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Whiteness, class and place in two London suburbs

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This article addresses a specific intersection of class, place and whiteness by focusing on distinctions between middle-class owner-occupiers in suburban London. Where whiteness is constructed through association with an imaginary of the unchanging nature of rural England and in particular the village, some suburban places provide a more ready village metaphor in support of whiteness than others. In a securely middle-class suburb residents are able to misrecognise their neighbourhood as a village, and beyond the metaphor, report feeling at home in rural England. In a marginal middle-class suburb whiteness is founded on weaker claims to the English village metaphor and, moreover, residents feel less at home in rural England. This article demonstrates the need to go beyond the often made distinction between the tactics of middle class (owner-occupiers) and working class (tenants) by identifying distinctions within the former group. The relationship between imaginaries of place and whiteness is central to understanding the distinctions between middle class owner-occupiers.

Key words: ethnicity, London, middle-class, owner-occupation, suburbs, whiteness.

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Introduction

In recent decades London has become a markedly more diverse city (Vertovec 2013) with more suburban-outer than inner London boroughs being projected to become majority-minority communities by 2034 (GLA 2015). However, to date ethnic diversity in outer London has a clear geography, while western, north-western and north-eastern outer London is home to a significant Black Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) population, the eastern and south-eastern boroughs are marked by the dominance of white-British residents. This article is concerned with the intersection of whiteness, class and place in two suburban neighbourhoods that both remain overwhelmingly white-British¹. The two neighbourhoods are both characterised by owner-occupiers living in semi-detached housing but they are markedly different in terms of housing quality and price, characteristics of the wider built environment, and social profile (by occupational classification). In these two areas differences in constructing whiteness is explained by variations in the ability: first, to misrecognise the respective suburbs as a village and so to connect to an imaginary of whiteness linked to bucolic Englishness and; second, to feel at home or to make a home in rural England. This article therefore adds to the literature on the classed experience of, “[h]ow people make themselves “white” in contemporary England” (Garner 2012, 448), by identifying and explaining intra middle-class distinctions in London’s suburbs. While recognising that white-British residents in both neighbourhoods are able to construct the world in their own image and to dominate space (Sullivan 2006), the focus is on the, “...enormous variations of power amongst white people, to do with [among other things] class, ...” (Dyer 1997).

Such differences are more commonly exposed by contrasting the working and middle-classes, where the middle-classes are owner-occupiers and the working-classes tenants (often in social housing). Through this framing the working class is associated with more overtly revanchist constructions of whiteness (Garner 2016, Tyler 2015), typically in response to competition for public resources including housing (Dench, Gavron and Young 2006), while the middle-classes are able to affect a more neutral stance as observers (Garner 2016, 56). Reflecting this, Massey has argued that where suburbs become more diverse, the white middle-class can always, “[p]ush off elsewhere [and] pretend not to be racist” (Massey personal communication, as quoted in Amin 2002, 968). However, this dualism is muddled in this article by looking at how differences within the owner-occupier middle-classes, including class related variations in the character of their neighbourhoods, provide variable support for the construction of whiteness. In the following section the links between suburban settings, national identity and whiteness are discussed. After this the two case studies in outer London are introduced and analysed. Both dominated by white-British, owner-occupier households the two cases, nevertheless, provide very different experiences of constructing whiteness.

Suburbia, nation and whiteness

Alongside the literature on the experience of ethnic minority groups in British suburbs (Huq 2013; Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe 2007; Watson and Saha 2013), another body of work looks at the response of white-British suburban residents to ethnic diversity. A recurring feature of this literature is the observation that change at the neighbourhood scale can disrupt an individual’s sense of the nation and of national identity (Sandercock 2005). In the case of multicultural neighbouring, this ambiguously requires

a reaching out to the other from the base of a secure national identity, "...making of its own what was 'external' to it" (Fortier 2007, 108). Also emphasising this ambiguity Crow et al (2002), note the requirement for both closeness and distance, for both a secure yet flexible sense of national identity. In the UK scaling between embodied local experience and nation necessarily includes addressing the difference between referencing Britishness and/or the constituent parts of the UK. In relation to Englishness, Britishness is implicitly more adaptable, and therefore, relatively more available as a hybrid identity. Britishness has been conceived politically as a civic rather than an ethnic category (Uberoi & Modood 2013). While not unproblematic this has facilitated Britishness as a potentially multicultural identity reflected in census categories such as white British, British Asian, Indian and British Caribbean. To be English provides a less mutable national identity being more fixed, less adaptable and therefore less ethnically open category implicitly linked to whiteness (Bryne 2007; Leddy-Owen 2014; Parekh 2007; Wright 1985). It is made less mutable through linkages to the past, and in particular to a 'pastoral-England' (Crang & Tolia-Kelly 2010, Neal 2002, 444), linked by Tyler (2012) to a settlement type; the village. To these elements Bryne (2007) adds class to produce an imaginary of 'Deep England' (514), as being pastoral, white, and upper-middle to upper-class.

The suburbs are also riven with ambiguity; in relation to the urban and rural, to class and therefore to England and, by implication, to whiteness. In their very naming as sub-urban, they are less than the urban (see for example Gordon and Gordon 1933), but associated with it and so certainly not rural. Consequently derogatory views of the suburbs sustained by an urban and rural elite serve to set apart spatially and socially

the petit bourgeoisie suburb (Mace 2015). This has resulted in the accusation that the suburbs are not truly English, as Forster expressed it in his novel *Howard's End*, "[i]nto which country will [the road from London] lead, England or suburbia?" (Forster 1910:13 cited in Kuchta 2010, 127). The uncertainty as to the national, cultural and class status of the suburbs is only made more acute by their varied nature. London's suburbs have always included working class public housing (Willmott & Young 1960), and marginal-middle class owner-occupation (Swenarton & Taylor 1985), alongside classic leafy green and securely middle class suburban neighbourhoods. As the suburbs encompass a wide range of class distinctions we must look to numerous intersections of class, place and whiteness. This includes the distinction between marginal and secure middle-class owner-occupiers, where the latter are more able to distance themselves from multiculturalism, integration and diversity with the neutral distance of an observer rather than participant (Garner 2016, 58). Following Bourdieu (1986), the hegemonic nature of their values affords them greater cultural assuredness as these are less open to question, (incidentally, placing them closer culturally to the elite who belittle suburbia).

Outer London

This article draws on fieldwork from an earlier research project concerned with residents' sense of belonging in outer London that included interviewees with a range of ethnic identities (Mace 2013). While the original interview material is several years old a new analysis informed by a different literature has focused on the intersection of class, whiteness and place. The two neighbourhoods were originally identified using Experian data that divide the population into one of 61 categories using a combination

of government and marketing data. These are reported at the scale of Census enumeration areas (Output Areas) being smaller than the political wards that boroughs are divided into. The case studies are of two 'neighbourhoods' (Output Areas) each of which represent a concentration of households in two of the most common Experian categories living in outer London: 'Original Suburbs'; classic middle class, leafy green and reasonably affluent suburbia, (Beckenham, London Borough of Bromley), and; 'Sprawling Subtopia' with marginal middle-class, less affluent residents, (Collier Row, London Borough of Havering); their location in London is shown in Figure 1. Interviews (46 in all) comprised; in Beckenham 22 interviewees in 20 households; in Collier Row, 24 interviewees in 20 households. Where more than one person per household was interviewed this always happened at the same time and was with partners. While the identification of the most common Experian categories resulted in an ethnic dimension (the two areas reported here being disproportionately white-British), this was not a focus of the original study of belonging. Ethnicity was not directly referenced in the semi structured interview questions as there was a wish to avoid identifying this *a priori* as a metric of belonging in the suburbs. In the case of white-British participants, the 'ethnic matching' of interviewee and interviewer appeared to provide a space for disclosure (Sherman 2002), as many framed a number of their responses in terms of ethnicity.

<Insert Figure 1 about here 'Map of London Boroughs (outer London in light grey) with approximate location of case studies pinned'>

This article is informed by a new analysis of the interview material from those who identified as white-British: Beckenham 18 interviewees /16 households, Collier Row 24 interviewees/20 households. The majority had lived in their respective area in excess of ten years, nine for up to five years, and 33 five years or more (25 of which, for over ten years). All but nine interviewees were over 45 and most were in the 55-65 range. Overall, they represent a purposive sample able to provide an insight into change over time. We might expect different narratives if the dominant group were younger residents and/or those who had recently moved in. Therefore, no claims are made for the possibility of generalising the findings to other groups. While the shift to middle-class renting in London's suburbs represents a significant social change (Paccoud & Mace 2018), the sample represents established owner-occupiers not directly subject to emerging middle class uncertainty linked to the inability to access owner-occupation (Benson & Jackson 2017), although this may be a concern for their children. Rather, following Yin (2009), the case studies raise points that might be tested elsewhere, including with a different age profile and in different suburbs.

The present-day suburbs of outer London were primarily developed in the 1920s and 1930s in locations then outside the border of London. They were marketed as places offering a mix of rural and urban with access to the city, typically along metro (Tube) and rail routes (Jackson 1973). The housing has been criticised for its cultural pretention, with architectural references to rural housing styles. This often references earlier periods of English history leading to Tudorbethan being coined as a derogatory term. Both Beckenham and Collier Row are dominated by semi-detached owner-occupied housing, the typical built form and tenure in outer London. However, the size

of the housing, property values and the quality of the public realm vary significantly between the two neighbourhoods. Council Tax banding reflects the value of housing in England², on a scale from A to H, least to most expensive housing. In Kelsey & Eden Park ward³ (including the Beckenham case study) 7% of properties are in the lower value bands A to C and 86% in the higher value bands E to G; while in Mawneys ward (including Collier Row case study) 16% are in the lower bands A to C and 28% in bands E to G. Variations in house prices are broadly reflected in the Standard Occupational Classification of residents in each area (Figure 2). Beckenham and Collier Row are predominantly white-British neighbourhoods (74.2 per cent and 81.9 per cent respectively; London 47.2 per cent; England 80.9 per cent. Census 2011), making them more like England than London in this aspect.

<Insert Figure 2 about here 'Percent residents in each Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (all persons in employment)'\>

Beckenham

The case-study area adjoins a large public park (Kelsey park), formed from a landscaped garden once part of rural estate including a substantial country house. The house has long since been demolished and the grounds sold to the local authority. In common with other suburban locations, the remaining public park reflects the original landscaping, speaking directly to a time when the area was part of a rural estate with a wealthy owner. It provides a ghostly reference to the 'Deep-England' of Bryne (2007), an English bucolic upper-class landscape. In this setting and reflecting Garner's observation that the white middle-class, "[understand] themselves as observers of,

rather than participants in competition” (Garner 2016, 56), there was an absence of reference to actual or anticipated change in the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood. Residents were supported in anticipating stability through being able to make strong linkages between Beckenham and the rural/village, for example:

I am not committed to South London I am committed to Beckenham. I like Beckenham because it has ‘villagey’ feel to it even although it’s only 20 minutes into the Victoria, where you get the madness... I lived in Winchester, I left there when I was 26. Winchester is a very big town in Hampshire but it’s very spread out. So I am a country boy at heart and I do like being around the green. BE01 male 35-44 telecoms technician.

Here a clear distinction is made between London and Beckenham, they are clearly held apart. This separation is reinforced by a surprising comparison favouring ‘villagey’ Beckenham and ‘urban’ Winchester. Winchester is a small city set in the county of Hampshire. Taking the broadest definition of its extent, its population (116,600 Census 2011), is considerably smaller than just the London Borough of Bromley’s (309,392; Census 2011). The interviewee is clearly separating off Beckenham not just from London but even from the borough it sits in by making this comparison.

Bureaucratic/official ‘representations of space’ (Lefebvre 2003) support residents in locating Beckenham within an imaginary of a commuter belt village entirely outside the city. The local post-code (zip-code) system varies from the standard geographical divisions of London eschewing S (South), SE (South East), etc and using instead BR to

reference the nearest major settlement of Bromley. This helps reinforce residents' sense of separation from London. This is echoed by local estate agents who reflect the monetary value of 'separation' by referring to Beckenham as being in Kent, harking back to the early 1960s, before London's borders were extended to include both Beckenham and Bromley. There are long memories of this change,

When we came to Beckenham, it was Kent now we are part of Greater London. Well, we didn't want to be part of Greater London we wanted to be Kent. BE03a Female 65-74 retired local government officer.

The persistence of this memory is explained by its value in supporting residents' imaginaries of Beckenham as a self-contained 'village-like' community, placed 'outside' London. Such a depiction is reflective of Tyler's study of 'Greenville' a commuter village close to Leicester, where, nostalgic images of the countryside and community are, "intertwined with specifically white middle-class social and moral values" (Tyler 2003, 392)". The misrepresentation of Beckenham as a village also has the benefit of distancing it from lower status neighbouring places.

Diversity was not entirely absent from the interviewees accounts, with neighbouring areas discussed as different and less desirable while not threatening the 'exclusivity' of Beckenham. Penge was referenced by several interviewees (six negatively and three neutrally), most often for the characteristics that marked it off from Beckenham – and Beckenham from it. In one case the village trope was employed directly to compare Beckenham favourably to Penge.

Penge was created by the Crystal Palace builders it was the navvies and the workmen at the Crystal Palace in the 1850's who mostly populated what was a very small rural village and Penge and Beckenham are totally different. BE12 female 55-64 graphic designer.

This reflects the construction in the twentieth century of a binary between spoiled and un-spoiled places (Baker 2003, 328), where Penge can be read as a spoiled place. Historically, when it might have been considered a village, it was spoiled by being occupied by working-class, 'not white', Irish labourers. In the present day it remains a working class area with a significant proportion of BAME residents ruling out contemporary claims to village status. Only one interviewee, who had herself grown up in Penge, overtly referenced the ethnic distinction between Penge and Beckenham.

It's more Victorian but you could probably say that it is more working class. But I think what the undercurrent quite often is with these things is that Bromley is predominantly white with very few immigrants. Anybody black tends to live in Penge. BE17 female 25-34 insurance services.

The distinction made by interviewees between Penge and Beckenham reflects the practice of boundary making observed by Jackson & Benson (2014) in Peckham, Inner-London. They explain how sweat equity gentrifiers seek to construct and maintain boundaries in the imagination between themselves and two neighbouring areas, one predominantly working-class and more ethnically mixed, the other a more exclusive gentrified area with differing values to their own. In Beckenham boundary making had a distinctly suburban character. First, lower density development produces a diffuse built form meaning that boundaries in the suburbs often do not have to be so tightly

drawn. Penge is further away physically than the 'other' places in the imagination of Peckham residents. Second, and related, the uniform expanse of high price housing in Beckenham creates, in economists' terms, an area effect by securing a neighbourhood of like others. However, the distance created by low density suburban development does not always guarantee distant boundaries (Watt 2009), reinforcing the need for a localized understanding of London's suburbs.

Work on middle-class boundary making extends to the suburbs (for example Savage et al 2005; Watt 2009). While Beckenham residents generally presented more as observers of, rather than participants in change, several referenced threats to the area's qualities.

I think it is good, but I think it is losing it to be honest. I see some of the shops in the high street closing down or family businesses [going] and it is those kind of things that have given it a kind of village feel. BE07 male 35-44 IT consultant.

Reference to the loss of village like qualities was always in relation to the changing retail offer on the local high street as small independent retailers were replaced by chains. Some interviewees noted the importance of supporting independent retailers, reflecting tactics of place maintenance by white middle-class residents in village settings (Benson and Jackson 2012).

Interviewees were asked about places they might live in the future, and in Beckenham felt entitled to access a wide range of other types of place should they wish to. This

was not necessarily to rural locations that they sought to associate Beckenham with. A number of the interviewees had lived in gentrified areas of inner London before moving to the suburbs for instrumental reasons (typically linked to having a young family). Three Beckenham interviewees considered living in Inner London to be a future option once children had grown up. This instrumental association with Beckenham was captured by one,

[I would] probably either move back into central London [...] or move abroad. [Beckenham is] just a stopping place in my life. BE13 female 35-44 homemaker.

The future possibilities of inner city gentrified areas and the dismissal of Beckenham as merely a 'stopping place' reflects a metropolitan habitus (Butler with Robson 2003) held in abeyance by temporary functional needs. The cultural power of the middle class has allowed the transposition of their norms back to the inner city (Tonkiss 2006). The UK government supported this in the 1990s, reassuring middle-class waverers that the inner-city was now safe territory by branding its flagship urban regeneration schemes as 'Urban Villages'. Moving abroad was an option voiced by five interviewees while moving to the Home Counties or further afield in Britain was typically associated with existing social connections.

I don't know. I think it's just that we see this country as not really going places [...]. Actually, having said that, we did think about moving to Somerset, Devon, because my family are down that way. That would be the other sort of move but, yeah, it would probably be Australia if we went anywhere. BE15 female 35-44 teacher.

My husband plays cricket in Surrey [...], if we did move out we'd probably move out into Surrey because of his connection with cricket and then I'm sure my son will get into it and things like that so he's got a really strong link with his cricket club [...] but maybe if an opportunity came up abroad for one of us, because we're in a similar industry, we'd follow each other so if it was decided we'd go to Australia. BE19, female, 35-44 asset management consultant.

In the latter case we gain a strong sense of the deep links to the Home Counties, achieved through family and cricket (with its own class markers). While both appear sure of their ability to fit into 'Deep England', both also demonstrate the extent of their mobility with reference to Australia as an international option that appears equally as available. Rather than seeming to be engaged in competition or struggle with changes in London they appear to keep a distance secure in their options.

To summarise, Beckenham provides reassuring support to residents' constructions of whiteness through the ability to connect metaphorically with English rurality, implicitly linked to whiteness and insulated from exogenous change. The metaphorical is supported by the material reality of the area effect, as relatively high house prices made the neighbourhood less porous filtering out poorer groups who might threaten the status of the area; keeping Penge at bay. Moreover, should they wish to leave, their cultural and social capital made real a wide range of alternative options including but not limited to a rural embodiment of the Beckenham village metaphor. Residents' social and cultural capital made either a future life in the inner-city, or in a rural area, both viable options. It would be easy to assume the absence of significant numbers of other ethnic groups in the area explained the general absence of direct references to

ethnicity through the interviews; but as we turn to the case of Collier Row we see that no such link can be made.

Collier Row

Although Beckenham and Collier Row are both overwhelmingly white-British, owner-occupied neighbourhoods, differences between the two illustrate the effects of class running through English as a national identity. Here it is useful to make a distinction between Englishness and English as a national identity. In Beckenham residents associate themselves with the Englishness of the rural and village, as associated with landscape and tradition. In contrast, residents in Collier Row associate with being English, the English flag is hung in car and house windows and on flagpoles in gardens. Encouraged by the local Member of Parliament, its display acts as a deterrence to potential ethnic-other incomers (Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe 2007). Therefore, while as owner-occupiers householders in Collier Row have access to an essential element of middle-class identity (Benson and Jackson 2017), they appear more aligned with a working-class marginalized by a national identity with “unequal membership” (Mann 2012, 488). It is argued here that this is explained both by a greater vulnerability to change in situ and lesser opportunities to be accepted elsewhere.

Residents reported a fear of looming change and the anticipation of a general loss, as the area would change from what it had once been and largely still is. This is no doubt reflective of the age of the sample, the majority of whom were retired. It is also underscored by the location of Collier Row, which acts as a suburb of Romford a large shopping sub-centre within east London. Romford has a long history as a market town

in Essex before being incorporated into London and so is a proximate example of the threat of change over time as it represents a spoiled rural market town. Interviewees often referenced Romford rather than Collier Row when giving examples of change. Some also referenced Barking and Dagenham, a neighbouring London Borough formerly associated with the outward movement of a white working-class population from east London and which, more recently has seen particularly rapid change in its ethnic make-up compared to other London boroughs. Between the 2001 and 2011 Census' the proportion of the white-British population changed from 81% to 49% in the Borough compared to a change from 58% to 45% for London as a whole.

Aware of the extent of change in neighbouring London boroughs one resident invoked then withdrew the imagery of a ghetto.

I mean, there is no way that it is becoming a ghetto, but there is not the – you could almost call it a village type atmosphere many years ago – I think we have lost that. But I think that as London comes here it will just eventually overwhelm it. CR13 male 55-64 engineer.

The rejection of Collier Row becoming a ghetto recognises this as an exaggerated outcome yet indicates it has been imagined as a worst case scenario. While stopping short of claiming the area will become a ghetto, the term serves as a strong marker of the interviewee's view on the potential transformation of the (white) village-like Collier Row into multicultural London. The uncertain positioning of Collier Row in relation to the village metaphor was mitigated by community which serves as a marker of village life (Benson and Jackson 2012; Tyler 2003, 2012). With claims to community,

Collier Row could be held still to have some claim to being village-like. However, residents were clear that they measured this on a scale with Collier Row having a greater sense of community than the city but not to the same extent as a village where community was imagined to be at its strongest.

I suppose as people have moved out [to Collier Row], they have obviously seen that this is a place where they could get some community spirit or sense of place away from the city. But then I don't think it is as strong as if you go further out to Ongar and the rural towns and villages which I think have a much stronger sense of place because they are smaller communities. What they do is based around mutual dependence, farming and such like. CR03 male 18-24, student.

This imagination of the true village is highly questionable as farming is a vanishingly small part of the rural economy in the UK and many villages are commuter settlements with little or no mutual dependence. However, the imaginary makes sense if related back to links between whiteness and rurality (Tyler 2003, 2012) where 'mutual dependence' can be read as 'like others' with farming referencing back to an early period of English history more white than now. As in Beckenham, in constructing a sense of place, interviewees sometimes went beyond the village metaphor. On occasions interviewees would claim the neighbourhood has once been 'village-like' before becoming a suburb, but in Collier Row this was often in the context of spoiled places.

As I say, we are two miles to Romford ... Collier Row which is a small, used to be a big village now it is just an outskirt [of Romford]. CR02 male 65-74, retired print-worker.

I thought you might have raised the integration of all the different cultures into these areas. It is so changed in 20, 24 years. I used to see these little areas as little villages where everybody knew everybody else. You have got to live with whoever is next to you, live as best you can. But with different cultures now, I think that that is a huge issue. You could talk until you're blue in the face because this is going to go on and on. These issues, of living with so many different cultures, different nationalities. I mean when I was a kid I was brought up with just the kids from Dr. Barnado's, maybe a few children from, I don't know, Nigeria, somewhere like that.... Gradually in my lifetime we have had to learn to integrate in these areas with different cultures and how other people live their lives. Whereas here is still very much, an English sort of area; we all do basically the same. CR04 female 45-54, hairdresser.

The interviewee is not clear about the scale or place she is referencing. She acknowledges the whiteness of Collier Row and therefore appears to be drawing on experience of neighbouring London Boroughs. In their empirical study of nearby Ilford, Watson and Saha (2013) employ the concept of 'suburban drifts' to indicate how residents of all ethnicities feel a sense of being left simply to get on with working through diversity. The state expects residents to improvise multiculturalism where the state itself is not necessarily clear what this means or whether it is a desirable policy. As Fortier (2007, 116) notes, multicultural neighbouring requires embodied practices where people do not just live side-by-side but rather know one another - encompassing an affective element. In this case the village-community metaphor, underscored by the reference to 'we', who 'all do basically the same', suggests the opposite. Rather, identification with a bucolic white-English identity serves as a separation from the multicultural drift of London. A narrow reading of the village

whiteness of 'we' is made clear in the following where Polish residents are associated with the non-whiteness of London,

Now we are just becoming a part of London. You feel as if you're becoming part of London, there is a general...not being racist, it was all white here. Now, in the last couple of years, in the last year, we have suddenly got two Polish shops that have opened in Romford. Now back, five years, it would have been, 'what is the point in them opening here?' I am not saying that you come across a tremendous number of Polish people, you don't. If you go down to the market there are obviously languages I've never heard of. Not that I am good at German or French either, but I do know what they sound like. CR01 male 65-74 retired bank clerk.

This is an example of the, "racialising [of] nominally white groups in Britain" (Garner 2012, 448). Unknown eastern European accents are not those of higher status German or French speakers, rather they indicate people of a lower status. This combined with the importance placed on a village community of white 'like others' renders Polish incomers as 'not white', the Polish shops in nearby Romford are an urban intrusion. However, residents' culturally narrow reading of 'we' also reflected constraints on themselves, as interviewee's accounts of feeling at home in rural England where cut across by class (Mann 2012). This has an impact on options for (in Massey's terms), 'pushing off' from Collier Row. While seeking to move to the countryside is an option for residents of Collier Row, it has a distinctly different quality to it compared to Beckenham's residents. In exercising this option it is evident once again that, while all white-British benefit from the privileging of whiteness, there are significant variations linked to class. When asked about possible locations for a future home, none of the Collier Row interviewees countenanced a move further/back into London. Where they

were former residents of Inner London they had moved out because of structural changes in employment and the housing market. As we have seen, some Beckenham interviewees had moved from gentrified areas and sometimes anticipated a return, but this was not the case for Collier Row interviewees, for example,

I haven't been back [to Mile end] recently but where I used to live they have just demolished it all. [...] They have rebuilt a lot of it and where you come down to Mile End where they have landscaped by the canal, now it is completely altered. Properties down there that's they could not throw at you 20 or 25 years ago now go for a quarter million pounds, well no, about half a million. CR01 male 65-74 retired bank clerk.

There was no way back into London for residents in Collier Row as it was simply unaffordable. Moreover, the description of it having been 'rebuilt' and 'completely altered' suggests a more general change that has made the area no longer familiar, no longer somewhere where Collier Row residents would fit or would want to be even if it were affordable. Given this, the only alternative to another suburb would be to move to a more rural location. There is a history of outward movement from the east of London to parts of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk but interviewees were more circumspect than those in Beckenham about their ability to feel at home in the white-English countryside. Their social and cultural capital left them less confident of their mobility, giving them fewer options should they choose to leave. This is reflective of other studies that employ Bourdieu's concepts of capitals and fields to understand how class runs through place attachment (Bensen 2014),

Yes I like the community side of little coastal towns. Talking to people that have moved to there you find that you have to be accepted into these places [...]. And I think coastal towns, a lot of them, are like that. If you were to move into them it does take a while to get accepted into the community. [...] I'm only going from experience of my mother and father in law [who moved to Walton on the Naze]. And my mum and dad [who] moved to Bournemouth. And that was very much like that, especially Walton on the Naze. CR04 female 45-54 hairdresser.

Neither Bournemouth nor Walton on the Naze are part of 'Deep-England' but even in these places the interviewee was unsure of being accepted. With a marginal middle-class background; moving from an east London suburb risked rejection. This has been experienced by a Couple with children who had moved to a village near Harlow only to move back to Collier Row,

I put my daughter into a nursery there, it was pre-school nursery, and again it was like they wouldn't speak to me, [she] wasn't invited to things, it was like because we hadn't grown up there, because we weren't local to the area. CR16a female, 25-34 mature student.

The Couple were the most vocal interviewees in rejecting local displays of English nationalism and the most positive in embracing diversity, but they had been pushed back to Collier Row from village England.

Conclusion

The suburbs of London are the primary areas where ethnic change in London is taking place with more majority-minority neighbourhoods in, and projected for the suburbs than in Inner-London. This makes them an important site for study including to understand what role place plays. While others have looked at BAME experiences in

London's suburbs (for example Huq 2013; Watson and Saha 2013), here the focus has been on a particular intersection of whiteness, class and place in two suburbs that remain overwhelmingly white-British. This article has sought to go beyond the distinction between working and middle-class responses to diversity which typically maps onto a distinction between owner-occupiers and renters. This article builds on work looking at how the middle-classes position themselves within the contemporary city both in relation to other middle class groups (Butler with Robson 2003) and to ethnic diversity (Jackson & Benson 2014). The two areas studied share key features; a stable population, overwhelmingly white, semi-detached housing stock and, owner-occupation (a bedrock of middle-class identity, although in decline in the suburbs as elsewhere in England [Benson & Jackson 2017]). Yet, the construction and maintenance of whiteness is notably different between the two.

To explain this attention has been paid to the English whiteness nexus. English is seen as a problematic national identity as it is run through with class leading Nairn (2003 cited in Mann 2012, 486) to claim it is almost inevitably reactionary. It has been shown here that it is not inevitably overtly reactionary a point made by separating Englishness from an English national identity. In Beckenham residents' class position makes them confident of being part of 'Deep England' (Bryne 2007), fully able to exploit an Englishness of the rural and the village that only implicitly references ethnicity. This gives access to a construction of whiteness without recourse to the more reactionary elements of English nationalism. An added local dimension was that 'others' were in distinctly separate neighbourhoods such as Penge. There was not the middle-class anxiety to establish boundaries in the imagination as reported in inner-city Peckham

(Jackson & Benson 2014) or even in other London suburbs (Watt 2009). In combination this produced an absence of discussion of ethnic change or of multiculturalism making interviewees appear as neutrals, as observers.

In Collier Row interviewees drew on a more overtly reactionary English national identity employing tactics more typically ascribed to some white working class neighbourhoods, including overt displays of the English national flag. The difference has been explained by weaker claims to rural Englishness including a lesser ability to be at home in 'Deep England'. The more overtly reactionary stance in Collier Row was reflected in the different use of the village metaphor. Here it was employed to draw parallels between an imagined village community of like others and the desire to maintain a community in Collier Row founded on like others. These differences return us to the question of how class is core to understanding variable constructions of whiteness in contemporary England (Garner 2012; Sullivan 2006). It has been shown that class creates uncertainty in relation both to English and suburban identities. One effect is that class based variations in suburban identities override commonalities such as owner occupation when residents seek to exploit imaginaries of England and Englishness in support of construction of whiteness. As with comparisons between working and middle-class constructions of whiteness the danger would be for overt expressions of revanchist behaviours to overshadow the power of the secure middle-class. It has been shown here how area and individual differences strongly privilege the secure middle-class in their construction of whiteness, allowing them to remain as apparently impartial observers in outer London.

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¹ Here the census category is used, elsewhere white English and Englishness are used when discussing constructions of whiteness that are not captured by the census category.

² Although based on 1991 values they offer a reflection of relative value between properties.

³ This data is reported at a ward level, a political sub-division of a borough. The case studies use census Output Areas that nest within wards. The Output Areas are identified by alpha-numerical codes – the given names reflect the researcher's sense of neighbourhoods on the ground and not precise locations.