against the grain. Thus, and paradigmatically, Steedman's (1987) *Landscape for a Good Woman* shone a spotlight on her working-class home and specifically her mother in ways that are both loving and harsh, reflecting her intellectual aim of foregrounding white working-class women's lives as complex and passion-filled rather than either heroic or abject. Kuhn's work on *Family Secrets* picks up Steedman's (1995)

threads, theorising memory as an active process that 'calls into question the transparency of what is remembered', taking it 'as material for interpretation' (p. 157), and centring women's and children's narratives as fundamental to an alternative plotting of twentieth-century working-class affect and desire. In both cases, the work moves between non-fiction and fiction, not as a complement to quantitative or demographic class description, but as essential to its fuller representation.[2] More recently, Orr (2020) explores her relationship with her mother through an auto-ethnography of Motherwell (as a place with feeling as well as geography and history). The focus of such work is consistently on the secret passions of ferocious mothers that refuse to be reduced to *demographic examples* of 'white working class women'. This feminist memory work centres the gendered experience of being or growing up working class, and the difficulties of respectability as both burden and expectation: they chart disappointments and frictions between generations, as much as they chart care. These are also tales of *white* mothers and daughters, and that question of how to theorise whiteness when it tends to present itself precisely through its unmarked status, haunts these feminist memoirs. Kuhn's (1995) chapter on the Coronation in *Family Secrets* – 'A Meeting of Two Queens' – is an important exception in this respect, theorising the investment in Empire at the moment of the shift to the Commonwealth, the young Elizabeth embodies (pp. 70–99). As Kuhn explores, the 'whiteness' of Great Britain remains narratively obscured, yet is emphatically re-centred at the heart of British culture, with 'race' firmly exported to flagging Empire and its representatives, even when they form a central part of the celebrations (pp. 95–96). In 1953, as Kuhn notes (and we might add that things are remarkably similar in 2021), 'to be British was still to inhabit that default . . . identity: white' (p. 96).

More recently, I have been influenced by the memoir-based responses to the pointed question 'What do you think?' that Brah (2012 [1999]) asks after her complex exploration of the complexities of classed, raced and gendered belonging in a changing South London. Ali (2012) answers Brah's call by reflecting on her experience of growing up as a 'mixed-race' child in a white seaside town with a white mother. Her evocative piece sits firmly within my discussion of 'memory work', in that she researched her own and her siblings' memories of their childhood, and then (in returning to this work almost a decade later) their further memories of both childhood and the earlier interviews. What emerges is a rich and complex account of the *feelings and failures* of class, race and gender. Her work not only highlights that 'the meaning of class was contested repeatedly' (2012: 94) within the family, but also challenges assumptions (by both mainstream and feminist writers) that British working-class history is also a history of whiteness.[3] In a similarly auto-ethnographic response to Brah's invitation, Thomas (2012) describes her own anxieties and feelings of inadequacy from her 'class migrant position' (p. 109) as a young white working-class woman going to an elite UK university. Thomas explores the 'white shame' she feels when mocked by her white middle- and upper-class friends; they have learned to mask the dependence of their white privilege on racist exclusion (p. 118), while she has yet to benefit from that education. Thomas's work aims to hold whiteness to account for its dynamics: lived in the present, carved by the past, projected onto an imagined (nostalgically framed) future. Thomas is less concerned with 'whiteness' per se, then, but with a critical excavation of its exclusions, repressions and violences.

In this article, I want to join Thomas in starting from an exploration of the ways in which the authority of whiteness works through gender: its affects, fantasies, displacements and investments. Instead of reproducing a 'memory archive' that obscures the ways in which *white gendering* works, or papers over the cracks, I want to take its modes of deflection as a key part of how whiteness reproduces itself as dominant and as central to the classed and gendered dynamics I inherit. The aim is to join Thomas in another way too: in solidarity. Thomas responds to Brah's question by exploring the operations of gender and whiteness in class transitional mode, and by thinking with her on how to open up conversation and connection across 'difference'. Thomas is able to do that

precisely because Brah's (1999 [2012]: 19) text is an open one that foregrounds the consistent ambivalence that marks all claims of belonging, and that works outwards from an imaginative commitment that starts from the possibility of interpersonal relations beyond the violence of history.

The gendered labour of remembering

In an interview with me in the summer of 2020, sitting outside on the terrace of my parents' 1930s detached house on the edge of Brighton (maintaining a safe Covid distance), my mum tells a story of family on her mother's side. As if she were right back there, giving me a tour of the house, mum remembers 64 Chepstow Road, Newport, South Wales, and its occupants with both clarity and fondness. The house was four stories, she tells me, with three generations living there together from the 1920s onwards: Albert (my mum's uncle) and his wife Nora, his brother Arthur (the unmarried patriarch), Florence Maud ('Flossie': my maternal grandma), Granny Liz (mum's maternal grandma), Nanny Hobkirk (Nora's mother), and from the late 1930s, Albert and Nora's children Pip and David. My mum, Ann, and her siblings Sheila and Glyn, would visit with Flossie as children both pre- and post-wars, and she marvelled:

> It was the most wonderful house. Huge. Because you went in through the front door, there were the stairs up, and then there was this big room in the front, that Liz had (she was bedridden). There was a den in between, and then you went through into another room where Albert had this *huge* [roll-top] desk . . . And then you went through into the kitchen. And then beyond that there was a dairy. Oh! That was my favourite place in the whole world. (A Hemmings, 2020: 8).[4]

Albert worked on the docks, coming home with 'huge deep pockets . . . fill[ed] with sugar' or 'anything that you couldn't get in the war' (1).[5] Nora controlled food – 'she cooked like a queen . . . used to make the most wonderful apple pies' (8), using some of that precious sugar when they could get it, or otherwise using soft cheese together with fruit for the pies. Arthur ran a grocery business and was very successful: 'it was Arthur's house' (9), mum continues, and he had a suite of his own at 64 Chepstow Road:

> You went up the stairs and immediately opposite there was another corridor. On the right there was a bathroom, which he had . . . And then he had this huge room at the end. In between the toilet and this room there was this little bedroom, quite small. But the huge room with floor to ceiling windows, like a big sort of bay. Huge room. That was his room. And it overlooked the garden. And nobody was allowed in there. Even I wasn't allowed in there. Nobody was allowed in there. (13)

Mum remembers that Arthur's 'mistress, I think she was' who was 'phwaw *gorgeous*' (15) also spent quite a bit of time at the house, along with friends of Albert's from the docks, and visiting relatives like cousins Mary and John from North Wales. Nanny Liz moved in with Flossie and took to her bed a couple of years after the boarding house she set up when her husband Charles died went up in flames. Flossie was a chorus dancer, my mum told me, and before the fire Liz 'used to take in stage people, so my mother grew up knowing all these quite famous people' (5). Old Nanny Hobkirk also lived in a room upstairs; she 'was weird' my mum remembers, 'we used to call her a witch' (9). Mum tells a story of an eccentric old widow who 'never worked. She was always in this little room. She used to come down for meals and stuff' (13). Mum characterises Nanny Hobkirk as a hoarder, describing her already cramped bedroom as filled to the brim with

> rolls and rolls and rolls of material . . . One wall of her room was full of these rolls . . . So she must have had money. And she used to buy these great bolts of material. And Nora used to use it for all our clothes and stuff; she used to make them all. (13)

'That's crazy' (13), I say, and we both laugh.

My mum and I share lots of laughter on the terrace as she tells me about this crowded house, bursting at the seams with people who lived there or visited. It is clear that she adored her uncle Arthur, who would still send her money when she was at teacher training college in the 1950s, and who left Flossie enough in his will for her to buy a café (and then a bungalow after retirement). 'Arthur was an amazing man' (9), mum recounts, reiterating that same sentiment several times in the course of our discussion. At a couple of points, I wonder aloud about where the money came from for him to buy 64 Chepstow Road in the first place and to keep so many members of the family with a roof over their heads. We conclude that Arthur must have been involved in what my mum calls the 'criminal fringe' (9), shifting goods through the house (perhaps even those bolts of material in Nanny Hobkirk's room). We tell each other a story of an imposing uncle Arthur whose grift makes enough money to set up and keep the household going, and who leaves nest-eggs for the next generation to prosper: 'It all came from Arthur' says mum; 'God bless you, Arthur' (15), she concludes, smacking her lips with satisfaction.

The story of Arthur is a deeply pleasing one to both of us: he is a larger than life figure who protects the ageing women in the family from the misfortunes of fires and widowhood, and who lives a glamorous, even louche, life in his private part of the house: I cannot help myself whispering 'I guess that's where he killed them' (13) in gothic undertones to my mum. It is a story that runs parallel to our more firmly established family narrative of class improvement through education: initially through grammar school education and then (for the generation that mostly moved away from Wales) through becoming teachers or accountants (11). Both my mum and I embrace this recasting of our white working-class family's predictable if slowly improved fortunes as having a more transgressive, glamorous origin (mum reminds me *multiple times* how gorgeous Arthur's nameless mistress was). Flossie inherits from Arthur when he dies (Albert is already dead), and a third of that comes in turn to my mum when her parents die. It is Arthur's money that pays for the remodelling of the kitchen and the knocking down of the outdoor toilet in the house whose terrace we are sitting on now.

But the story starts to fray the more I think about the money, and I come back to how it could be that Arthur – even with his ill-gotten gains – would have had a substantial enough lump sum to buy 64 Chepstow Road when he was in his mid–late 20s (9). His dad, William, would not have made much as a chauffeur, or have left much from a war pension[6]; hence Granny Liz needing to open a boarding house after he died. So I go searching for another story, one that lurks beneath the surface of my mum's and my contentment with the one we have told each other so far. Wondering when it was that Arthur and Albert moved into Chepstow Road, I check the only relevant document I can find: Albert and Nora's marriage certificate from 1929,[7] which shows that 21-year-old Nora already lived at 64 Chepstow Road when she married Albert. It was Albert and the other Jones's who moved into the house, and not Nora. I do a bit of digging on Nanny Hobkirk, Nora's mum. Eveline Hannah James married Charles Workman, a railway guard, in 1907, when she was 20 and a trifle shy of 9 months before the birth of their daughter, Nora. Charles died in December 1918[8] and Eveline married William Young Hobkirk in 1921. When William died in 1924, he left Eveline £1508 3s – 9d in his will.[9] This was a substantial amount, certainly more than enough to buy a large house in Newport. Was the house Eveline's and not Arthur's? She must have moved there with Nora sometime between William's death in 1924 and Nora's marriage in 1929. Perhaps, she ran it as a boarding house herself, just like Granny Liz, before the whole Jones family piled in. Yes, it

makes sense: 64 Chepstow Road, Newport belonged to Nanny Hobkirk, the family 'witch' who 'never worked' and lived in one room, 'only coming down for meals'. It belonged to the crazy lady who hoarded bolts of material in her too-small room, and who my mum and I fantasise is being cared for out of Arthur's grey-economy generosity. In fact Eveline lived at 64 Chepstow Road until she died in 1966, outliving Liz, Albert and Arthur, and not moving to the South of England with Nora when she did (to be with her daughter) in the late 1950s or early 1960s (11).

This second story is of course already there in our first one, though I have to go back to read for it. It is there in the lack of sense my mum and I can make of Arthur's purchasing power: again and again, we wonder how he would have bought 64 Chepstow Road so young with no inherited lump sum. We spin and spin the possibilities around his ownership, never fully challenging it, preferring a tall tale that gives a transgressive whiff to our shared legacy of class transition rather than abandoning it altogether. Yet when I look back at the transcript of the interview with my mum, my own slow realisation is already there in black and white. It is the most plausible explanation for why mum's cousins Pip and David were able to buy a large house in Bexhill together many years later, splitting it in two and living one either side. Mum reflects hesitantly that 'Nanny Hobkirk might have had money' (13), yet neither of us returns to this, and it takes on the status of a passing comment, buried in plain sight. Instead the two of us puzzle and puzzle over whether Nora's inheritance would have come from Albert or Arthur (12), rather than from Eveline who died in 1966 (and when I check, she leaves her £3376, again a substantial sum). Despite my mum wondering aloud about whether Nanny Hobkirk's bolts of material were part of a clothes-making business of Nora's (13), we prefer the story that Eveline 'never worked' to one in which she not only provided housing for three generations, but also underwrote at least one family business out operating out of 64 Chepstow Road.

The story my mum and I tell is at one level one that simply aligns with the dominant histories of gender and class that we inherit. It is one in which women's roles as property owners, business underwriters and benefactors are erased by centring men on one hand, and also imagining women possessing little financial or social agency. The alternate story of Eveline Hobkirk's financial authority tells a different history as well as familial tale of gender and class, one in which we are confronted with an understanding of uneven progress for women over time, and of the complexity of the gendered nature of economic history (one with two world wars and plenty of widows). And yet in telling the story of our familial progress with an embarrassing failure to consider this more plausible route, we fabricate a tale of pride in the 'shady labour' of the patriarch of 64 Chepstow Road. We maintain that dominant history: my mum and I *work hard* in our combined retelling to ensure that our sense of improvements over time remains intact. We work hard to ignore the complex position Eveline must have found herself in: we laugh at her, transforming her into Nanny Hobkirk that 'crazy old witch', someone to be scared of. We tut and exchange glances at her hoarding as evidence of Arthur's generosity in the face of her demands on the patriarchal purse. We think nothing of the number of rooms given over to Arthur, Albert and Nora, and even cast them as devoted family members who ensure both Liz and Eveline have rooms of their own. We honour Arthur's need for privacy and space (it is his rooms, no one is allowed to go into, not Eveline's), and in imagining ourselves turning a blind eye to his supposed grey-economy activities as part of a tale of inherited transgression we both rather like the idea of, we wilfully consign Nanny Hobkirk to obscurity.

You would think my mum and I would know better. Indeed, later in the interview, my mum tells the story of having to obtain my dad's signature to use her inheritance to convert the outdoor toilet into a kitchen, in that 1970s upgrade to the Brighton house I grew up in and that remains in my dad's name today. Mum remembers that she 'had to get John [my dad] to sign before they would build the kitchen, before they would accept my *my* money. Ahhh!' (15). Mum frames the incident

as a joke, saying that 'John [my dad] laughed like a drain of course', and she is also laughing while she is telling me the story, but then says, she was 'furious', and 'remonstrated with this young man', until he 'sort of backed off' (15). She tells me the story with an emphasis on how things have improved for women, now that you would not need your husband's signature. Yet while it is me and my mum who imagine ourselves the beneficiaries of hard-fought for (relative) equality at the end of the twentieth century, it is nevertheless the two of us who fawn over Arthur, and my mum (not Eveline) who has to get her husband's signature to use her own money. It is Eveline Hobkirk who can secure her own, her daughter's and her grandchildren's futures through investing in property in the 1920s, who enables her daughter to run a business, and whose legacy either bought or paid off a mortgage for the housing security of the next two generations.

It is that affective labour that I am most ashamed of, and that is most telling about how a patriarchal order functions. Connell's exploration of the feminine labour that reaffirms a patriarchal order is helpful here. In describing the *practices* that constitute 'emphasized femininity' (her term), Connell (1987) notes that it is 'defined around compliance with. . . subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men' (p. 179). Most pertinently to our tale of 64 Chepstow Road, Connell continues:

> Central to the maintenance of emphasized femininity is practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation . . . What is hidden from it is the experience of spinsters, lesbians, unionists, prostitutes, madwomen, rebels and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches. (p. 187)

In wanting our narratives of progress to align, my mum and I not only obscure the central role Eveline Hobkirk played in the security of my mother's family across generations, but also actively prevent her from being a full subject at all. We might want to add 'financially secure widows' to Connell's list of those outsiders.

In my mum's and my shared tale, as much as in conventional history, Eveline Hobkirk is a witch, she has never worked, she is losing her grip and perhaps slipping into madness in that small room surrounded by those heavy bales of material that threaten to crush her where she sleeps. Thinking of femininity as a set of *practices* that props up heteronormative familial structures helps me make sense of why our stories about Arthur are so comforting. They are in line with the tales of male-led progress so central to what I am supposed to have inherited in terms of class transition and increased gendered freedom. Their affective authority positions my mum and I (and all the other tellers of similar tales) as knowing subjects, while Eveline's own authority is undermined through our (often cruel) affect. 'Emphasized femininity' should thus be thought of as both a set of practices and a set of affective registers that are of profound significance for upholding dominant histories. It is only through a subsequent analysis of the 'memory archive' here that that this violence is exposed and Eveline's story – that haunts both the house and the familial accounts of it – can be fleshed out.

The gendered labour of forgetting

While attention to the 'memory archive' thus far has expanded Connell's helpful concept to incorporate affective registers and a more intersubjective understanding of how that gendered labour takes place as part of 'emphasized femininity', it still needs further extension to explain why women tell gendered tales that do not initially appear to advantage them. Flossie and mum do not after all inherit as much as they might have if the house had belonged to Arthur, and one might wonder why other members of the family also maintained the fiction of patriarchal ownership of 64 Chepstow Road (my mum did not present the original story as in any way contested). For that

analysis, we need to take a more intersectional view of gendered labour, contextualising it within the colonial histories and affects that underwrite fantasies of white class progress in the first place.

Tudor's (2019) understanding of the 'labour of misogyny' is useful here as it provides a fuller exploration of the multiple power relations that gendered labour works to sustain (p. 371). For Tudor, gendered labour props up heteronormative power relations and naturalises them, certainly, and it also describes the repeated efforts of that labour to secure raced as well as classed fantasies. And in *Imperial Intimacies* in which she tracks her family history back through the black and white British and Jamaican parts of the family, Carby (2020) showcases whiteness and its triumphs as time and time again *gendered scenes* in which the ability to invest in the inferiority of racialised others is central to fantasies of white, working-class transition. So while in the first section I highlighted the gendered labour of storytelling as part of how men are prioritised within a class transitional familial fantasy I inherit, in this part, I follow Carby and Tudor in expanding our understanding of Connell's 'emphasized femininity' (its affects and labour) to include an account of how class transitional histories of inheritance work through racialised as well as gendered modes.

My analysis of affect and history in articulating the history of whiteness also on Paul Gilroy's (2005) work on 'postcolonial melancholia'. For Gilroy, children and adults in Britain are consistently introduced to a narrative of 'Britishness' as heroic through persistent reference to the Second World War over and above discussion of a violent and considerably more resilient Empire. These stories of British war heroes tell their recipient about *white* Britishness in particular: where blackness is included it is in the form of colonial troops, subjects of colonies whose folding into that representation of Britishness also erases the history of violence that underpins their status as 'British' in the first place. For Gilroy, these displacements are a central feature of 'postcolonial melancholia', an endless refusal to confront or be accountable for the violence of Empire as constitutive of Britishness as whiteness.

My brother and I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s being told many such stories. We were introduced to tales of our brave grandpa – Flossie's husband Ernest – who was a policeman in The Blitz. We watched war films on wet Sunday afternoons like all middle-class British kids of our generation. We were taught early, until we knew it in our bones, that the (white) working people of Britain survived bombing and rationing because of something called 'character'. At school, my brother and I were certainly not taught about the horrors of Imperial Britain. Instead, we were taught (over and over again) about modern European history, and in particular encouraged to over-invest in the defeat of the evil Nazis and the resilience of the British over and above that of the (cowardly) French and (late-to-the party) Americans. These are general tales of course, and resonate with other family stories where it is women who do the telling, as often to rehabilitate individual men as to cast the sons of Empire as morally superior global civilisers in a shiny new frame. Gilroy thus points us to *forgetting* as a key mechanism used to shore up power and deny violence, and this is certainly a function of war stories in my familial 'memory archive'.[10] Although Gilroy does not pay attention to the role of gendered labour in maintaining and passing on these stories of twentieth-century white Britishness, that aspect is important. It helps in understanding why white women in particular might be inclined to forget their own or other women's authority and invest in stories passed down through generations of classed and raced progress with men as heroes.

My inheritance of a specifically white class-transitional history can be read back into my history of 64 Chepstow Road in a range of additional ways that complement the analysis of racialised war stories, following Gilroy. These concern the flow of commodities as well as ownership of property, providing a material history of whiteness as a fuller context for class and gendered transitions. There are the goods that dockworker Albert pilfers from the ships coming in, transported from England's colonies. That sugar he stuffs from split bags into his internal pockets was 'the single

most [important] colonial commodity' up until the end of the Second World War (Bosne et al., 2007: 5). The handing over of sugar to Nora, who used it to make baked goods for family or that she sold on, or that enabled a war-time trading of sugar coupons for meat and dairy, signals not only the hard graft of working-class survival of austere times, but also the family's increased quality of life through participation in the legacy of slavery represented by the 'politics of sugar' (Sandiford, 2004). Those pockets and pies that move in and out of 64 Chepstow Road frame the house as implicated in colonial histories of prosperity and class-transitional fortunes.

It was one of the initial peer reviewers for this article that pointed out the other ghost in my story of 64 Chepstow Road. Granny Hobkirk was not only the 'witch' confined to her room who scared the children in our first narrative, and nor was she only a property-owning widow who secured generational security and mobility in our re-told tale. She was also a *white* British citizen, one who was able to benefit from the Married Women's Property Act by inheriting from her second husband, buying property and keeping it in her own name. Nanny Hobkirk was a hoarder of 'rolls and rolls and rolls of material' (13), we might recall my mum telling me. When I suggest this might have been something she was saving for Nora or had inherited as a kind of trousseau, mum corrects me, noting this was probably part of a business (13). We may recall that Nora made clothes for the family or sold them (and yet the memory of the bolts of material marks Nanny Hobkirk as 'crazy' rather than shrewd).

Those rolls and rolls will have been dyed bright blues and crimsons at the warehouses near the docks after the ships came in. Eveline may have preferred indigo to crimson, I suspect, despite having to wait for that precious colour to come from India or Indonesia, but loving the depth it gave. She may not have known anything of the local knowledge that was passed from dye-maker to dye-maker on the indigo plantations (Kumar, 2014), but she marvelled at its glow. These are colonial tales that are important precisely because of their general character: my mum's family works on the docks rather than owning the ships or managing sugar or dye import. But like all white working-class families mine's possibility to imagine and invest in a different, class-transitional, future relies on their colonial privileges that remain unmarked. Eveline and Nora's hard graft relies on harder graft elsewhere; and it relies on not making that visible or including it in an account of the *value of hard work* so central to white class-transitional narratives. The stories that displace Eveline Hobkirk and that inaugurate Arthur Jones as the patriarch of 64 Chepstow Road relies on both gendered and racialised labour, then. They consign Eveline to being the 'madwoman in the attic' even while her ghostly presence continues to insist that she be given a different tale. And they forget the material context of colonialism that underwrites the family's survival and fantasies of a better life, a context that Eveline benefits from even as she appears to be agreeing to her own narrative and spatial subordination.

Thinking with Gilroy, Carby and Tudor as I have tried to do here means that we can begin to make sustained sense of the ways that those white women with little access to white male privileges invest in both their racialised authority and the benefits of class progress over their own gendered recognition. Unless we understand her as white, in fact, it is hard to imagine why or how Eveline Hobkirk would have ceded another kind of authority to history. And from an affective point of view, it also reorients us to think about the pleasures of white feminine 'masochism', the sweet taste of propping up white masculine pride, and the importance of investing in whiteness as a way out of classed insecurity, as Carby has so beautifully traced. In this analysis, then, the stories told or not told by the residents of 64 Chepstow Road, by me and my mum, about property, inheritance and the war, are key to understanding class transition into the twenty-first century. They articulate the importance of gendered labour to obscure white women's authority and invest in white male privileges, and a belief in the value of both their and our 'sacrifices' to secure a more privileged future.

Another inheritance

When I discovered the history of 64 Chepstow Road to be at odds with my mum's and my narration, I told her about it over email. I was anxious that she would be upset about having her own version of the past challenged, or angry at my interference in cherished memories, so it took me a while before I plucked up my courage. I need not have worried as she responded positively, saying: 'Wow well done you Somehow it all fits Things you thought you'd forgotten. X x' (A Hemmings, Nov 2020; personal communication).[11] Typically generous towards me, mum's response validates my capacities as a researcher even as it expresses her surprise at the new story. But that 'wow' is undercut by her suggestion that Eveline's tale resonates at another level: as a 'thing' that had slipped her mind, rather than something she had never known. Knowing it *again* now brings it back into memory, an alternate thread of family story that was there all along. Perhaps it was always there because of a resonance with other parts of the 'memory archive' – 'somehow it all fits' – or perhaps it was a reminder that it is possible to remember (even if you 'thought you'd forgotten') many things at once. My mum's openness and enthusiasm to this 'new' reading (rather than the irritation I had anticipated) remind me in turn – at a moment where I am feeling deflated about the gendered labour I have been doing to secure a familiar tale – that more than one narrative of gendered and classed inheritance is always available.

In their recent article, 'A new genealogy of "intelligent rage"', Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto (2021) optimistically insist that it can and must be possible to intervene in white gendered scripts and habits to activate a different politics based on solidarity. In taking up their invitation to try and do some of that work, my aim here is not to detract from the importance of unpicking the ways in which gendered labour upholds white class-transitional narratives in my 'memory archive'. Rather, I want to combine that work with imagining what some of those other 'things you thought you'd forgotten' might be to activate a multiple inheritance. What happens if I turn back around to listen to other buried resonances that are not so easily aligned with the white gendered labour that invests in propping up white male authority? What tales might emerge that hold out the possibility that 'there are other ways to be' and that 'the moment we inhabit is not inevitable' (Nash and Pinto, 2021: 896).

Nanny Hobkirk is not the only elderly woman living at 64 Chepstow Road at the time my mum remembers. There is also Granny Liz, who is found dead in her bed one morning by little Ann, her visiting grandchild (A Hemmings, 2020: 1). A widow like Eveline, I wonder now about Liz's own trajectory. I imagine her feelings of freedom as well as grief when her husband Charles dies and she sets up the boarding house that she runs with her daughter. I think too about Flossie's labour as a chorus girl, coming home exhausted and handing over her night's wages to her mum, loving the attention she gets from the lodgers and wondering who was (or would become) famous (A Hemmings, July 2021, personal communication). Then one night, the fire rages through the house, consuming everything in its path, leaving them with nothing (they certainly did not have insurance). Flossie's one 'special dress was hanging on the back of the door, and she didn't even have time to get that' (A Hemmings, 2020: 10) mum tells me, remembering being told the story over and over again as a cautionary tale never to try and preserve anything in the face of a blaze. Such times they must have had, I am sure, before they saw it all go up in smoke, then trying to make ends meet, before finally admitting they needed to join the rest of the Jones' family and move into 64 Chepstow Road.

Did Granny Liz and Flossie rail against the fates that meant they had to move into 'Arthur's House', relinquishing economic independence and pleasure for familial confines and a stricter order of things? Was it in fact Eveline who insisted on opening the doors of 64 Chepstow Road to Liz and her daughter against Arthur's and Albert's reticence, broking no argument on this rare occasion? Did Eveline want to rescue Liz and Flossie from their increasingly disreputable

reputation, or was she instead hoping for more entertaining company to distract her from Nora's diligence and Arthur's insatiable penny-pinching? Does my mum's *failed forgetting* offer a way into imagining the 4 or 5 years Eveline may have spent at 64 Chepstow Road with Nora before she married Albert and the whole clan moved in? It was surely filled with ups and downs, with laughter and sorrow. Perhaps Eveline had been on the cusp of opening up her own boarding house, but was forced to give up her ambitions when Nora begged her to let Albert (and then Arthur) move in. Did Eveline see reflected in Liz her original desire to fill this huge house with lodgers, her hopes for a lively house to distract her from the pain of two dead husbands rekindled? Did their shared grief and relief give Liz and Eveline common cause?

How soon did their raucous laughter and ruling of the roost give way to sober seclusions? Did their relationship with one another tip into the kind of friendship that did not need – had never needed – men to make sense of it? How did Arthur and the rest of the family persuade these tough, resilient, loyal women to give up the ghosts of their independence and pleasure and agree to their confinement at opposite ends of the house? Or did they simply concede the terrain to Nora and Flossie, hoping they would pick up their mantel and come into themselves? Like my mum's 'Wow well done you', were successes passed off as Nora's and Flossie's, and were they in turn irritated or pleased that their mothers beat full retreats, leaving the present tense of gendered labour to them?

Eveline and Liz must surely have had moments where their eyes met again in knowing irony over dinner: when Albert had had too much to drink and Arthur lauded it over the lot of them. Was that even a wink, perhaps, a smothered laugh? One thing is for sure, after Liz died, Eveline was never the same, and seemed to lose heart entirely. She came down for dinner less and less, stayed in bed for days at a time, until she *thought she had forgotten* the years of joy and plotting she and Liz had shared. Then Arthur died and Nora moved away with those humourless children of hers, and Eveline remembered whose house they had all been living in all along. With a nod and another wink to Liz, she refused to go with Nora: 'I'm staying put, she insisted; but, you go on now . . .'.

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Notes

1. My work has been primarily concerned with the limits of formal and conventional stories about the feminist and queer past, and about gender and sexual equality claims. I experimented with citation practice in *Why Stories Matter* as a way of intervening creatively in the histories we inherit, and continued with this interest in *Considering Emma*, where I wrote the letters we do not have from Goldman to her lover, Almeda Sperry (Hemmings, 2011, 2018). Both interventions play with memory and inheritance, but not as the central feature of either project.

2. This British Cultural Studies work chimes interestingly with US Black feminist work on 'critical fabulation', which invents as well as supplements the archive to imagine complex pasts, presents and futures for African American narratives and communities (see Hartman, 2008, 2019).
3. Lewis writes autobiographically of similar experiences to Ali of growing up 'mixed race' in a working-class family with a white mother. For Lewis, the experience is of learning class politics in her white grandma's kitchen, yet knowing somehow that something was missing in the labour union accounts that never spoke of Empire (2019: 414).
4. Clare Hemmings' interview with Ann Hemmings, 5 August 2020. Pages are transcript pages.
5. Mum describes these pockets as sewn into the lining of the dockers' coats, so that they could 'split bags' and bring home pilfered goods without being detected (1). The practice was so common, though, that it was likely to have been a calculated loss.
6. Western Front Association; London, England; WWI Pension Record Cards and Ledgers; Reference: 353/05MJUK, World War I Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914–1923, accessed at ancestry.com
7. Marriage Certificate, Edith Nora Workman to Albert John Jones, 19 Jun 1929. Archives, Wales. *Monmouthshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1551–1994, accessed at ancestry.com.*
8. *Monmouthshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1551–1994.* Archives and Records Council Wales, accessed at ancestry.com. On the burial record the vicar has noted that there is 'great mortality due to plague and influenza throughout the country' (1919: 86).
9. Principal Probate Registry. *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995* London, England © Crown copyright. Accessed at ancestry.com. This would be approx. £90,000 today, if we follow inflation.
10. Family stories about war heroes in my family – as in many white British families – serve to rehabilitate men whose failings can be expunged in death or selfless acts in battle. The failings for the men on my maternal side include alcoholism, gambling, sexual abuse and other forms of violence.
11. Exact transcription of the communication.

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