

REPACKAGING

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repackaging

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poverty

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LOOKS LIKE YOU NEED
POVERTY GOVERNMENT
BUT INSIDE DOESN'T LET
THERE'S FALL INTO
WEALTH POVERTY TA
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1. **poverty repackaged:**
looks like poverty but inside there's wealth
2. **the starving artist-resident:**
poverty, precarity and creativity
3. **gates and gatekeepers:**
racism and champagne socialists

These are the messages, thoughts, and findings of Alexis, a local resident and citizen social scientist from Stratford.

Alexis conducted research on the obstacles to prosperity that residents in Hackney Wick, Fish Island, Gascoyne Estate and Stratford

experience, as part of the *Prosperity in east London 2021-2031* Longitudinal Study.

To find out more about Alexis and *Prosperity in east London 2021-2031*, take a look at the final pages of this zine.



no.1 > cafe along white post lane
young professionals. graffiti.
pricey food.



no.2 > popular pub amongst creatives
creative professionals. graffiti.
popular spot.

1.



poverty repackaged

Parts of Hackney Wick and Fish Island are dotted with seemingly obscure shops surrounded or even fronted by layers of graffiti. Alexis describes these places as “looking like poverty but inside there’s wealth”. Look inside and you’ll find items that residents just a walking distance away living in social housing (towards the north of Hackney Wick) can hardly afford. “A cup of coffee is 5 pounds, why would I go there” – one resident from Gascoyne Estate told Alexis.

The shops and restaurants in the area primarily cater to professionals living and working in the newer residential and commercial developments in the southern parts of Hackney Wick, and in the heart of Fish Island. Following the deindustrialisation

of inner London in the 1980s, Hackney Wick and Fish Island became key spaces for creatives and artists looking for affordable and readily available workspaces in the 1990s. This creative expansion significantly increased the area’s cultural and symbolic value, as artists drew inspiration from the post-industrial grit of their environment to produce avant-garde work (Harris 2012).

Naturally, more artists and creative businesses followed, as did developers. Between 2015-2016, Hackney Wick and Fish Island began a major regeneration initiative led by the London Legacy Development Corporation. The regeneration plan aimed to develop new local amenities, workspaces, and

homes, whilst maintaining the area's distinct "local heritage and character" (London Legacy Development Corporation 2015). Walking around Hackney Wick and Fish Island today, you will find a mixture of artist studios, mixed tenancy housing developments, restaurants, shops, and arts venues. Some are still able to offer genuinely affordable workspaces and housing, but many have seen sharp rental increases, pricing out artists and residents who were once local. Although the area still looks like repackaged poverty – graffiti tastefully decorating walls and shopfronts – people living in poverty are finding it harder and harder to remain.

This brings us back to Alexis' images of the graffiti-covered walls in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. Often associated with deviance and inner-city poverty, graffiti historically emerged from urban subculture and began as an expression of urban identity, struggle and creativity amongst communities grappling with deprivation and oppression. Soon its aesthetics became

commercialised by marketing agencies and fashion brands seeking to convert the cultural creativity of the poor into commercial value. As Alexis shares, creativity and ingenuity often come from a life of precarity and struggle – graffiti, thrifted 'vintage' clothes, grime and drill music: "when you're poor you have to do things differently".

Alexis speaks of graffiti's transition from urban poverty to wealth as yet another example of commercial companies repackaging the plight of the poor, extracting their ingenuity, and absorbing the gains (see Schacter 2019). Artists can sometimes play a complicit role in this process, acting as translators of working-class culture into upper-class aesthetic value, which then makes the shift (often through marketing companies) into market value. This happens both in fashion and in places. In the same way that graffiti has become repackaged, so has the look and feel of post-industrial poverty in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. But who benefits?

no.3 > pub along the canal on 90 Wallis Road, Hackney Wick
professionals. street-looking wall art.
warehouse exteriors.



**'LOOKS LIKE
POVERTY BUT
INSIDE THERE'S
WEALTH' -alexis**



UP TO **£40,000**
INCENTIVES ON
APARTMENTS
£650,000+

2 & 3 bed warehouse
style apartments

Opposite Hackney Wick station
and moments from Crossrail

22 minutes from the City

Landscaped roof gardens,
concierge and gym

REGISTER INTEREST:

BagelFactory.london • 020 3937



no.4> advertisement for private
apartments in Hackney Wick
unaffordable housing.



no.5 > shop with food products in Hackney Wick
bare wooden shelves. rustic tones.
feels like post-war, early industrial aesthetic.
expensive artisanal produce.



no.6> long queues at the food bank carpenter's estate food bank. all kinds of people. not what you would expect.



no.7 > food bank donations from M&S good day at the food bank because of M&S donations. not all days are good. sometimes left with bad vegetables.

2.

the starving artist- -resident

While conducting research at a food bank near Carpenter's Estate (just on the periphery of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and a 20min walk away from Hackney Wick and Fish Island), Alexis met many residents living within the vicinity of the Olympic Park who depended on the food bank to feed themselves and their families. Some had just lost good jobs while others were working at minimum wage. In either case, they were unable to keep up with the rising cost of living. At the food bank, Alexis also met several local artists. Ben and Nadia were two such artists:

Ben is an artist, photographer and local volunteer, whose work involves large-scale installations in community spaces. He used

to live in some of the affordable live-work studios in Fish Island but has had to move due to rising rental costs. When Alexis met him, Ben had been moving from place to place within Hackney, staying with friends and sleeping on couches. He spoke of the toll that this frequent relocation had taken on his well-being and the sense of isolation he frequently felt.

Nadia is a resident of Stratford, an artist and entrepreneur who runs art workshops for her community and enjoys engaging them in her creative practice. When Alexis met Nadia at the Carpenter's Estate food bank, she was struggling to earn enough income from her artistic practice and faced difficulties securing affordable studio spaces, grants and financial support to continue

her work.

Contrary to glamorous images of successful entrepreneurs and famous artists, Ben and Nadia's struggles with food, job, income and housing security, are reflective of the precarious lives many artists and entrepreneurs lead. Their experiences with poverty and community-based artistic practices defy simple divisions between artist and resident, workplace and community, revealing the importance of intersection. Rather than think of artists as always being facilitators of gentrification and poverty

repackaging, Ben and Nadia's stories invite us to consider the common struggle and common value that can be created when artists and communities work together. This vision of a creative community hub that both Ben and Nadia spoke of requires resources - funding and space to support the work and livelihoods of artists and communities. But who gains access to funding and what gates prevent people from entering spaces?

no.8 > Rolex shop in Westfield mall, Stratford
luxury watches vs. food bank a short walk away.
inequality



**'WE NEED A GOVERNMENT
THAT DOESN'T LET PEOPLE
FALL INTO THE POVERTY TRAP'
-alexis**



no.9> gated community in Fish Island
gates. restricted access.
physical gates reflect social gates.



no.10 > Fish Island housing advertisement
advertises promise vibrancy: “enhancing not replacing”.
how true is this?



3.

gates and gatekeepers

Alexis noted that although Olympic regeneration initiatives have created multiple commercial centres, research facilities and employment areas, many of these jobs and opportunities have not been accessible to longstanding local communities (Tam 2022: 71). Alexis lamented that local hiring by large companies and institutions in the area has often been tokenistic. Often, locals are only able to access lower-wage, entry-level jobs. As a result, many cannot afford to pay for housing and are forced to relocate as prices multiply with each new development and office block. Frequently, women of colour were the most marginalised in terms of professional prospects.

Casey, an African refugee and community worker who lived on Fish Island (but had to move due to rising rental costs), spoke about the difficulties she faced as a woman of colour in the workplace:

I feel like if I was a blonde white woman it would be less stressful for me to succeed professionally in my career, I have to put in three times more work. Once, a person at an event we were organising asked me for more tea and coffee. They assume that I am in the catering team. I feel like I'm not good enough and there's a lot of imposter syndrome and self-doubt because of how my environment treats me. Thankfully I have had colleagues who were good

at calling this out. I've had strong allies who would push my name forward as the most knowledgeable candidate. But I've also had to learn systems and speaking methods to get what I need. I've learnt to speak posh and quote names, be assertive, confident and well-spoken, as well as develop a network of white allies. This is what you need to do. Not – getting too angry.

Nadia also mentioned similar difficulties in her attempts at obtaining art funding. Although she did not speak about institutional racism, she felt a similar sense of frustration at not having the right networks and cultural capital to be seen or noticed. Being able to secure jobs and funding requires networking and being able to pitch one's ideas and identity – knowing how to speak and who to speak to – resources that Alexis felt many women of colour lack. As a result, Alexis describes a pattern of wealth accumulation in the hands of what is popularly described in British slang as “champagne socialists” - a person who espouses socialist

ideals while enjoying a wealthy and luxurious lifestyle (Oxford Dictionary). Alexis describes this term in her own words:

On the surface, they appear to help the community, but they don't really try to give back and don't really understand. They're more likely to drink champagne! They sometimes do try to help, but they don't understand the pain – and if you don't understand how can you help people?

In her research and life, Alexis repeatedly encountered champagne socialists who spoke of doing social good and wanting to help achieve equality and diversity, only to then act as gatekeepers to resources – funding, jobs, and spaces. Often, she felt that they tended to have greater access to resources and power because they had the right networks, were able to pitch themselves, and often knew how to repackage the painful experiences and ideas of marginalised communities without sharing gains. For Alexis, this boiled down to not truly understanding the pain of people who struggle with deprivation



TRUE ALLIES CAN
STEP AWAY AND
GIVE YOU SPACE

-casey

and marginality. As Casey said:

True allies can step away and give you space. And not in a tokenistic way.

Moreover, this sense of gatekeeping highlights the failure of policy attempts to equalise and diversify cultural capital. As Casey and Alexis highlighted, it's all about pitching and packaging, but how do communities with very different backgrounds and experiences learn to pitch and package themselves in ways that get them jobs, funding,

and spaces? Alexis highlights the importance of training and education, but equally important is the need to rethink the boxes we try and package ourselves in. Different ways of thinking about qualifications, different ways of showcasing one's talents and applying for resources, and a fundamental appreciation of the value of real-life experience are also needed.

If you could speak to a policymaker now, what would you say?

“Policymakers need to understand the pain that marginalised communities experience and engage them in collaborative place-making. We also need universal access to basic food and more diverse ways of finding and recognising talent”



alexis charles

MSc, BSc (Hons) DipM, PGCE

Expertise in leading: collaborative projects | Citizen Social Scientist (CSS) teams | creative entrepreneurs | SMEs & Urban Community Networks | L&D Training Programmes | business turnaround + growth strategies | Corporate & Community Projects, Institute for Global Prosperity | Strategic Research | Business Enterprise Education | Creative Enterprise Zone | Strategic Partnerships Boards Consultant | Interests include creating bespoke Inclusive Innovation programmes and consulting organisations on how to communicate with creative SMEs + diverse community groups to bring local change.

Hackney-born and Stratford-based. Graduated from several sponsored education programmes (UCL, Loughborough + London South Bank Universities) and is determined to support inclusive innovation, communities, creatives, and marginalized enterprising people who work through challenges, voice real stories and experiences.

PROSPERITY IN EAST LONDON 2021-2031

Prosperity in east London 2021-2031 is a 10-year mixed-methods study tracing the effects of large-scale and long-term urban regeneration on local communities in east London. The study equips local residents with the tools to examine prosperity in their communities, producing citizen-centred insights on people's lived experiences of regeneration.

During wave 1 of the qualitative research, which took place between September and October 2021, 10 residents from 10 areas in east London, were employed and supported by east London community organisations: Compost CIC, Hackney Quest, and Leaders in the Community, to engage in 3-months of part-time research and training. Through [UCL's Citizen Science Academy](#), they received practice-led training on research design, ethics, qualitative data collection, and social impact strategies. The teams carried out interviews and walking ethnographies exploring obstacles to prosperity in their different neighbourhoods, and are currently involved in presenting this research to policymakers.

Managed by the Institute for Global Prosperity's (IGP) [Prosperity Co-laboratory UK](#) (PROCOL UK) in partnership with the [UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#), the study was co-designed with members of the [London Prosperity Board](#) – a cross-sector partnership between the IGP, UCL East, London government, public agencies, businesses, the third sector, and local communities in east London, to change the way decision-makers think and act for prosperity.



www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/igp/research/ | seriouslydifferent.org

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CONTACT US

✉ londonprosperity@ucl.ac.uk

🐦 [@glo_pro](https://twitter.com/glo_pro)

📷 [@glo_pro](https://www.instagram.com/glo_pro)

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