Gentrification, Ethnicity and Education in East London

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Final Report to ESRC

Background

Gentrification has changed the residential structure of much of inner London over the last 40 years. East London has been largely exempt from this process and remained strongly working class although the redevelopment of Docklands has extended gentrification. East London is also characterised by a strong and growing multi-ethnic composition. Research has identified a mismatch between the educational aspirations of many of inner London’s new middle-class inhabitants for their children and the lack of provision of high quality schooling particularly at secondary level. Nowhere was this more the case than in East London which traditionally had some of the country’s worst performing schools. This research project aimed to examine the relationships between social class change, ethnic change and educational attainment and aspirations in East London. In particular, it aimed to examine the ethnic dimensions of social class and housing market change and the importance of education within this.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were to investigate as follows:

The nature and extent of changes in class composition that have occurred in inner London since 1981.

This objective was largely achieved through an analysis of the 1981-2001 censuses which required considerable work to make the different measures of social class compatible using the conversion tables supplied by David Rose to recode NS-SEC classifications back to the SEG used up to and including the 1991 Census.

What, in particular, have been the significant indicators of gentrification and its correlates in this period?

This objective has been addressed in conjunction with objective 1. We have also each contributed to a special issue of Environment and Planning A (Vol 39 No 1) edited by one of us which discussed a number of the issues arising from this reconsideration of social class change and drew on our work from the project.

The changing size and geographical extent of the ethnic minority population of London in the period.

Analysis of changes in the ethnic composition of London from census data from 1981 to 2001 were presented at the ISA in Durban in 2006 and are currently being prepared for publication. We argue that there has been a considerable growth of the BME middle class, particularly in the lower middle strata, in both inner and outer London. Second, we argue that there has been a process of class separation occurring amongst BME groups in London with middle class members moving away from non working class groups often involving a simultaneous move into outer London.
The contours of educational attainment in inner London and how this relates to the changing social composition of the school population.

We have addressed this part of the research through an extended analysis of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and the National Pupil Database (NPD) to which codes from the Mosaic Geo Demographic database were attached. This has been one of the highlights of the research and has resulted in two edited journal special issues (Journal of Education Policy and Urban Studies) and a number of papers (one of which (from Urban Studies Vol 44 No 7 is attached).

To focus on East London with a quantitative/qualitative study of approximately 500 respondents to investigate the extent to which issues of educational performance and ethnic diversity have influenced the nature of its recent middle-class settlement.

We experienced considerable difficulty in attracting the hoped for number of respondents in the questionnaire survey (discussed earlier in the report under ‘difficulties’) – particularly those with a less gentrified profile. Although we failed to meet our target numbers for the survey component of the research, our strategy of adding a series of open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire was invaluable in enriching the data. The qualitative research target of approximately 20 interviews from each area was successfully achieved.

Drawing on the London wide data and that from the East London case study, we aim to answer the following questions:

In what ways has ethnicity structured the gentrification of inner London?

This is addressed in the survey and specifically the in-depth interviews which identify different housing and education strategies pursued by different groups. Our analysis of social class change by ethnicity paints a complex picture of gentrification and suburbanization indicating the processes differ by area, social class and ethnic background.

What have been the implications of white gentrification for overall educational attainment in London?

The PLASC analysis enabled us specifically to interrogate this question using ‘transactional’ data (Savage and Burrows 2007) drawn from the whole population rather than a sample. The findings show that different class and ethnic groups in different areas adopt somewhat different strategies towards educational attainment and that not all groups follow the middle class ‘strategic chooser’ model proposed in much of the literature.

To what extent have changes in ethnic and social class composition complemented or contradicted each other in the remaking of the human geography of inner London since 1981?

This is a big question which we intend to address in our proposed book. We believe that our findings have thrown considerable light on patterns of class and spatial mobility across East London – both inner and outer. We argue that it is hard to understand this except in the international context of London’s continued growth and expansion and East London’s role as a zone of transition.

Methods

The project involved a mix of research methods, ranging from the quantitative analysis of census data for 1981, 1991 and 2001 for London, analysis of Pupil Level Annual School
Census (PLASC) data and linked data from the MOSAIC geo-demographic data base, a large scale questionnaire (face to face) survey and in-depth interviews. All parts of the research were successful, although we failed to meet our target for completed questionnaires survey despite devoting great time and effort to this (we completed 300 out of a target of 500). Taken as a whole we feel that the mixed methods used in the project have enabled us to round out our secondary analysis and to contextualise our qualitative data; the survey data and the use of the geo demographic tools provided additional triangulation of our results enabling us to pose what we feel are some important answers to the research questions.

Social Class Change in London

The class structure of Britain and many other western countries has changed considerably over the last twenty five years (Esping-Anderson 1993; Platt 2005) reflecting the massive decline in manufacturing industry and so of the manual working classes and the commensurate rise in the non manual classes working in the service sector and, in some accounts, of a large marginal underclass of low skilled, low paid or unemployed. This dramatic increase in non manual occupations has been particularly marked in London in both the professional/managerial and in the routine lower middle class occupations - as it has in a number of other major cities such as Paris (Preteceille 2004). Traditionally, the working class was the dominant class both numerically and sociologically (Savage 1995). This is no longer the case, and non manual employment now dominates the UK economy (Lash and Urry 1994) and the debate over the ‘middle class’ assumes greater importance.

Gentrification research has tended to focus on the dramatic increase of the professional-managerial class (Butler and Robson 2003) although others (e.g. (Preteceille (2004) in the context of Paris) have argued that the most dramatic change has occurred amongst the ‘middle middle class’ of routine non manual workers – teachers, nurses, police officers, etc. To the extent that this is correct, it suggests that many observers may have been walking backwards into the future, looking at the industrial class structure of the past rather than at the rapidly expanding new middle classes, both upper and lower.

It is well known that inner London has undergone extensive gentrification in recent years which has been associated with the substantial growth of the professional and managerial middle classes (Hamnett 2003). This growth has, in turn, occurred in part as a result of the shift in London’s economy from one based on manufacturing to one based on financial and business services. This has led to a decline in the number and proportion of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs and to an increase in the number of white collar office jobs. But East London, particularly the old East End, has for long been the locus of considerable poverty and deprivation and remained a bastion of the London working class, largely bypassed by gentrification (Willmott and Young 1973). This began to change in the late 1980s with redevelopment of Docklands.

In order to ascertain the social class changes which have taken place in East London, and their links to gentrification, we analysed social class change in London from 1981-2001. This involved a transformational matrix to convert the new 2001 NS-SEC classification into a form compatible with old 17 category SEGs (see Butler, Hamnett et al. 2008 forthcoming).

The middle classes (defined as SEG’s 1-5) in England and Wales experienced major expansion between 1981 and 2001 (growing from 26 percent to 43 percent of the economically active population – a 17 percentage point change [ppc]). It is important to note, however, that only a third of the proportionate growth took place in the traditional upper middle classes (SEG’s 1-4) which grew from 16 percent to 21 percent (5 ppc) compared to the lower middle classes (SEG’s 5.1 and 5.2) which grew from 10 percent to 22 percent (12
ppc). In terms of the geography of the middle class growth, the picture is one of overall increase, greatest in inner London, fastest between 1981-91 but still growing 1991-2001 during which time the largest increases were in the intermediate groups 5.1 and 5.2. The increase in the share of the professional and managerial groups (SEGs 1-4) was far larger in inner London than elsewhere. SEG 5.1 however has become increasingly prominent; it is not only the largest single group but also has the largest percentage point growth which, in inner London (14), is nearly twice that of England and Wales (8) – inner London’s continued social upgrading is happening at both the top and in the middle of its social structure.

The rapid growth of SEG 5.1 (which we broadly equate with NS SEC class 2), in London and in England and Wales as a whole, is sociologically very important and suggests that the changes in the structure of jobs has created an expanded new group of lower level middle class workers with significant implications for the overall occupational class structure. In London, this group’s share of the economically active population has more than doubled, rising faster than in all other areas. It has been responsible for driving the growth of the overall middle class share of the employed population in inner and outer London. It represents a new ‘middle mass’ of white collar and routine non-manual workers lending support to Pahl’s (Pahl 1988) thesis regarding the possible emergence of an ‘onion’ shaped occupational structure in Britain.

Amongst the middle class group (defined as SEGs 1-5 or NS SEC 1 & 2), inter borough differences have been reducing 1981-2001 which suggests some ‘catching up’ by the boroughs with a lower class composition – these are discussed in detail in the attached paper ‘inward and upward’. This can be interpreted as a ‘filling in’ or ‘evening out’ of middle class composition across inner London over time. This is consistent with the idea of widespread replacement of the shrinking working classes as the occupational structure of London has shifted upwards.

London: from mono-ethnic to multi-ethnic city

Over the last 30-40 years the ethnic composition of London has undergone a dramatic transformation. In the process, London has been transformed from a predominantly white, mono-ethnic city to a multi-ethnic one with large ethnic minority populations. In 2001, 2 million people (29%) out of a population of 7 million in London were ethnic minorities. In this sense it has become much more like major North American global cities such as New York and Los Angeles.

Forty years ago, the proportion of London’s residents born in the ‘New Commonwealth’ was tiny: less than 250,000 or about 3% in 1961. The proportion reached 6.4% in 1971, 9% by 1981 and 11% in 1991. The 1991 census revealed that non-white ethnic minorities totalled 1.35 million or 20% of London’s population. This was a major increase from the figures based on just country of birth a decade earlier, but the pace of change increased during the 1990s. In inner London the ethnic minority population, including those of mixed ethnicity, increased from a quarter (25.6%) in 1991 to just over a third (34%) in 2001, and from 17% to 25% in outer London. The ethnic minority population of London was just over half as big again (53%) in 2001 as it was in 1991. The increase in the non-white population has been accompanied by a 4 percent decrease in the size of the white population.

These changes have occurred across almost all London boroughs but they have been particularly marked in our study area of East London (see figure 1). The growth in the ethnic minority population has been remarkable. The greatest increase from 1991-2001 was in Barking (148%) albeit from a very low base. In Redbridge the BME population grew by 80%, in Tower Hamlets by 66%, in Newham by 64%, and in Waltham Forrest by 43%. These
increases were accompanied by declines in the white population (see figure 2). Whether this indicates a process of ‘white flight’ as in the US or the replacement of white residents as they die or move out is impossible to say on the basis of these data, but the result is the same: a marked change in ethnic composition which has not been confined to inner London. On the contrary, the pattern of changes shows a process of suburbanization and decentralization of the ethnic minority population which has important implications for social mobility, housing and education. It is clear that East London is in the throes of a major change in its ethnic composition from traditional white mono-ethnic dominance to multi-ethnicity. High rates of birth amongst these groups suggest that the process will continue in the future. The change is being reinforced by the continual in-migration from overseas which is particularly felt in East London and especially in Newham (see (Hall 2007) for a discussion).

We examine some of the implications of these changes for education in the next section and continue the focus on education in the subsequent sections discussing our survey and interview findings.
PLASC analysis of educational attainment

Education has been a perennial problem in inner London for many years, and attainment has been lower in many inner London boroughs than elsewhere. In addition, attainment varies significantly between ethnic groups, leading to debates over educational disadvantage (see Hannett, Butler and Ramsden, 2007 for a discussion - attached).

The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) provides a wide range of data on every pupil, and their school and its location including indicators of ethnicity and attainment, at all four key stages. There is no indicator of social background apart from the indirect measure of whether a child is on free school dinners which reflects household income and is in effect a measure of social deprivation. The ELSA data set included 17,900 pupils in 7 boroughs at key stage 4 (GCSE) in 2003. They attended 285 secondary schools, of which 115 were within the study area (accounting for 90% of pupils). We were provided with links between these data and the MOSAIC classification based on pupils’ home post codes. This enabled us to examine pupil attainment by ethnicity and by the social character of their home post code which we took as a proxy for social background. The analysis showed that the range of capped GCSE scores (ie limited to the pupils’ best 8 grades) varied by pupil ethnicity and by post code classification. The range from the group mean for ethnicity was from +7.4 for Chinese pupils, and +4.6 for Indians to -3.7 for Black Caribbeans. The range for Mosaic type was greater however, ranging from +8.9 for the most affluent post code to -4.5 for the least indicating that home background continues to exert a dominant causal influence on educational attainment.

This greater impact of home background than ethnicity was confirmed by regression analysis which took the capped GCSE score as the dependent variable. We were also able to examine the role of school effects or the role of social composition of the school on individual pupil attainment. We grouped the schools into four quartiles by attainment. This indicated clearly that a pupil going to a school with a high academic performance is more likely to do better than predicted on the basis of their social/ethnic/gender characteristics and vice versa. Conversely, it may suggest that lower performing schools are recruiting from a pool of pupils...
with lower average ability. Subsequent analysis looking at distance to school reinforced this hypothesis by showing that higher achieving schools tended to recruit from a larger catchment area than lower achieving ones. Analysis also shows that schools with higher average mean scores at GCSE tend to recruit from the most affluent Mosaic groups and vice versa. These findings suggest that the emphasis on school management and on the identification of so-called ‘failing’ schools may be misplaced in that school performance is influenced significantly more by the overall social composition of its pupils.

Profiling a new East End middle class

This section reports on the survey data we gathered across the five study areas in East London (see map). In this and the subsequent section we have focused on education.

Area 1: Victoria Park North and South in Hackney and Tower Hamlets
Area 2: East Ham and Forest Gate in Newham
Area 3: Leyton and Leytonstone in Waltham Forest
Area 4: Seven Kings in Redbridge
Area 5: Barkingside in Redbridge

Figure 3: Map of ELSA study area

Map indicating 5 study areas together with the schools attended by respondents’ children

Victoria Park differed from the other areas in having a majority of higher professional and managerial respondents – the modal group overall and in every remaining area was NS SEC 2 (Lower Managerial and Professionals) with a significant number of respondents in the intermediate group (SEC 3) and small employers (SEC 4) - most of whom were non professional own account workers. Just under half our respondent were white and 46% had been born in the UK. Sixty four percent of respondents had received some form of higher education (including nursing and teacher training), this was lowest amongst Bangladeshis.
(40%) and, rather surprisingly, Indians (50%). The classically gentrified area of Victoria Park had the highest proportion of graduates by some margin (81%).

Examining people’s reasons for moving to their current areas, the most common reasons were that it was affordable and they liked the property. Generally, whites tended to be reluctant outmovers whilst for other ethnic groups this represented an ‘aspirational’ move. Relatively few respondents offered schools and schooling as a main motivation for moving, unless linked to a larger discourse about surbanisation. Turning to the issue of education, it was clear from the survey and the follow up in-depth interviews that this was a major concern for respondents but that they dealt with it in different ways. Levels of satisfaction with schooling was – perhaps surprisingly – high with approximately 70% of respondents satisfied with their child’s primary school education (measured on a five point scale from ‘very poor’ to ‘excellent’) with about 15% ‘don’t knows’ and 15% feeling it was ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’. At secondary level, this fell to about half being satisfied with about a quarter dissatisfied and a similar proportion ‘don’t knows’; however at neither primary nor secondary level were there massive levels of dissatisfaction; this finding correlated with the very small numbers who had actually moved because of dissatisfaction with their child’s schooling. Nearly 40% felt standards in primary and secondary schools were improving. We need to be cautious here as nearly a third felt that they ‘didn’t know’. Only about 10% thought they were getting worse.

In terms of choosing a suitable secondary school for children, league tables and OFSTED reports were not nearly as important as the reputation of the school and parental sense that it would get the most from their child. These were then particularistic rather than universalistic grounds for educational choice. In all areas, parents indicated a strong commitment to their child’s schooling with 80 percent always attending parents’ evenings. This commitment was maintained in terms of making appointments to meet staff to talk about their child’s progress, attending sporting events and joining in fundraising (40%) with little variation between areas. Forty five percent overall had made a special effort to get their child into their current school. Approximately 30% had attempted to get their child into another school (and failed). Overall the survey suggests that there is a significant difference in attitude and background between respondents in Victoria Park and those in the other areas. Elsewhere, we found social aspirants from BME populations were keen to distance themselves from their origins both in terms of social class and social space in order to seek a better and more distinctive life for themselves and their children. At the same time, there was a white middle class lower professional grouping who were committed to living in an area where they valued its social mix and diversity and had a commitment to ‘making it work’. They were happy for their children to attend local schools and although they actively avoided the worst schools were broadly happy with the quality and improvements in the education they were receiving. This apparent satisfaction with schooling was one of the more surprising findings of the survey and was largely confirmed by the subsequent in-depth interviews. The survey findings point to a more complex model of school choice than that of middle/working class chooser/adapter and broadly fit with the findings of the analysis of the PLASC data (Webber and Butler 2007).

At a more general level, the survey data reinforce the census findings by suggesting that there is simultaneously an inward and upward trajectory amongst the higher social group, and an outward movement amongst the mainly black and Asian respondents who were often keen to leave the inner city for the suburbs. A third behaviour is found amongst those largely white lower professionals who demonstrate a continued commitment to living in the fast changing environment of Newham which BME respondents were keen to leave. Finally, there was a group of reluctant white outmovers who were unable to afford to buy housing in their
preferred inner London location. This clearly indicates that gentrification, is only one type of urban social class change.

**Living in East London – evidence from our in-depth interviewees**

Many respondents referred to a long-term relationship with East London. In many cases, respondent were born in the area in which they currently live and have relatives living in East London. This was much less the case in Victoria Park which was much more representative of a middle class incomer model of gentrification. The dominant narrative, however, was one of rapid change in the social composition of residential areas and the respondents’ perceptions of change and their part in it and responses to it. Grievances centred around dirt and litter, the presence of gangs and antisocial behaviour among younger elements, immigration and perceptions of social fragmentation as well as the erosion of neighbourly and street level social interactions between residents - something residents from this part of London in particular have prided themselves on in the past. Generally speaking those who had lived in east London the longest, and the most able to recall ‘the good old days’, voiced the most intense dissatisfaction. Comparisons were made between not only between the east London of today and the one they grew up in but also the one of five years ago such is the perceived rate of change. While the nature and consequences of transformation is hotly debated, the unanimous response from these respondents was that changes indicated the loss of a distinctive way of life, in which neighbours were known to one another and committed to their area; these features were traditionally seen as a fulcrum of east London social identity.

A number of white interviewees were keen to move eastwards – particularly to Essex – in search of a better standard of living, bigger houses, and a more peaceful and tranquil life. Some expressed this, albeit in a coded fashion, as a desire to move to an area where there were larger concentrations of whites Many white interviewees however – and not just those in Newham discussed above - expressed a commitment to remaining in their current neighbourhood and welcomed the influx of well motivated and (relatively) affluent, hard working and family oriented Asian professionals. Most respondents articulated what can be termed ‘liberal’ values – although many BME parents bemoaned the loss of discipline particularly in schools which was a major motivating factor for black respondents who chose to send their children to faith schools often a long way distant.

Some middle-class parents are characterised by a notably quiet and unassuming confidence that their children would perform to their desired levels academically in the local state school as well as valuing other aspects of the school experience. References to a ‘rounded’ education were commonplace with an intrinsic element of this being attendance where the school roll reflected the ethnic and social diversity of its constituent neighbourhoods.

For many, becoming a parent meant negotiating the city in a new way. It meant OFSTEDs and catchments, childcare and after-school. The schools conundrum and its consequences for residential preferences cannot be overstated. It also becomes more troubling as children make the transition to secondary schools as opposed to nursery or primary education since the majority of parents attached less importance to these stages of education, seeing it as equipping children ‘only’ with the ‘basics’ in numbers and language while setting children off on the correct path towards becoming ‘rounded’, responsible and caring adults. Parents whose eldest children were either approaching entry to primary or secondary education thus exhibited the greatest desire to suburbanise, or move out of the London metropolis altogether.

Many of the BME parents that we interviewed were particularly exercised about education and were determined to distance their children from what they saw as the ‘contaminating’ effect of low performing children who they were convinced would ‘drag them down’ or
worse. For black parents, especially, who could often claim membership of a Christian religion the attraction of the ‘discipline’ of faith schools was a very strong pull. Asian parents tended to go more on the pull of the high performing schools in Redbridge (selective and non selective) and the informal advice of other Asian parents who had children already in those schools. For many in Victoria Park, the desirability of the area and its housing as somewhere to live had to be compensated for by paying for private schooling or a move out of London at the time of the secondary transition. For others in this area, who could not afford the housing near to the desired primary school or the fees of independent schooling and were not prepared to move out of London, this was a permanent dilemma in which they invested considerable time and emotional energy. They tended to eschew many of the other primary schools on the grounds that they were insufficiently diverse – either too dominated by Asians or too mono-ethnically white with a working class ethos which was often interpreted as bordering on the racist. Indeed, many expressed reservations about the nature of the education offered which they saw as over disciplined and resented the intrusion of religion into what they saw as an essentially secular activity.

Education therefore comes over very strongly as an issue although in different ways; what perhaps is most striking is that – with the exception of the established gentry of Victoria Park and possibly the white lower professionals in Newham – many of our respondents were not sufficiently established in their own trajectory of upward social mobility to be able to focus single-mindedly on securing their children’s futures.

Conclusions

The research has opened up a new research agenda on the relationship between social class and ethnic change in a global city. We have demonstrated that, whilst there is an on-going process of gentrification occurring in inner London with a continued upgrading of its socio-economic composition, this only paints a partial picture. Whilst there is a continued expansion of the NS SEC Class 1 in inner London, the biggest growth over the last intercensal period both absolutely and relatively has been amongst the ‘middle middle class’ of social class 2... This continued, if more socially and tenurially differentiated, residential gentrification has also resulted in an outward spill over into outer London in which the middle middle class is now dis/replacing lower middle class and working class residents. The census analysis and our own survey suggest that the private rented sector (mainly in the form of the new ‘buy to let’ phenomenon) is of increasing significance amongst this group. There is also a suggestion, which is borne out both by our survey data and the in-depth interviews, that many of these outward spiralists are from second and subsequent generation BME populations who identify upward social mobility with suburbanization. Like other upwardly socially mobile groups, they wish to distance themselves from the less successful.

Education plays a complex and complicated role in this. Changes in education markets have accompanied the changes that have been taking place in London’s housing markets. Most respondents expressed a generalized concern about education and their children’s schooling however few appear to have actually moved because of education and most express an equally generalized satisfaction with education. Whilst only in the highly gentrified Victoria Park area did we find confirmation of the middle class ‘chooser model’ proposed by Stephen Ball (2002) even here this really only applied to those able to afford the most expensive housing near to the popular primary school. Elsewhere white parents found themselves making more adaptive choices involving avoiding insufficiently mixed schools – either because they were overwhelmingly Asian or largely white working class. In this context, they found themselves choosing faith schools which they might not otherwise have considered. Elsewhere in ELSA, different patterns emerge in ways rather more influenced by ethnicity.
These ranged from supporting local schools seen to be improving to suburbanizing to areas with perceived better schools. This was linked with both housing and social aspirations and with a wish to distance themselves from what they saw as deteriorating social situations as new groups arrived in the borough or existing groups appeared to sink into social and economic marginality. Thus, at least amongst those who we interviewed, their strategies had been part of a wider move of upward social mobility which for the non white groups involved spatial mobility in an outward direction. Thus we see the process of social mobility in a rapidly expanding city as at the heart of the dynamic which we have outlined. East London is a particular example of this as it remained not only predominantly mono-ethnically working class longest but has not fallen to the same kind of white higher professional gentrification as elsewhere. We argue that one dynamic that is driving this is the continued in migration into London from overseas. This occurs at both ends of the social scale and boroughs such as Newham illustrate how a new zone of transition is developing in London. As new populations become settled and more affluent they wish to move outward and upward; The scale of multi ethnicity is now shaping much of London’s social geography.

Outputs
- Data set lodged with ESRC Data Archive
- 3 Journal Special Issues
- 4 published journal articles

Impacts
- 4 Radio interviews
- Publication of alternative league tables in *The Guardian*
- Developing a new geography of education through special issues of leading journals and conference presentations

Future
- A book on Social Mobility and Class Change in East London which will hopefully provide an original analysis of the sociology of the city driven by international migration and social/ethnic change. We will link this to the changing geography of inner and outer London and show how the gentrification of both working class zones of inner London as well as its zones of transition is directly affecting the movements of populations in what was once its last ungentrified quarter. We will however argue that gentrification no longer explains the overall change taking place
- Work on distance to school and attainment
- Further work on Mosaic and attainment
- Intersections of class, ethnicity, migration and the growth of London
References


