

ALL WHITE ON THE PECKHAM FRONT

Take a walk through Peckham's Rye Lane and you'll encounter a hodgepodge of sensations from largely Afro-Caribbean businesses. Smells of raw meat and fish from market stalls, fumes puffing out from beauty salons, flashing signs from mobile phone repair shops and knick-knacks spilling out of discount stores such as Khan's Bargains. All are freckled along the street's commercial skin, and its complexion is proudly mixed.

Yet bulging out from this high street – the neighbourhood's primary shopping artery – like a varicose vein, are a clot of 'trendy' establishments run by young, predominantly white creatives. Arts and yoga studios, cafés, pop-up fashion outlets... Peckham's trendy Copeland Park complex is, from the outset, an innocuous example of Peckham's cultural mix: different communities enmeshed in one

area. Until they clash. It's inevitable when you consider that some businesses aren't merely setting up shop here, they're suffusing their white values onto the majority-ethnic community (aka ethnic cleansing).

Yogarise is a fitting example. The Evening Standard ran an article about a young middle-class married couple who opened a yoga studio in Bussey Building, part of Copeland Park. They expressed (gasp!) disrespectful views about the existing African communities whose alleged 'massive ghetto blasters and screaming' at Sunday church services were an irksome distraction during their chaturangas. The piece was edited, at the couple's request, because it 'created animosity locally' – a euphemism for racial tension born of bourgeois entitlement, if ever there was one.

Another example is Vegan Jesus, a plant-based café that sounds more like a messiah-cum-meme for millennials. While its owners haven't overtly offended anyone (though their name could cause offense among religious residents), it's more proof of ethnic cleansing in Peckham: shops selling overpriced coffees and yoga in working-class areas drain their sanguineous, multicultural spaces. These businesses tie a tourniquet of middle-class ideals around Peckham's established ethnic community that raise the newcomer clique above everyone else. They do little to reflect or blend with local needs (considering the number of chicken shops and fast-food chains on Rye Lane alone, 'vegan' is probably a dirty word in Peckham). Instead they transfuse a set of seemingly 'superior' values that infect the cultural bloodstream.

Just look at rising house prices as proof. Unsurprisingly, as they rise fewer people can afford to buy, leading to the pricing-out of a large percentage of ethnic-minority residents. As the new clique moves in, local businesses are pushed out and replaced by 'trendier' offers: a west African butcher is now a video-game bar; an African restaurant is now a branch of the Honest Burger chain, and many others expect the same fate. The hairdressers and nail salons opposite Peckham Rye station will soon be uprooted and moved to a less visible back road as they make way for Southwark Council's plans to refurbish the station.

Of course, this isn't to suggest that kale lattes and cat cows are synonymous with racial superiority. Undoubtedly, the arrival of the artsy set has injected a creative dynamism to the area, despite also contributing to its rapid cultural change. Peckham Levels is the latest example. Opened in late 2017, the underused multi-storey car park on Rye Lane is a creative hub of workspaces for local artists and small businesses, sharing the space with arts organisation Bold Tendencies and rooftop hangout Frank's Cafe.

It's the product of a petition launched by resident-led group Peckham Vision to save the site from Southwark Council's redevelopment plans (they wanted to build a tower block with 83 new flats), after the group applied for the space to be recognised as an Asset of Community Value.

While it still arguably smacks of a hipster haven, the project is evidence that all is not lost in the struggle for social cohesion in Peckham. It's gone ahead without displacing, disrespecting or disadvantaging lower-income, largely ethnic-minority communities, for whom home shouldn't feel exclusionary, or their way of life inferior. Or their choice of hot beverage covered in 'unicorn glitter'.

Love thy neighbour, Jesus Christ famously told his followers. But if your new neighbours are Vegan Jesus and his oat latte-loving disciples, even devout churchgoers won't need to book a yoga class to consider that a bit of a stretch.

Elephant

NEVER FORGETS

"LCC, SHAME ON YOU!" Chants from the army of locals, students and activists outside London College of Communication a few weeks ago boomed across Elephant and Caastle roundabout. They came to protest plans to redevelop the Shopping Centre across the road.

I am a student here; by default, I'm complicit in the potential 'forcing out' of many residents and businesses who depend on the shopping centre for their

livelihoods. In its place, along with proposed new swanky housing by property developer Delancey will be a new, equally swanky, cutting-edge UAL building.

I feel guilty. You may think it's not about me or the other 4,500 LCC students - but we are part of the change, and although I'm on the protesters' side I'm conscious of being a member of an academic institution that is willing to impact the community it's been part of for more than 50 years.

Has London's seemingly endless regeneration done enough damage when it's followed a pattern of social cleansing? Too many times local people, many of whom are from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds, have been priced out of their homes when a new development has barged its way into their neighbourhood.

Being a group of LCC students, it wasn't lost on the Oppose team that gentrification





was happening on our doorstep; it's one of the reasons why we set up this zine. As our name suggests, we're against these changes – and many of those who stood chanting outside the uni agree. They shouted loud enough to win an important victory: Southwark Council's planning committee deferred the planning application earlier this month.

Central Saint Martins student Amber Gonebi was one of the protestors. Brandishing a sign that says, 'UAL are complicit in this social cleansing and gentrification', she told me why she opposes LCC's plans: "We shouldn't affect local communities in a negative way, especially as an arts university that prides itself on producing influential people. We need to own up to what we're doing and to know what our university is representing."

Amber isn't the only UAL student contesting the development. Groups have camped in the college entrance, plastered up protest signs and joined marches. They want to know where LCC stands. I asked Natalie Brett, head of the college, for some answers. She said: "I've worked in Southwark for nearly a decade [...] and I feel a strong personal connection to this area. LCC is an integral part of the Elephant and Castle community, providing benefits educationally, economically, culturally and socially.

"We have educated generations of people from Southwark [and] we engage a high number of local people and communities through our diverse public programme. It's for these reasons I want us to stay.

"As a world-leader in creative communications education, we need to offer world-class facilities. The financial cost of running an old and inefficient site is an ineffective use of funds. Staying in our existing building in its current form isn't an





option. If the plans are rejected, we will be considering our options [...] and we may be forced to leave Elephant & Castle.”

Her points are valid, but surely there are better ways to achieve these plans without having such a detrimental impact on local people? The war rages on. While protesters have managed to pause the application, developer Delancey is putting up a fight. At the time of going to press, they had revised their offer to include '74 Social Rent housing units' and

converting 'a further 42 housing units from London Living Rent to Social Rent'.

It's back to the waiting game to see whether the plans go ahead. In the meantime, I hope LCC doesn't forget that what it claims to stand for is inclusive; art is for everyone and its pursuit shouldn't marginalise or push anyone out.

As the blurb on the college website reads: 'We are for the curious, the brave and the committed: those who want to transform themselves and the world around them'.



**I DON'T
ACTUALLY
KNOW WHAT
THAT WORD
MEANS**

**SORRY,
I'VE JUST
WOKEN UP,**

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