



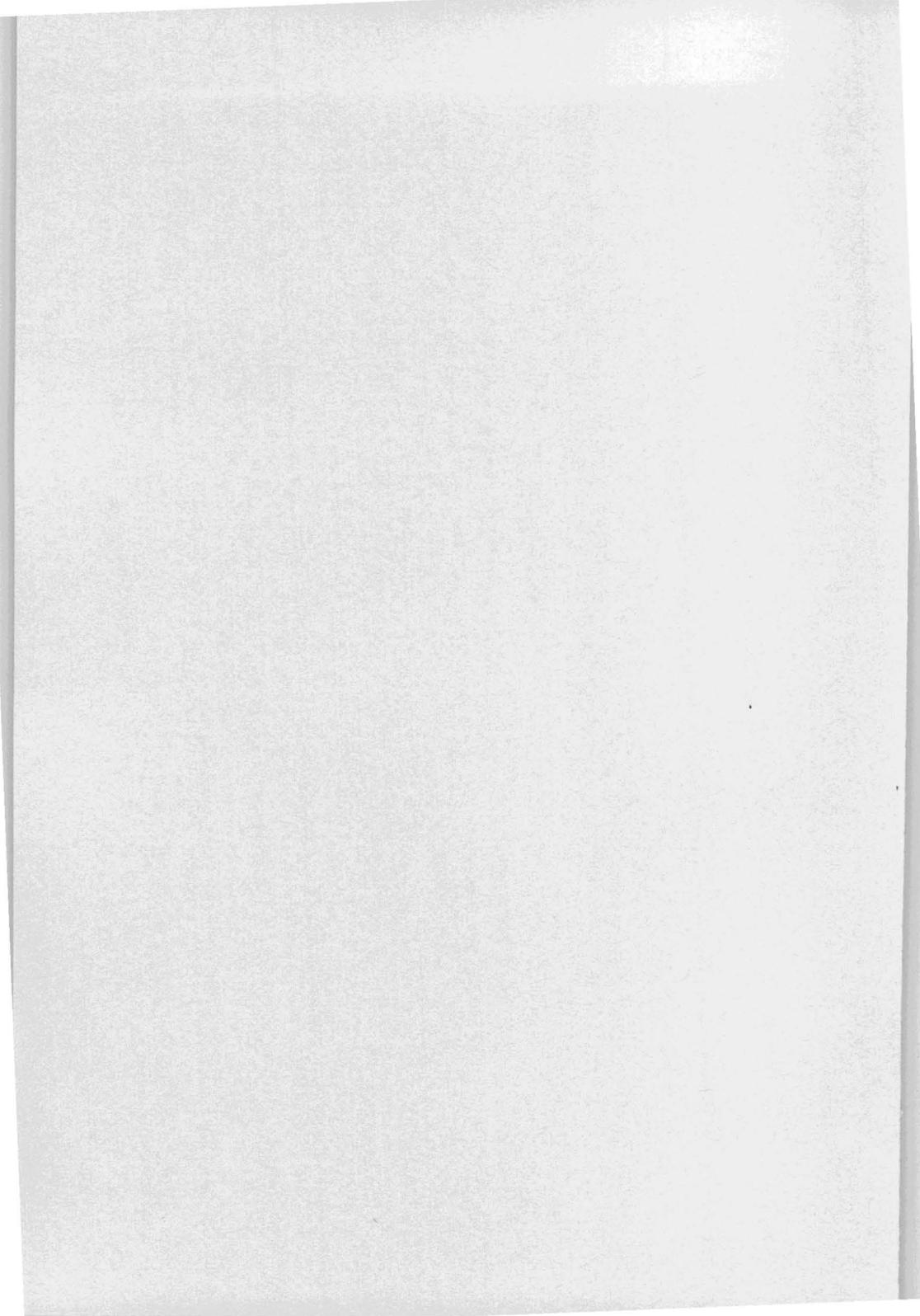
London School of Economics & Political Science
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**IN SEARCH OF THE 'TRADITIONAL' WORKING
CLASS: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND OCCUPATIONAL
CONTINUITY IN INTER-WAR LONDON**

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Department of Economic History
London School of Economics

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Dudley Baines and Paul Johnson,
Department of Economic History,
London School of Economics,
Houghton Street,
London.WC2A 2AE.

Telephone: +44 (0)171 955 7059/7061
Fax: +44 (0)171 955 7730
E-mail: d.e.baines@lse.ac.uk
p.a.johnson@lse.ac.uk

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Working-class society in Britain before the Second World War has been characterised by many sociologists and historians as relatively static, constrained from within by strong kinship and community networks, and constrained from without by a rigid class structure, reinforced by an exclusive and hierarchical educational system. In 'traditional' working-class society, friends were made, jobs found, work carried out, parties held with, and marriage partners selected from, a close network of relatives and neighbours. According to this view, economic and social aspirations seldom extended beyond a strictly local horizon. However, these close local and familial links were loosened to the point of destruction by post-war developments in suburban housing, in car ownership, in the provision of secondary education, and in the structure of employment. The 'traditional' working class was replaced by the 'affluent worker'.¹

Young and Willmott, in their classic and influential study of the twilight years of the 'traditional' working class community of Bethnal Green in the 1950s, wrote that 'People do not, after marriage, throw off the past which contains their former family and friends. They combine past and present. They continue to belong to the same community'.² Yet in the new suburban estate of 'Greenleigh', to which many East Enders had been moved by bombs and town planners, 'the family is, by the standards of Bethnal Green, isolated not only from kin but, it appears, from fellow residents as well. A new residence, a new life'.³ A decade later a study of the affluent working

¹ The clearest sociological statement is that of Klein, *Samples*, particularly vol. 1, chapter 4. Her work is a synthesis that draws heavily on a large number of post-war social surveys.

² Young and Willmott, *Family*, 156

³ *Ibid*, 141. The location of 'Greenleigh' was not revealed in the original study, but in the new introduction to the 1986 reprint of the book, Young and Willmott noted that it then was within the area of the Epping Forest District Council.

class of Luton confirmed this more individualistic outlook. According to Goldthorpe and his collaborators, 'whatever their previous community experiences may have been, they were now largely free from the continuous and essentially conservative social pressures exerted by the extended family and by established neighbourhood customs.'⁴

The images presented by Young and Willmott and by Goldthorpe et al. of 'traditional' and 'new' working classes have been accepted by many historians. Briggs, for example, stresses the '...continuation of ways of thinking, feeling and behaviour in slums across the divides of time..' as shown in the books by Roberts and Young and Willmott.⁵ Harrison stresses the changes in East Enders when they moved to suburban housing estates. They welcomed the new houses, but '...not without regret for the friendliness and sense of community of the East End.'⁶ In his recent analysis of classes and cultures in modern Britain, McKibbin explicitly adopts the dichotomous terminology of 'traditional' and 'new', and draws on a wide range of evidence to trace the social culture of the 'traditional' working class, noting that it was significantly modified by postwar housing and prosperity. By 1950, he suggests, it had become a commonplace that the new housing estates were responsible for a loss of working-class sociability. Most of the evidence for this change comes from a dozen or so post-war sociological surveys that were contemporaneous with the work of Young and Willmott. Direct evidence concerning the structure and strength of 'traditional' working class culture in inter-war Britain is scarce.⁷

⁴ Goldthorpe et al., *Affluent worker in the class structure*, 86-7.

⁵ Briggs, *Social History*, p. 338.

⁶ Harrison, *Common People*, p. 387.

⁷ In his section on the 'traditional' working class, McKibbin, *Classes*, 179-98, refers to ten accounts of working class social life published in the 1950s, and several subsequent works of autobiography and oral history, but to just three inter-war studies, all of which deal with the narrow topic of juvenile labour and behaviour.

Other writers have been more sceptical. Thompson doubts that there ever was a period in the two hundred years before 1950 when 'British towns collectively sustained a complete social structure, with interrelated and cohering classes.'⁸ In the second edition of his textbook, More argues that the period of the *Affluent worker* was not necessarily preceded by a period of community-centred existence as implied by Young and Willmott. More notes the existence of heterogeneous working-class communities in the nineteenth century and the exclusion of some working-class groups from those communities. He suggests that the '...cohesion of many working-class communities may well have developed during the period of economic stagnation and low migration between the wars.'⁹ Glynn and Booth, in what is effectively an aside, imply the opposite: that the homogeneous working class community existed in the nineteenth century but was declining between the wars.¹⁰ Finally, Davidoff suggests that the (re)discovery of the homogeneous working class community may have been an artifact of the Second World War which 'focussed attention on the family as a national resource.'¹¹

The contestable nature of the historical evidence may explain why the idea of a 'traditional' working class has been mythologised in much sociological literature. In order to sustain an interpretation of modern social arrangements as the outcome of some process of change, a past has to be identified or, if not identified, invented. In the *Affluent worker* study, Goldthorpe et al. expand on their invention in a footnote:

⁸ Thompson, 'Town and city', pp. 85-6.

⁹ More, *Industrial age*, pp. 388-9.

¹⁰ Glynn and Booth, *Modern Britain*, p. 176.

¹¹ Davidoff, 'The family', p. 176.

Such concepts as the 'traditional worker' or 'traditional working-class community' must be understood as tools of sociological and not historical analysis. Their use, for example, contains no implication that at some period of time all or even most of the members of the community displayed social characteristics, or lived in communities with characteristics, of the kind that are labelled 'traditional'¹²

In this paper we aim to redress this resort to ideotypical constructs and to retrospective historicisation by presenting quantitative evidence relating to one aspect of 'traditional' working-class society in the inter-war period - the entry of juveniles into the labour market. According to Young and Willmott, in the 1950s direct father-son continuity in the workplace 'although not so widespread as it was, is still fairly common.' Fathers or other relatives would 'speak to the Guv'nor' to get a job for a teenager, although the buoyant labour market of the immediate post-war period apparently made this personal influence both less important and less necessary than it had been in the 1930s.¹³ We use data collected in 1929-32 on 28,000 London working-class households to examine the extent to which juveniles followed in the occupational footsteps of their fathers. The data also allow us to measure the degree of father-son occupational mobility, and to assess, in a limited way, the extent to which the school system offered opportunities for mobility before the post-war introduction of universal secondary education.

The paper proceeds in five stages. First we present outline details of our data and the survey from which they are derived. This is followed by a brief comparison of the metropolitan and national labour markets in order to demonstrate that conditions faced by juveniles in London in 1929-32 were not exceptional. The following three sections

¹² Goldthorpe, *Affluent worker in the class structure*, fn.1 p. 86.

¹³ Young and Willmott, *Family*, 73-80. See also McKibbin, *Classes*, 119-27 for accounts of informal job search in other part of the country

examine, in turn, the rate of father-son occupational continuity in London, the degree of father-son class mobility, and the potential returns to an additional year of schooling for juveniles from skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds. The results cast doubt on accepted views about the power of internal and external social structures to limit the occupational choice and social horizons of juvenile and young adult males living in working-class communities in inter-war London.

II

Our data are derived from the *New Survey of London Life and Labour* (NSLLL), which was the largest and most comprehensive social survey undertaken in Britain before the Second World War and the only one for which the original survey cards have survived (almost) in their entirety.¹⁴ The NSLLL involved a detailed house to house enquiry which collected information on more than 2 per cent of the working class population in 38 London boroughs - 28,100 households containing 98,400 individuals. Data concerning 26,915 households and 94,137 individuals have survived; most of this relates to 1929 and 1930.¹⁵ Information was collected on the demographic structure of the household, housing conditions, and the occupation, income, earnings and birthplace of each individual, including the name of the employer and the cost of

¹⁴ Results of the survey were published in nine volumes. The household survey was referred to in only two volumes and then only in aggregated form. See Llewellyn-Smith, *New survey*.

¹⁵ The cards for the outer London boroughs of Walthamstow and Tottenham, although used for the published volumes, have been lost. The proportion of the 26915 households surveyed in each year was 1928: 0.1, 1929: 34.9, 1930: 49.3, 1931: 13.5, 1932: 2.3.

the journey to work. Manual tabulation of the data was a laborious task and, in common with other surveys of the time, little analysis of the data was undertaken. The cards have now been fully computerised.¹⁶

The strengths and limitations of the NSLLL data should be noted. The household was, in effect, defined as all persons living at one address, and, most important, included only working class households. 'Working class' was defined by exclusion, the main criterion being occupation. Hence, police inspectors were excluded, but police sergeants included. Most 'employers and managers' and 'proprietors' were also excluded. If in doubt, as, for instance, in the case of the self-employed, the investigators were instructed to include only those households where the income of the head was less than £250 p.a., this being the upper income threshold for National Insurance contributions. Working class households were selected for inclusion in the survey on a random basis within each borough. This makes the survey an excellent resource for the analysis of within-household economic and demographic characteristics, but it precludes the direct evaluation of some extra-household issues such as the residential propinquity of kin.

III

We have individual level data only for London and our analysis is confined to London (which in 1931 accounted for 14 per cent of the population of England and Wales, and 15.5 per cent of the labour force). Moreover, the coincidence of the NSLLL with the interwar depression means that the survey data may be unrepresentative of the inter-war period as a whole. Trends in the national economy in the inter-war period

¹⁶ The cards are held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science (the LSE library). The entire contents of each card has been computerised, together with additional coding of occupations, birthplaces and location of employer. Full details, of the project, including the quality of the sample, are given in Baines, *Computerisation of the NSLLL*. The computerised data is now held by the ESRC Data Archive.

disproportionately favoured the growth of employment in London, for both adults and juveniles. The main employment growth in the inter-war period was in services, in which there were many entry level jobs. Furthermore, technical changes in the newer consumer industries, which were relatively important in London, favoured juveniles.¹⁷

The 1931 census shows that London¹⁸ had higher juvenile participation rates than England and Wales at all ages for both males and females. Yet London also had marginally higher proportions of 14-17 year olds in full-time education. This apparent conundrum of both higher participation rates and more full-time education in London is accounted for by the greater than average propensity of unoccupied juveniles in London to be in receipt of full time education. In London, 81.6 per cent of unoccupied male juveniles were in full time education, compared with 72.5 per cent in England and Wales. The contrast for females was even greater - 65.1 per cent compared with 42.8 per cent.¹⁹

Juveniles in the NSLLL sample also exhibit higher participation than in the country as a whole (Table 1). But the NSLLL data differ somewhat from the census return for the equivalent area of London. Participation rates for 15-17 year old females and 15 year old males are higher and for 14 year olds lower. The reason is probably definitional. Occupational status was self-defined in the census, but independently defined by the interviewer in the NSLLL, according to seven possible labour market states: 'not in labour force'; 'employed'; 'self-employed'; 'unemployed'; 'sick/incapacitated'; 'on

¹⁷ Gollan, *Youth in British industry*, p. 80.

¹⁸ We define 'London' to include the LCC area (the census definition) plus the outer boroughs surveyed by the NSLLL (Acton, Brentford, Ealing, Hornsey, Willesden, East Ham, West Ham, Barking, Leyton, Tottenham and Walthamstow) except that to maintain comparability with the computerized NSLLL data, we have excluded the two boroughs - Tottenham and Walthamstow - for which the NSLLL cards have not survived.

¹⁹ *Occupations of juveniles*, Table 18.

strike'; 'unknown/other'. We count as occupied all juveniles except those declared as 'not in labour force'; this is an upper bound estimate of the participation rate (column 3 of table 1). Since we also have information on earnings in the survey week, we can treat juveniles who reported current earnings as a lower-bound estimate of participation (column 4 of table 1). Even on this restricted definition, participation at some ages was higher than in the census, confirming the exceptionally high participation rates in London.

The high juvenile participation rates in London, particularly for females, suggests that demand for juvenile labour was buoyant in 1929-32, and that most school leavers could find employment. This impression is confirmed by NSLLL data on unemployment; for ages from 14 to 17 the proportions of males reported to be unemployed were, respectively, 2.7, 2.1, 4.0 and 5.0 per cent. For females they were, respectively, 2.4, 1.3, 2.8 and 2.8 per cent. We are confident, therefore, that at the time of the NSLLL survey the juvenile labour market in London was not particularly depressed.²⁰ There is no reason to think that behaviour observed in 1929-32 was uncharacteristic of the inter-war period.

IV

We now examine the evidence of father-son occupational continuity in the London labour market. In their discussion of father-son continuity, Young and Willmott wrote:

This system probably used to result in many more sons following their fathers than do so today. We do not know; we can only surmise. All we are certain is

²⁰ The adult labour market in London was also little affected by the depression. The average unemployment rate recorded in the NSLLL for males aged 21-64 was 7.2 per cent.

that only ten out of the forty-five husbands in the Bethnal Green marriage sample have the same occupations as their fathers, as dockers, market porters, and in a few other trades.²¹

Unfortunately Young and Willmott did not collect information about fathers' occupations in their general household sample, so their 1950s evidence of a 22.2 per cent rate of occupational continuity was derived from the 45 families in their subsample of married couples with two or more children. We can use the 2 per cent NSLLL sample of the London working-class population directly to test for evidence of father-son progression in both Bethnal Green and London generally, and in each occupational sector, in 1929-32.

We first examine those male juveniles aged 14-20 who were economically active, and who lived in a household where the male head (nearly always the father) was also economically active. The occupations of these individuals were coded into the 31 main occupational orders, as given by the 1931 census, but cases where the occupation was 'other and undefined' (sector 31) or retired, or unknown, were omitted. This gave us a sample of 3909 males aged 14-20. One fifth (20.4%) of these juveniles were in the same occupational order as their fathers for the NSLLL area as a whole, but there was considerable variance across boroughs. Table 2 lists those boroughs that displayed a level of working-class father-son occupational continuity more than one standard deviation away from the mean.

Some of this inter-borough variance is a function of differences in the occupational structure. Some orders exhibited very high rates of father-son occupational continuity - this was particularly the case with building (order 18: 41 per cent), transport (order 22: 36 per cent) and clothing and shoes (order 13: 30 per cent) - so boroughs with a concentration of these trades were likely to have above average rates of inter-

²¹ Young and Willmott, *Family*, 75.

generational occupational continuity. A regression across boroughs of the measured rate of occupational continuity on the employment share of each occupational sector explains just over half of the inter-borough variance (R -bar-squared 0.58). This implies that independent borough-specific influences were responsible for almost half of the observed inter-borough variance in continuity. However, Table 1 does not point to any simple 'East End' or 'traditional working class' effect. Young and Willmott's 'traditional' borough of Bethnal Green exhibits a high level of occupational continuity, as do the inner East End boroughs of Stepney and Shoreditch. Yet Poplar, adjacent to both Bethnal Green and Stepney, and with a heavy concentration of dock workers, is well below average in Table 1. In the west of London, the borough with the second highest rate of continuity, Kensington, is sandwiched between Westminster and Hammersmith which have the lowest recorded rates. On the metropolitan fringes, and beyond the London County Council administrative area, the suburban borough of Leyton had a rate of occupational continuity of 26.5 per cent whereas the suburban borough of Barking had a rate of only 16.4 per cent.²²

The NSLLL evidence so far indicates that the degree of father-son occupational continuity found by Young and Willmott in Bethnal Green in the 1950s (22.2 per cent) was above the average level for working class households in London in 1929-32 (20.4 per cent), but below the inter-war level for Bethnal Green (26.4 per cent). However, our test for occupational continuity within broad occupational orders is far more inclusive, and hence much less precise, than that used by Young and Willmott. For example, sector 22 (transport and communications) includes all workers in railways, road transport, the merchant marine, and the docks, together with postmen, telephone

²² The borough-specific rates of occupational continuity we derive from the NSLLL are, like those of Young and Willmott, based on the residential location of fathers and sons. On this measure a juvenile working in the same occupational sector as his father, but whose place of work was in a different borough to his father, would be deemed to be exhibiting occupational continuity.

operators, lift attendants, messengers and porters. If a father worked in the docks and his son on the railways, there is no genuine occupational continuity here, although both work in the same broad sector. Young and Willmott, by contrast, identify the existence of occupational continuity only if there is exact job matching - both father and son working as dockers, or as market porters. We can gain a more accurate view of occupational continuity in the NSLLL sample, and one more comparable with Young and Willmott's study, by examining the specific occupations reported by respondents, which have been coded according to a modified version of the 1931 census classification of occupations.²³ By this measure the rate of father-son occupational continuity in the NSLLL is just 7.6 per cent, ranging from zero in Woolwich to 12.6 per cent in East Ham. Bethnal Green is again above average (9.4 per cent), but within one standard deviation of the mean. In Bethnal Green we find that 22 of the 233 juveniles had exactly the same occupation as their fathers: four sons followed their fathers into tailoring, seven into cabinet-making, four into french polishing, with the other seven working as metal moulder, building labourer, driver, butcher, wholesale salesman, van salesman and costermonger. None of the Bethnal Green juveniles followed their fathers into the docks, portering or printing, the three occupations identified by Young and Willmott as characteristic of intergenerational occupational continuity. This is perhaps not surprising since none of the fathers of the 233 juveniles worked in printing, and just 7 worked as porters and 14 as dock workers. The fact that printing, portering and dock work were very much minority occupations in Bethnal Green itself suggests that the occupations of fathers in the Young and Willmott 'marriage sample' were unrepresentative of occupations in the borough as a whole.

Neither of our measures of occupational continuity support the contention of Young and Willmott that this form of behaviour was much more prevalent before the second

²³ Bailey and Leith, *Computerising*, pp. 33-40. This coding scheme contains 629 distinct occupational categories.

world war than in the 1950s. Our narrow measure based on exact occupational matching, which is closer to the type of continuity discussed by Young and Willmott, finds less than ten per cent of sons following in their fathers' footsteps. Since no one, least of all Young and Willmott, has suggested that occupational continuity was more prevalent in the post-war than the pre-war period, we must conclude that the data derived from the Bethnal Green marriage sample in the mid 1950s was unrepresentative of the father-son occupational continuity experienced in the borough as a whole, and that this led Young and Willmott to identify as commonplace a form of labour market behaviour that in fact was highly untypical of working class juveniles in both Bethnal Green and more generally in London.

V

The low rate of (narrow) father-son occupational continuity among working class households in London demonstrates that initial employment choices for juveniles were not massively constrained by 'traditional' job-seeking practices. This suggests that there may have been significant opportunities for sons to find jobs with a different status to that of their fathers, and thus to achieve upwards or downwards social mobility. Such social mobility would appear to be at odds with the views of Glass, who in his analysis of the pattern of mobility across successive cohorts born between 1890 and 1929 found that 'there have been no major differences between generations in the overall intensity of the status association between fathers and sons.'²⁴ Goldthorpe's 1972 study found clear evidence of rising absolute mobility rates over the middle decades of the century, but this was a function of the expansion of the relative and absolute number of service class (white collar) jobs, rather than a result of greater 'openness' in society; the underlying structure of mobility chances in Britain remained

²⁴ D.V. Glass and J.R. Hall, 'Social mobility in Britain: a study of intergeneration changes in status' in D.V. Glass (ed.), *Social Mobility in Britain* (London, 1954) p. 216.

largely unaffected²⁵. Both the Glass and the Goldthorpe studies concentrated on movement between manual and non-manual occupations, and so are not directly compatible with the NSLLL data which are restricted to a working-class population. A better basis for the long-run comparison of working-class social mobility is the data relating to over 10,000 sons, fathers and fathers-in-law collected by Vincent from a sample of marriage registers between 1839 and 1914. Analysis of this data by Miles reveals much greater 'openness' over time, particularly *within* the working class. In particular, he finds that in the seventy five years between 1839 and 1914, the total mobility rate - the proportion of men leaving their class background by the time of their first marriage - rose from a third to almost a half.²⁶

By grouping NSLLL occupational data into socio-economic classes, we can see whether working-class social mobility in inter-war London corresponds with the pattern of growing openness found by Miles in earlier data. We have borrowed the Registrar-General's classification of socioeconomic class (used in censuses from 1911 to 1951) which allocated occupations according to their level of skill to one of five categories: I = higher professionals, managers and proprietors; II = other professionals, managers and employers; III = skilled and clerical workers; IV = semi-skilled workers; V = unskilled workers.²⁷ Miles also uses this 5-point class scale, so direct comparison with his data for the period up to 1914 is possible. There is, however, an important differences between occupational data collected by the NSLLL and that derived from marriage registers. The NSLLL explicitly excluded nearly all households containing workers in non-manual employment, and so

²⁵ Goldthorpe et al, *Social mobility*, chs 4 and 12.

²⁶ Miles, 'How open' in Miles and Vincent, *Building*, 22-3.

²⁷ Bailey and Leith, *Computerising*, p. 38

occupations of both fathers and sons are restricted to classes III, IV and V. We allow for this by adjusting Miles's data to exclude those cases where mobility occurred into or from classes I and II.

We also need to recognise that recording the occupations of fathers and co-resident sons is not the same process as recording the occupations of bridegrooms and their fathers. By the time of marriage, some grooms would no longer be resident in the family home, possibly because they had migrated to improve their employment prospects. We might expect, therefore, that the NSLLL would under-report the level of father-son occupational and class mobility relative to the marriage register data. However, we think this bias is small. An analysis of the skill composition of male juvenile and young adult workers in the NSLLL shows that, not surprisingly, unskilled (class V) jobs dominated at the age of 14, by 16 juveniles were equally represented in unskilled and skilled (class III) jobs, but for 17 year olds, skilled jobs dominated. By age 19 the occupational distribution of males had converged to the adult (age 21-30) norm, with 50.3 (51.3) per cent in skilled jobs, 21.4 (21.3) per cent in semi-skilled jobs and 28.3 (27.5) per cent in unskilled jobs. There is no net class mobility for males between the ages of 19 and 30 in the NSLLL sample, and so no reason to believe that the occupations of co-resident young adults would be significantly different from the occupations of grooms.

We have used the NSLLL to compare the skill classification of 1075 young adult males aged 19 and 20 with the skill classification of their fathers.²⁸ In Table 3 we compare this data with that derived by Miles from marriage registers for 1839-54 and 1899-1914, adjusted to exclude mobility to and from classes I and II. The data are presented in Table 3 in the form of a mobility matrix. Column percentages (headed column *i*) represent the percentage of sons working in class *x* who originated from (i.e.

²⁸ We have excluded from this analysis all cases where either the young adult or the father was not in employment, or where the occupation was not defined.

whose father's class was) class y ; this is a measure of occupational inflow. Row percentages (in columns headed o) represent the percentage of fathers working in class x whose sons work in class y ; this is a measure of occupational outflow. For example, of the 548 fathers in the 1929-32 (NSLLL) sample who worked in class III occupations, 64.4 per cent had a son working in a class III occupation, and 17.0 per cent had a son working in a class V occupation. Of the 580 sons in the 1929-32 sample who worked in class III jobs, 60.9 per cent originated in a class III household, and 19.5 per cent originated in a class V household.

Table 3 demonstrates that mobility within the working class rose substantially over time. In 1839-54 more than three quarters of working-class sons were in the same working-class skill range as their father; by 1899-1914 this had fallen to 59.5 per cent, and by 1929-32 it had decreased further to 49.8 per cent. In other words, mobility across unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled boundaries, from being exceptional in the mid-nineteenth century, had become the norm for young adult males by the inter-war period. This rise in mobility was not simply the consequence of an expansion in the number of class III jobs. The proportion of class III fathers and sons was lower in 1839-54 than in 1929-32, but only marginally so (48.8 and 51.0 per cent for fathers, 52.5 and 54 per cent for sons). Over time the proportionate increase in the chance of a son originating in class III and falling to class V was almost as great as the increase in the chance of a son originating in class V and rising to class III. The mobility matrix in table 3 reveals increasing fluidity over time; working-class occupational stability had been significantly attenuated in London by the 1930s. It is ironic that this is exactly the period identified by post-war sociologists as the apogee of the 'traditional' working-class community. The NSLLL evidence indicates that, in terms of occupational mobility, this ascription is incorrect.

VI

Significant amounts of mobility within the working class in 1929-32, and low rates of father-son occupational continuity, suggest that many juveniles and young adults were gaining employment in ways that relied less heavily on family connections than in the past. It is possible that the education system played a role in determining the type of work attained by juveniles, and we can examine this possibility with NSLLL data on juvenile employment. The NSLLL did not record information about education, but we know from the census that 82 per cent of unoccupied male juveniles in London were in full time education, and in the following analysis we assume that non-working juveniles were at school.

We use data from a cross-tabulation of boys' occupational class by the occupational class of the head to estimate the age-specific probability that a boy from a class x household gained employment in a class y job. Table 4 reports these probabilities for boys for each age from 14 to 17. Children from class III households consistently had the highest probability at each age of working in a class III job and the lowest probability of working in a class V job. For class V children this relationship is reversed. The probability of obtaining class III employment generally increased with age, but class remained important. Class V boys made up relatively little ground on their class III peers as they became older. For employed juveniles only, the probability that a juvenile from a class V household held a class III job at age 17 (0.36: derived as .35/.97) was marginally less than the probability that a class III juvenile did at age 14 (0.37: derived as .16/.44).

The class of origin affected not only the chance of obtaining a particular class of job, but also the probability at each age of being in the labour force. The final column in table 4 includes data on non-occupied juveniles. This shows that there were significant class differences in the propensity to enter the labour force for juveniles aged 14-16.

Boys from class V households were, at each age, more likely to be in paid employment than class IV boys, who were more likely to be working than class III boys. By age 17 more than 95 per cent of boys were in employment and the clear class hierarchy in employment propensities had disappeared.

These data provide some support for the idea that deferred entry, and the additional schooling that this implied, increased the chance of obtaining higher status employment. We cannot test this proposition directly, however, since the NSLLL includes only cross-sectional data. To go further we have to make several important assumptions. First, we have to consider our cross-section of juveniles as if it were a cohort on which we have collected data over several years. We have to assume that our 14 year olds in year t become our 15 year olds in year $t+1$, and so on. In other words we must construct a pseudo-cohort from cross-section data. Biases introduced by this procedure will be minimised if the imputed length of time over which the cohort is followed is kept short (in this case just 3 annual periods), and if the labour market environment of the preceding years (in this case 1927-30) has been stable. There does not seem to have been any change in the education system or the labour market in London in this period which would have changed the age at which juveniles entered the labour market or the probability of changing to a different class of job. We think, therefore, that it is valid to treat our juvenile cross-section as a pseudo-cohort.

It is necessary to adjust the underlying data to compensate for small variations in cohort size by standardising the number of juveniles in each cohort at 1000. With this standardised pseudo-cohort data we can get a rough idea of the extent to which an extra year's schooling altered the chances of any particular juvenile obtaining a specific class of job. The findings are necessarily approximate because we cannot know from these data the extent of inter-occupation mobility from one year to the next among juveniles already in employment. For example, as our cohort ages from 14 to 15 we cannot know how many of the 162 additional class III boys working in class III jobs came from the 343 new entrants to class III jobs, and how many came

from the 276 boys from class III households who were employed as 14 year olds in class IV and class V jobs. We can, however, examine different hypothetical scenarios. We consider the following three scenarios:

- i) **Static**; this assumes that there was no mobility among the previous year's workforce until all new entrants had been accommodated in the highest class possible.
- ii) **Historic**: this assumes that new entrants were distributed across occupational classes in the same proportion as the previous year's workers.
- iii) **Dynamic**: this assumes that new entrants were distributed across occupational classes in the same proportion as the following year's workers.

The static scenario implies that an additional year of schooling always promoted new entrants into additional higher class jobs ahead of those juveniles in the workforce who were accumulating experience in the workplace. The historic assumption is pessimistic and assumes that an additional year of schooling does nothing to improve the chances of gaining higher class jobs. The dynamic scenario assumes that the additional schooling received by labour market entrants in year t is a major determinant of the change in the distribution of juveniles across job classes between year $t-1$ and year $t+1$.

What are the probabilities produced by these hypothetical scenarios that a 14 year old boy who was not in employment would start work at age 15 and enter any particular occupational class? The probability of the non-employed 14 year old starting work at 15 was about 0.6, regardless of the class of the household from which the boy came (derived from final column of table 4). But the probability of his gaining a job of a particular class was closely related to the class of the household from which he came. Table 5 shows the probability of a 15 year old boy from class x entering a class y occupation, according to the three scenarios outlined above. For new entrants from class III households, the chances of entering a class III job were at or substantially

above those experienced by 14 year olds, for all scenarios.²⁹ For a boy from a class V household, however, the additional year of schooling had an ambiguous impact. Under the static scenario his chances of obtaining a class III job would have fallen, whereas under the dynamic scenario it would have risen, compared to the baseline 'historic' scenario. However, the additional year of schooling consistently reduced the chances of 15 year olds from class V entering a class V job. For both class IV and class V new entrants, the difference between the static and dynamic scenarios is the extent to which an additional year of schooling raises the chances of entering either a class IV or a class III job.

The probabilities presented in table 5 depend crucially on the plausibility of the underlying assumptions. The assumption of the 'historic' or baseline scenario that a year's additional schooling does nothing to enhance the job prospects of new entrants seems unrealistic. If there was nothing to be gained from deferring labour market entry, then few boys (or their parents) would have been willing to forego a 14 year old's average annual income of over £17 (equal to just under 8 per cent of the total average earnings of NSLLL households containing a 14 year old boy). With either the static or dynamic scenarios, an additional year's schooling improves the chances of all boys entering a higher class employment. There is, however, a clear class gradient to this effect. Under the dynamic scenario, for boys coming from class V households the deferral of labour market entry from age 14 to age 15 raised the chance of entering a class III job by 27 per cent (0.28 vs 0.22), compared to 38 per cent (0.51 vs 0.37) for a boy from a class III household.

Our pseudo-cohort data shows that boys from skilled households gained potentially more from delayed entry into the labour force than did boys from unskilled households. It also supports the contention that education played a role in promoting

²⁹ Note that the probabilities under the 'historic' scenario here represent the chances faced by a 14 year old new entrant in achieving employment in any particular class.

social mobility. Post-war analysis of formal education has concentrated on the contribution of secondary and tertiary education to social mobility, and has concluded that formal educational qualifications have been important in the achievement of higher status employment, but that access to the educational system has been relatively limited for children from working-class families.³⁰ Our analysis of the NSLLL indicates that the inter-war elementary school system, which served all working-class children, was a potentially important extra-familial influence on social mobility. However, even within the working class population there was a class gradient to these mobility opportunities. In this respect our findings concur with the post-war conclusion of Hall and Glass that 'education as such appears to modify, but not to destroy, the characteristic association between the social status of fathers and sons.'³¹

VI

Our analysis of the NSLLL data on juvenile employment has produced three important findings:

- i) that on the basis of close occupational matching, the extent of father-son occupational continuity in London was less than 10 per cent;
- ii) that metropolitan working-class society in the 1930s was socially fluid, with just over half of young adult males having a socio-economic class different from that of their father;
- iii) that an additional year of schooling improved the chances of working-class boys entering the labour market in a higher-class job, and therefore that elementary education contributed to social fluidity; on the other hand, the benefits of education were less for boys from unskilled households.

³⁰ Hall and Glass, 'Education'; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, *Origins*.

³¹ Hall and Glass, 'Education', p. 307.

Other historical evidence is in accord with our findings. Low rates of father-son occupational continuity have been found elsewhere. For example, in the Lancashire cotton industry, which has often been assumed by historians to be a locus of embedded working-class traditionalism, Griffiths has recently discovered that 'family influence was exiguous to recruitment in the aggregate.'³² In 1898 a factory inspector found that only 14 per cent of children working in cotton mills had parents working in the industry; in 1921 a mill director stated that the majority of children employed as piecers were not the sons of cotton operatives.³³ Furthermore, a dominant role for family connections in juvenile job placement seems incompatible with both the extensive Edwardian and inter-war concern about the *absence* of career guidance for juveniles, and with the pressure from craft unions to maintain the exclusivity of skill and position, and to sustain formal barriers to entry.³⁴

Additionally, we note that there was a considerable degree of geographical mobility within the London working-class population. In the NSLLL sample, 18 per cent of male household heads were born outside the Greater London area.³⁵ But out-migration was more important than in-migration. The 1931 census estimated the relative contribution of migration and natural increase to the inter-censal population change of each administrative district in the country. Between 1921 and 1931 the East End of London experienced massive net out-migration: Bethnal Green lost 16.2 per cent of its population over this decade, Shoreditch lost 16.4 per cent, Stepney 17.3 per cent, Poplar 14.3 per cent. Only 49 of the 1120 metropolitan boroughs and urban districts in

³² Griffiths, *Work*, p. 154.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

³⁴ On juveniles' job placement and the 'boy labour' problem see Political and Economic Planning, *Entrance*. On craft unions, see Phelps Brown, *Origins*, ch. 8.

³⁵ Place of birth was not recorded in all cases. This analysis is based on data for 20924 male household heads.

England experienced net out-migration rates greater than those in Bethnal Green, and the majority of these places were steel, mining and shipbuilding towns that had been severely hit by the 1920-21 depression.³⁶ Gross migration rates would, of course, have been higher, but there is no way of estimating their extent. In demographic terms, the East End population in the inter-war period seems to have been one of the least stable in the entire country.

There are, of course, many aspects of what McKibbin calls the 'social culture' of 'traditional' working class life that are not directly related to occupational and social mobility, and which cannot be captured by a household survey such as the NSLL. The culture of the pub and the street may have been more vibrant, community and kinship ties may have been stronger, in pre-war 'traditional' working class communities than in the post-1945 period. Yet our investigation of occupational continuity and social mobility challenges dominant assumptions.

For Goldthorpe et al., 'the salient characteristics of the "traditional" type of working-class district could be said to derive from the relative stability and the social homogeneity of its population.'³⁷ These concepts of stability and homogeneity appear in a wide range of post-war writing on working class society. The largely autobiographical accounts produced by Hoggart and by Roberts of growing up in interwar Leeds and Salford present a picture of working-class life as standardised and homogeneous, as does Hobsbawm's interpretation of the making and persistence of 'traditional' working class society in Britain between 1880 and 1950.³⁸ Sociological

³⁶ *1931 Census of England and Wales: County Reports*. For comparison, the net out-migration rates in selected towns were: Barrow-in-Furness 16.2%, Ebbw Vale 20.7%, Jarrow 20.3%, Barnard Castle 19.6%.

³⁷ Goldthorpe et al, *Affluent worker in the class structure*, p. 86.

³⁸ Hoggart, *Uses*; Roberts, *Classic Slum*; Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, chs 10 and 11.

studies of a wide range of communities as diverse as mining villages, county towns, suburban estates and inner city boroughs all emphasised the stable, resigned, inward-looking nature of the traditional working class.³⁹ The study of Bethnal Green by Young and Willmott fits with a large body of other post-war research, but our findings suggest that working-class communities in inter-war London, including Bethnal Green, were neither as stable nor as homogeneous as has been claimed. What accounts for this difference?

A full resolution of this conundrum would require extensive historical research into a number of different working class communities in the inter-war period, but some indicators can be drawn from the existing literature. Looking first at the work of Young and Willmott, we note that both the population of Bethnal Green and the marriage sample they drew from this population were affected by the peculiar circumstances of the second world war. The combined effects of bombing and evacuation almost halved the population of Bethnal Green in the first two years of the war, and even at the post-war population peak of 1948 the borough's population had barely recovered to two-thirds of the 1939 level. Much of this net population decline was the result of rehousing policies; between 1931 and 1955 nearly 11,000 families containing more than 40,000 Bethnal Greeners were rehoused on LCC estates.⁴⁰ People who chose to resist or reject this mass rehousing programme were likely to have had particularly strong local kinship and community ties; evacuation and post-war rehousing must have heightened community-centredness among the population that remained through a process of concentration.

³⁹ For northern mining villages, see Dennis et al., *Coal*; for the county town of Banbury see Stacey, *Tradition*; for suburban estates see Shaw, 'Impressions', Slater and Woodside, *Patterns*; for inner city areas see Kerr, *Ship Street*.

⁴⁰ Young and Willmott, *Family*, p. 99.

Young and Willmott's marriage sample of 45 couples with two children was also affected by peculiar wartime conditions. Almost half (21) of these couples began their married life in the parental home, and this may be taken as evidence of strong kinship ties.⁴¹ However, it seems likely that this high rate of co-residence was determined by exogenous factors. Over three quarters of the husbands and wives in this marriage sample were aged 39 and below in 1955,⁴² and so almost certainly married during or shortly after the war, when geographical mobility and household formation were severely constrained by manpower planning and an acute housing shortage.

The inferences about the importance of community drawn by Young and Willmott, and by many other post-war sociologists, were also biased by their methodology. The community study, itself largely an invention of post-war sociology, consciously identified the population to be studied by reference to geographical boundaries. Any geographically bounded study will necessarily over-emphasise community ties over other (for instance workplace) relationships, because extra-territorial relationships are ignored or under-enumerated by such a methodology. Harris has suggested that 'the discovery of the traditional working class and its correlative family forms' was a direct result of this methodology, and that it is 'the disappearance almost overnight in the mid-1960s of the empirically-based community study', rather than any real change in family or community forms, which accounts for the waning of evidence about traditional working class community life.⁴³

Equally strong caveats can be voiced about the semi-autobiographical accounts of stable working-class communities in the inter-war period. Savage and Miles have noted that these accounts were 'frequently written by academics from working-class

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 171.

⁴³ Harris, 'Family', pp. 48, 51.

backgrounds who possibly romanticised working-class life and solidarity.⁴⁴ Certainly social historians increasingly find evidence that contradicts received views about the homogeneity of working class society. Davies has shown how gender cut across and challenged ideas of consensus in working class communities in inter-war Manchester and Salford; Fielding has identified similar tension created by religion and ethnicity.⁴⁵ And from a literary perspective, Hewison has argued that the cultural autobiographers perpetrated a myth of an organic working-class society. He points out that 'Hoggart's description of the "peculiarly gripping wholeness" of working-class life contrasts with the violence and disturbance that ran through Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, published a year after Hoggart's study,' and which was based on Sillitoe's personal experiences.⁴⁶

The recently computerised NSLLL has contributed to this debate by enabling us quantitatively to test some of the characteristics of working-class society in London in the early 1930s. The new quantitative data provide little support for the existence of a stable working-class community in the 1930s, as was assumed to have existed in the community-based studies of the immediate post-war period. This raises two possibilities, and an agenda for future research. Either, working-class society in London had, by the 1930s, already changed from a stable homogeneous community towards the more individualised and dynamic society observed in the post-war period. Or, homogeneous working-class communities had never been the norm in Britain.

⁴⁴ Savage and Miles, *Remaking*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Davies, *Leisure*; Fielding, *Class*. See also the introduction to Davies and Fielding, *Workers' Worlds*, for comments on the portrayal of Salford community life by Roberts.

⁴⁶ Hewison, *Culture*, p. 103.

Table 1.

Occupied population. Juveniles, 14-17.

London and England and Wales, 1931 Census.

Males

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
age	England & Wales	Census (NSLLL area)	NSLLL survey (N=3332)	NSLLL (with earnings)
14-	52.8%	58.1%	52.6%	50.1%
15-	74.8%	76.7%	80.7%	77.4%
16-17	88.7%	90.6%	88.8%	85.3%

Females

age	England & Wales	Census (NSLLL area)	NSLLL survey (N=3303)	NSLLL (with earnings)
14-	40.4%	52.1%	42.4%	41.6%
15-	60.8%	70.2%	77.4%	74.9%
16-17	75.6%	85.8%	86.6%	82.2%

Table 2**Within-order occupational continuity: boroughs with rates more than one standard deviation from the mean**

Borough	% father-son occupational continuity
Stepney	31.0
Kensington	29.3
Shoreditch	26.6
Leyton	26.5
Bethnal Green	26.2
Lambeth South	25.8
Hackney	15.1
Chelsea	15.0
Woolwich	15.0
Poplar	14.9
Stoke Newington	14.3
Fulham	13.7
Hampstead	13.6
Westminster	13.2
Hammersmith	13.0

Table 3

Social mobility matrix

Father's class	Son's Class						n	
	III		IV		V			
	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>		
III	1839-54	79.1	85.0	23.1	5.5	13.0	9.6	1078
	1899-1914	72.2	69.7	39.9	18.1	31.7	12.2	1042
	1929-32	60.9	64.4	43.8	18.6	36.9	17.0	548
IV	1839-54	6.6	32.8	46.7	51.3	4.7	15.9	232
	1899-1914	13.3	38.0	35.7	47.9	12.5	14.2	353
	1929-32	19.7	54.0	25.8	28.4	14.7	17.5	211
V	1839-54	14.3	18.5	30.2	8.6	82.4	72.9	897
	1899-1914	14.5	30.0	24.5	23.9	55.9	46.1	486
	1929-32	19.5	36.9	30.5	23.2	48.4	39.9	306
n	1839-54	1158		255		794		2207
	1899-1914	1006		474		401		1881
	1929-32	580		233		252		1075

Notes:

column *i* = percentage by column (inflow)

column *o* = percentage by row (outflow)

n = number of observations

Source: for 1839-54 and 1899-1914, Miles, 'How open', 22; for 1929-32, NSLLL files

Table 4**Probability of son's work status, by class of father**

Age 14	Father's class				Son's class			
	III	IV	V	nowork	III	IV	V	nowork
III	0.16	0.07	0.21	0.56				
IV	0.17	0.05	0.31	0.47				
V	0.13	0.09	0.38	0.40				

Age 15	Father's class				Son's class			
	III	IV	V	nowork	III	IV	V	nowork
III	0.33	0.13	0.32	0.23				
IV	0.25	0.17	0.40	0.17				
V	0.17	0.16	0.51	0.16				

Age 16	Father's class				Son's class			
	III	IV	V	nowork	III	IV	V	nowork
III	0.44	0.14	0.28	0.13				
IV	0.34	0.21	0.33	0.11				
V	0.26	0.16	0.52	0.06				

Age 17	Father's class				Son's class			
	III	IV	V	nowork	III	IV	V	nowork
III	0.53	0.20	0.23	0.05				
IV	0.37	0.17	0.38	0.08				
V	0.35	0.22	0.41	0.03				

Note: not all rows sum to 100%, because of rounding

Table 5

**Estimated probabilities of 15 year old new entrant
from class (x) starting a job in class (y)**

Father's class	'scenario'	Son's class		
		III	IV	V
III	static	.49	.18	.34
	historic	.37	.16	.53
	dynamic	.51	.16	.33
IV	static	.27	.41	.33
	historic	.32	.10	.58
	dynamic	.38	.24	.37
V	static	.15	.31	.54
	historic	.22	.15	.63
	dynamic	.28	.17	.56

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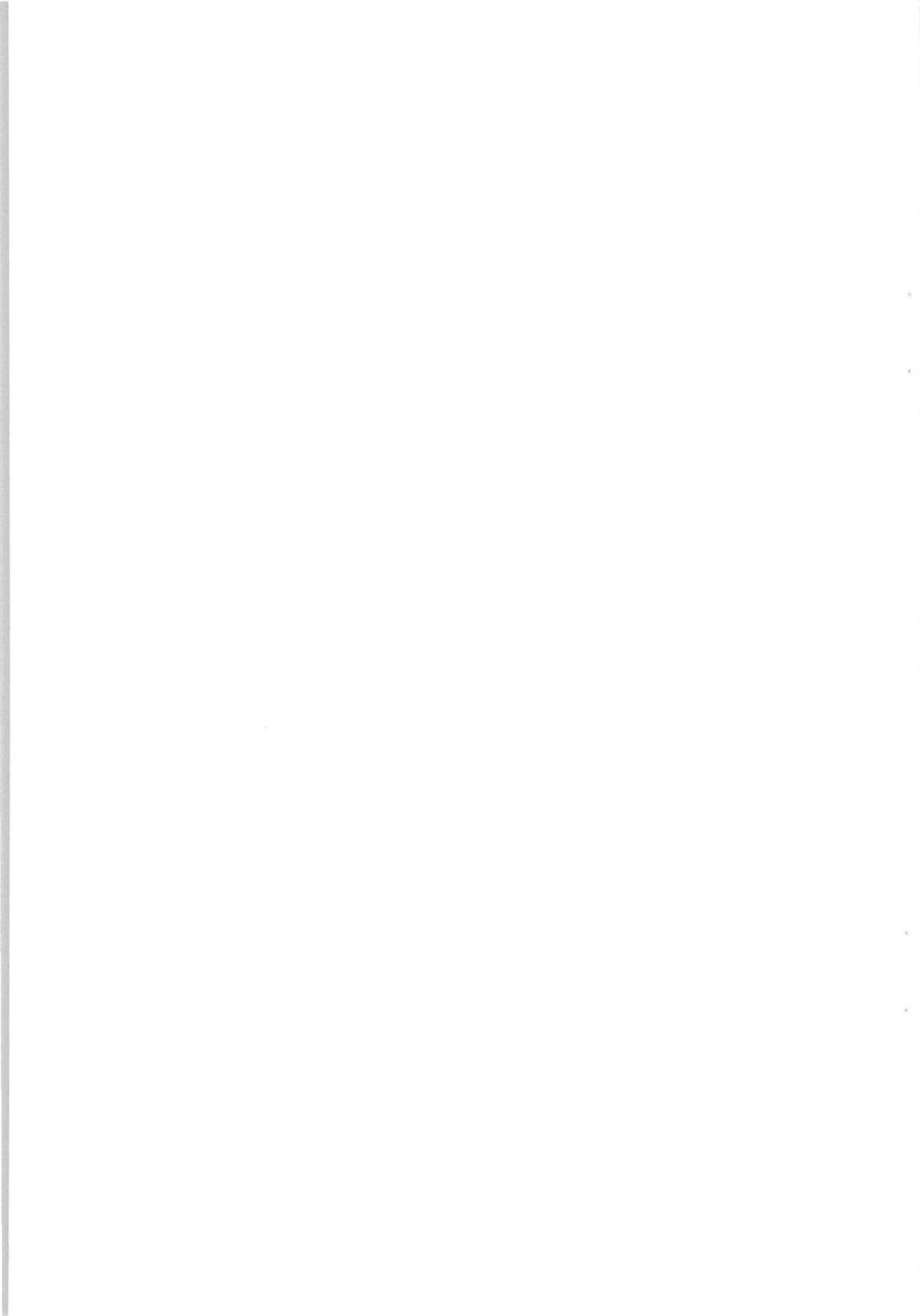
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