



Welcome to 'Monkey Island'

Identity, Community and Migration Histories in Three
Norwich Estates

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Abstract

In the recent history of the welfare state, particular areas have been identified in official documents as

Investigating the NELM Estates

Owing to increasingly apparent failures or limited successes of various welfare strategies, social policy theory since 1945 has become more and more preoccupied by the issue of implementation. In the UK in particular 'some passion' has gone into the 'top-down–bottom-up debate', typically linked to arguments about the respective roles of central and local government in the determination and implementation of policy (Hill, 1997). Area-based initiatives have a

in the geographical, cultural and social centre of Norfolk, indicating that even the centre has its own margins. When the estates were first constructed they were on the geographical periphery of the city. This physical marginalization was reinforced by the fact that many ex-slum dwellers were rehoused there, resulting in social stigma (Larkman Project Group, 1984; Sibley, 1995). Since that time, the city has expanded beyond the estates, separating them from the surrounding countryside while tying them closer to the city, and meanwhile the University of East Anglia has been built on their doorstep.

At the same time, the social location of the NELM area has undergone profound changes. As well as containing people's homes and neighbourhoods, its council houses and estates are physical embodiments of the changing face of the welfare state – from council tenancy to the right to buy, to the recent increase in housing association properties (Forrest and Murie, 1991). People's identifications are profoundly tied to their relationship with their houses and the places where they are located (Bornat, 1989; Sixsmith, 1988). Residents' identifications are also meshed with lifecycle patterns. Generational shifts change the patterns of expression, needs, and experience.

At the times of writing this paper we have conducted

Some long-term resident interviewees talked

Those who do not have a long history on the estates, either personally, or through their families, tended unsurprisingly to be much more ambivalent about ideas of 'community'. One woman, who may loosely be described as a middle-class incomer, initially made good links with her neighbours. However, she found herself ostracized when she was, falsely, accused by a neighbour of being a paedophile:

that summer like the neighbour, our immediate neighbours, these are the next neighbours didn't speak to us. The other side that we'd looked after their dog every summer, you know for two weeks they wouldn't speak to us and it was just horrendous, like, people that

Marlpit not to know where it is, even though it is only 10 minutes walk away. In one extreme case, a woman who lived at one end of Motum Road where her father, one sister, mother, brother and son also all lived, described how she had panic attacks when she went beyond a certain point further up the road. Her family, embodied in that particular section of the street, represented the boundaries of her particular 'community'.

Histories of Migration

It is important to emphasize that, alongside these very individual-based micro-constructions of what constitutes the local, residents, far from being isolated, conduct social relations enmeshed in networks that commonly encompass not simply national, but transnational, spaces. This can be seen through links both into and out of the area via the migration of individuals, ideas and capital. While Norwich, and in fact Norfolk, is typically seen as having been bypassed by post-1945 waves of immigration and settlement, in fact the estates have both contributed to, and experienced, various forms of migration.

Central to the experiences of interviewees growing up during and after the second world war was the presence of American soldiers in and around Norwich. Young women from the estates met them in the city, at the bases where dances were organized, or when they visited houses on the estates. Sisters of several interviewees, in what appear to be disproportionately large numbers, married GIs and moved to the United States. Similarly, interviews, backed up in part by council minutes, suggest that significant numbers from the estates took advantage of government-assisted migration schemes to Australia in particular, commonly referred to as 'the £10 ticket'.⁵

different or... that I think we're very actively knocked down or told that we were getting too big for our boots or that we were trying to do things that we were being ridiculous if we tried to do something that didn't fit into what the family expected and I know for example when I went to university one of my aunts actually didn't speak to me for several years because who did I think I was you know and er, there, there, I think it really, it really is the crabs in a bucket thing like you don't need a lid they're just, I think that's quite depressing to live amongst that I think.

(interviewee 28, 14.11.2005)

For others, being good at school was something to be avoided, not so much because of the disparaging attitudes of teachers but more because of the disadvantages anticipated if credibility was lost with peers⁶:

you didn't want to be a goody goody did yer, you know, that's the last thing you want teachers like you ... I did enjoy sciences, I didn't want anyone to know I actually enjoy that ... I can remember one year when I come top in science and they all start copping the piss and I said, 'that's alright I knew the answers', I said, 'I see the answer sheet'.

(interviewee 15, 4.10.2005)

This interviewee, and other men in their 60s and older, described the decision to join the military as the only socially acceptable way of gaining formal educational qualifications without losing face.

The temporary movement of estate residents out of the country to jobs abroad with the military led to encounters as migrants which not only left deep impressions of other people and places but which has in the process contributed to ideas about 'race' and national identity:

You might imagine on a troop ship all those people, so I used to get up early in the morning for a shave while the water's about... I forget how many mile out [of Mumbai], 'Phew, what's that smell?'. Now all of a sudden I was talking to this here [sailor], and he say, 'you give it a half an hour you'll see what, I shan't tell you', he said, 'you'll see'. And you started to see the sea change colour, dirty old brown colour and the smell get stronger, cos you're not used to it. See once you've been there you don't notice it but er, when you get there and what they used to say...'jewel of the empire!' I'd never seen nothing like it in my life. First thing you see is the old bullocks walking about cos they, they let them walk about don't they, and these poor beggars with rickets walking about backwards like crabs, just ignoring 'em, never seen nothing like it.

⁶ See Paul Willis (1977) Why Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Oh but they're lovely. That's funny when I was turning that drawer out I found a letter in there from one of my girls who come from Brazil. I mean they're all my girls and boys all of them.

(interviewee 12, 10.11.2005)

Another interviewee, an Indian national and academic who moved to Norwich as part of a job relocation to the then relatively new university, worked hard as a teacher in a secondary school in the area to counter what she saw as disadvantages based around class:

I always thought ... that they needed an extra handle... I know partly because if you're black you need an extra handle and it's very like that. My sixth formers had to have something extra ... Because they were working class, they, they had, they came from so many disadvantages ... they had to have something extra so we had all sorts of things like we always arranged for English sixth-formers extra evenings when they would come for a play reading or listening to poetry or records or a talk.

(interviewee 35, 3.11.2005)

Another middle-class immigrant to Norfolk, a former journalist, this time from north London, found it important to engage politically and socially on the estates, bringing a political ideology of equality and justice developed through experience bringing up children in socially mixed areas of the capital. She started working with women on the estates to promote healthy eating

[My ideas] were a bit, yes they were foreign ... the classic example of that was when we did pasta sauce and

NDCs are cliquey, offering “lip service” to consultation’.⁷

In this research, we problematized the notion of community by deliberately seeking out newly arrived residents and people who had moved away, rather than focusing only on those whose connections to the estate stretch back more than a generation. This has inevitably led to an appreciation of the huge diversity of backgrounds of estate residents, in terms of class, ethnicity and nationality. The categories (‘Travellers’, Irish, former rural workers and ex-slum-dwellers) that we started out with have been shown to be inadequate. Feelings of belonging to the area and being connected to other residents are highly contingent and may be related more to length of residence, family history, skin colour, nationality and relations with neighbours than history of settlement. Most significantly, echoing Doreen Massey, identity, a sense of place and a sense of group belonging may be strongly related to an individual’s own migration history and their interactions with ‘outsiders’ bringing their own histories to the estates.

In attempting to understand the interrelationship between individual identity practices and the discourses of the Welfare State, the next stage of our research, analysis of interview transcripts and further interviews and ethnographic work, needs to

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