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A gentrification stage-model for London? Through the 'looking *Glass*' of Kensington

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Abstract

Despite the term 'gentrification' being coined in London by the British sociologist Ruth Glass, there has not been an attempt to develop a stage model of gentrification for London, nor any up-to-date discussion of the different waves of gentrification there in one academic paper or book. Research on urban gentrification tends to see gentrification as an evolving wave, or set of waves, that change in relation to context and the dynamics of urban change. In this paper we look at the different stages of gentrification that have affected London over time, we do so by looking through the lens of a long gentrified part of inner London—Kensington, part of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. After establishing a stage model of gentrification in Kensington, we argue that stage models, like ours, have value in, for example, rethinking past trajectories of gentrification, but that we should be more critical of stage models going forwards.

KEYWORDS

gentrification, Kensington, London, Ruth Glass, stage model

1 | INTRODUCTION

> If Ruth were still alive today, she would be doing a research project in Kensington and Chelsea into the Russian oligarchs who have turned whole neighbourhoods into ghost towns (Phil Cohen, 2015, 50th Anniversary Symposium on Ruth Glass[1]).

Despite the term 'gentrification' being coined in London by the British sociologist Ruth Glass, there has not been an attempt to develop a stage model of gentrification for London, nor any up-to-date discussion of the different waves of gentrification there in one academic paper or book. Research on urban gentrification has long seen gentrification as an evolving wave, or set of waves, that change in relation to context and the dynamics of urban change. Contra earlier stage models, processes of gentrification predate coinage of the term by Ruth Glass in 1964 (Osman, 2016) and gentrification of a neighbourhood per se is no-longer seen as an end point (Lees, 2003), as such identifying a starting point and indeed

an end point is a contentious issue. Those gentrification stage models that have been developed to date have been predominantly focused on the USA (e.g., Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Hyra et al., 2020), although a small number of scholars have begun to develop models outside of the USA (e.g., the 2019 special issue in *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* and the 2022 special feature in *City*). In this paper we look at the different waves of gentrification that have affected London over time. We do so by looking through the lens of a long-gentrified part of inner London—Kensington, part of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (see Figure 1). Focusing at the neighbourhood scale and on fine grained geographical differences therein to read up to the scale of the city (here London) is different to what Matznetter and Kadi (2022) did in their long history of gentrification in Vienna.

We focus on Kensington for two reasons. First, because it is rumoured that Ruth Glass first used the term 'gentrification' in an unpublished study of housing in North Kensington in 1959 (Lees et al., 2008, p. 5), which is most likely given she was already researching other social issues, including other newcomers, in the area at the time (see Glass & Pollins, 1960). Indeed, if you read beyond the paragraph oft cited in which she coins the term 'gentrification' (Glass, 1964, as quoted in Lees et al., 2008), she discusses the uneven development of gentrification, citing Notting Hill in Kensington as a 'twilight zone' which was getting worse in comparison to gentrifying areas near to it. Glass talks about a 'metropolitan constellation' of wealth and poverty and an increase in segregation and exclusion (Glass, 1989, pp. 141–143). And second, Kensington is a part of inner London that has seen most of the different waves and types of gentrifications that have been identified/discussed thus far in the gentrification studies literature (on gentrification types, see Lees & Phillips, 2018).

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has long been associated with the aristocracy, the gentry and social elitism. Even the name 'Kensington' most likely derives from the Saxon *Kyning's-tun*, meaning 'King's Town' (Clunn, 1955, p. 389). It is one of the richest boroughs in the UK (for highest earners), but it is also one of the most unequal. The former Labour MP for Kensington, Emma Dent-Coad (2020), found that a quarter of residents over the age of 65 lived in poverty, and that 5000 homeless children lived in temporary accommodation. The late geographer Gordon MacLeod (2018) uncovered how this 'astonishing landscape of inequality' (p. 460) combined with a malevolent geography of injustice played out in the Grenfell Fire, which we turn to towards the end of this paper. Kensington's association with opulence distracts from the inequality and gentrification that continues to impact its poorest communities, indeed since 2014 the rich have gotten richer and the poor poorer.

2 | LOOKING BACK AT STAGE MODELS OF GENTRIFICATION AND THINKING THROUGH ITS WAVES

Gentrification researchers began to develop stage models of gentrification in the 1970s and 1980s to explain and predict processes of gentrification. The stage model outlined by Boston based MIT urban studies professor Phillip Clay (1979) became seen as a classic American gentrification model. Looking at neighbourhood renewal and drawing on data collected in Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington, DC, he identified the following stages: (1) *Pioneer*—a small group of risk oblivious pioneers like artists, designers, gays and lesbians who moved into disinvested neighbourhoods and renovated properties. (2) *Expanding Gentrification*—risk takers who renovated and remodelled properties and flipped homes for profit, speculation begins. (3) *Displacement*—risk neutral—with property values rising, new middle class people start moving into the neighbourhood causing significant change. (4) *Mature Gentrification*—risk averse—a neighbourhood becomes solidly desirable and many original residents even very early gentrifiers are displaced. Clay's model, although useful, was very neighbourhood focused and said little to nothing about broader capitalist or other forces that played a part in gentrification. It was also heavily skewed towards descriptions of pioneer gentrification. Indeed, Moskowitz (2017), in relation to Clay, discusses a 'Phase Zero' coming before Clay's Stage 1, in which the ground for post-war gentrification is set by the Great Depression, redlining, and the prioritisation of white suburban neighbourhoods over the Black inner city.

Rutgers University Urban Studies Professor Dennis Gale (1979), writing at the same time as Clay, drew on research on areas at different stages of gentrification in Washington DC, and emphasised population change in terms of displacement. He focused on the class and status distinctions between original residents and residents gentrifying the neighbourhood. As Lees et al. (2008) pointed out, these classic models are now quite dated and do not cover gentrification from the 1980s onwards. More recently, Osman (2016) and Lees et al. (2016) argued that urban gentrification as a process predates its coinage by Ruth Glass. Indeed, in his recent book, Dennis Gale (2021) extended his thesis back in time to argue that gentrification must be understood as an urban phenomenon with historical roots in the early twentieth century, doing the historical conceptualisation that Osman (2016) urged (see also Golash-Boza, 2023, on before gentrification in Washington D.C.). Nevertheless, it is worth

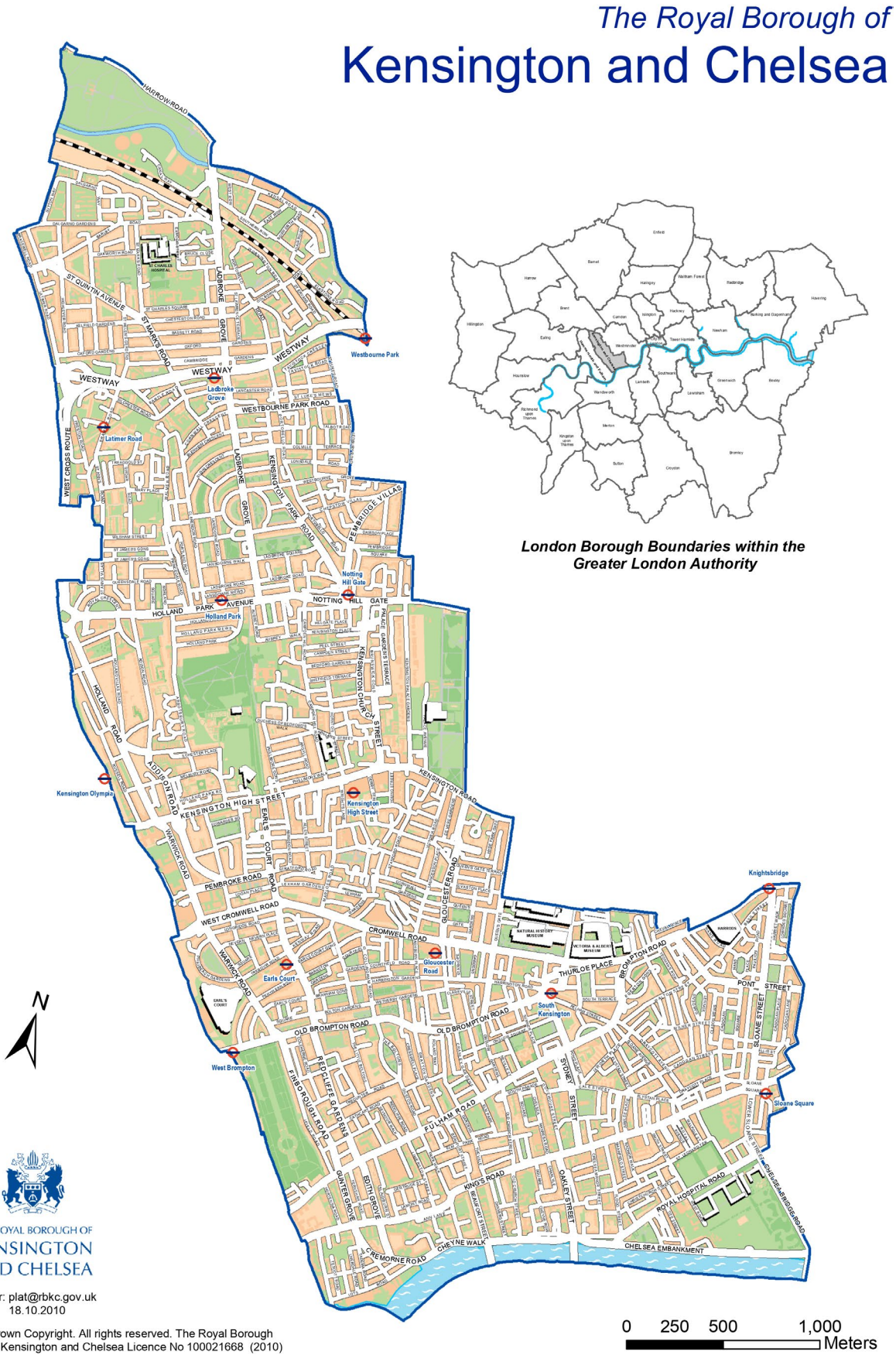

FIGURE 1 Map of Kensington and Chelsea. *Source*: https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/arts-and-culture/popular-local-maps.

pointing out that relatively little scholarship to date has attempted to historicise gentrification pre-World War II, and before Glass coined the term in 1964 (but see Dufton, 2019 on gentrification in Roman North Africa and Matznetter & Kadi, 2022 on nineteenth century Vienna). Indeed, some scholars, like Maloutas (2018) and Ghertner (2015), demand that we stick to Glass's outdated 1964 description (see Shin & López-Morales, 2018 for a robust critique of that stance).

The stage model of gentrification that has, to date, garnered the most attention is Hackworth and Smith's (2001) schematic history of gentrification in New York City, which extended its stages into the 1990s. Despite this model being tightly prescribed by the context of gentrification in New York City, it has often been drawn on to both explain and analyse gentrification in other cities, including outside of the USA. To some extent, this is because they stress that their model is based on readings of other cases outside of New York City too. Like with the Clay and Gale models gentrification begins as a post-World War II process: *First-wave gentrification* starts in the 1950s and lasts until the 1973 recession; it was 'sporadic' and 'state-led'. At this time, reinvestment from the private sector is seen as too risky and the public sector (the state) invests to lay the ground, making it more palatable and less risky. But pioneer gentrifiers are also agents 'green-lining' properties and neighbourhoods. *Second-wave gentrification* begins post-recession in the 1970s and 1980s and it is described as a period of 'expansion and resistance'. In this stage the process stabilises neighbourhoods and becomes more entrepreneurial. A *third wave of gentrification* begins in the 1990s, another post-recession gentrification which follows a 'recessional pause' and creates 'subsequent expansion.' This wave attracts more corporate and government investment. But after their model was published, the dot com bubble burst and throughout the 2000s low interest rates and financial deregulation triggered unprecedented housing bubbles globally.

Lees et al. (2008) subsequently discussed a *fourth wave of gentrification* in the US context, which was hinged on the increased availability of mortgages and creeping financialisation of national and global housing markets. They argued that 'disinvestment, reinvestment, and rent gap dynamics are now playing out in more geographically complex patterns, inscribing fine-grained inequalities of class and race in city neighborhoods' (p. 181), which they linked to predatory lending and Disaster Capitalism in the case of New Orleans. Some have argued that fourth-wave gentrification was simply a continuation or even intensification of third-wave gentrification (e.g., Doucet, 2014).

In a special issue of TESG on Hackworth & Smith's (2001) paper, the dominance of their model continued;, for example, He (2019) utilised their model but proposed a different periodisation on gentrification in China, and Van Gent and Boterman (2019) similarly adapted the periodisation to make it fit their case: Amsterdam.

Aalbers (2019) subsequently identified a *fifth wave* of gentrification for 2010–20. Fifth-wave gentrification was the urban materialisation of financialised or finance-led capitalism. The state, for Aalbers, continues to play a leading role in the fifth wave, but is now supplemented—rather than displaced—by finance. It is characterised by the emergence of corporate landlords, highly leveraged housing, platform capitalism (e.g., Airbnb), transnational wealth elites using cities as a 'safety deposit box', and a further 'naturalisation' of state-sponsored gentrification. Aalbers (2019; see also 2016, 2008) saw the financialisation of housing described by Lees et al. (2008) as a specificity of an American fourth wave of gentrification becoming increasingly generalised around the globe in 'fifth wave gentrification'. Moskowitz (2017, p. 34) writes, 'the fifth and last phase of gentrification is when neighborhoods aren't just more friendly to capital than to people, but cease being places to live a normal life—with work and home and school and community spaces—and become luxury commodities'.

Again from/in/on the US context, Hyra et al. (2020) set out to outline how the concept of gentrification has transformed over time since it was first identified by Ruth Glass in 1964. They focus in on the changing drivers of gentrification over time and clarify '*Fifth-Wave gentrification*' in relation to the 2007–09 Great Recession. They adopt and urge scholars to take a more historic perspective on place. Hyra et al. (2020) argue that they advance Aalber's (2019) work on the fifth wave by specifying the type of housing financialisation taking place during the fifth wave: rental real estate speculation, and connecting this rental speculation to the fallout from the Great Recession: 'the rise of the renter population due to foreclosures brought housing financialization out of the single family housing market and into the rental market, taking gentrification further from metropolitan America and bringing housing displacement pressures and evictions across the country' (p. 16). They assert that while each wave of gentrification exists independently, some dynamics carry over from wave to wave, and 'each wave is defined by the time period's primary drivers of urbanism and neighborhood change' (p. 8). We return to the use of the wave metaphor in our conclusion, where we discuss the value or not of stage models of gentrification. Where Matznetter and Kadi (2022) identified six *phases* of gentrification in their long history of Vienna from 1890 to 2020, we identify five *waves* in Kensington from the 1700s up until the current day.

3 | RUTH GLASS'S LOOKING *GLASS*

> Her intellectual confidence often came across to colleagues as abrasiveness. As the historian Mark Clapson has documented in *Anglo-American Crossroads: Urban Planning and Research in Britain, 1940–2010*, Glass was often dismissed by the American colleagues with whom she collaborated on urban research for the Ford Foundation in the 1950s, many of whom did not share her 'leftish sympathies'. The sociologist Edward Shils called her 'aggressive'; the Ford official Francis Sutton described her as 'emotionally volatile'. These impressions were colored by her status not only as a woman in a male-dominated profession, but as someone who was, in the words of her former student Michael Edwards, 'incapable of arse-licking'.
>
> (Subramanian, 2020)

Despite Ruth Glass (1964) conceptualising 'gentrification' in relation to Kensington, the gentrification studies literature has paid little attention to Kensington since. In what follows, we look at gentrification in London through the lens of Ruth Glass's Kensington. Glass was a Jewish German émigré who came from a relatively working-class background. She was the daughter of a 'factory burner' (Hobsbawn & Baker, 2004) who fled the Nazi persecution of the Jews. She was born in 1912 and as a teenager worked for a radical paper in Berlin while studying at the University of Berlin (Subramanian, 2020). By the mid-1930s she had left Berlin to finish her degree at the London School of Economics where she then worked. This was followed by a period of time at Columbia University in New York City (1940–42) where she attained a master's degree and worked at the Columbia Bureau for Applied Social Research, after which time she moved back to the UK and worked as a town planning researcher. In 1950 she began her academic career proper at University College London, where she became Director of the Social Research Unit in 1951 and founded the Centre for Urban Studies. It is interesting to note that the female sociologist Ruth Glass was viewed in very similar ways to the female geographer Alice Coleman—they were seen as brusque and difficult with problematic politics (Glass too Left, Coleman too Right), but both were strong, professional academic women working in a man's world who refused to be bullied or put down (on Glass: see Edwards, 2012[2]; on Coleman: see Lees & Warwick, 2022). Like other female academics in urban studies, especially those who are seen as a little separate or contrary, Ruth Glass has also been overlooked, even ignored.

It is useful to glean a little more about this female sociologist who coined the term 'gentrification'. If one looks at Ruth Glass in more detail, she emerges as a 'non-doctrinaire' Marxist who had left-wing views, but not communist sympathies and an anti-racist mindset (Hobsbawn, 1990). This is perhaps not surprising given her own experience of the discriminatory treatment of Jews both in Germany (Berlin) which she fled, but also in London (UK) where antisemitism was occurring both in British society as a whole but also among the established British Jewish community (see Davis, 2017). Glass with Pollins (1960, pp. 184–185) noted the links between racism and antisemitism at the time in how opponents to Oswald Moseley's fascist Union Movement were called 'Nigger Lovers' and 'Jews'.

As a Marxist, Glass was concerned with the social injustices of the class system both in Britain but also globally (Lees et al., 2016). In her numerous letters to *The Times* newspaper she criticised the British 1959 'Anti-Planning Bill' for making 'the rich richer and the poor poorer' (Glass, 1989, pp. 162–163); but also urban improvements in Third World cities for providing for the rich ('ornamental fountains in elite enclaves') and not the poor ('water taps in poor districts') (Glass, 1976). She was very concerned about the territorial expansion of rich people in the inner city at the expense of the poor—'gentrification'. In many ways, Glass was way ahead of her time in criticising urban policy for being 'detached from, or even opposed to, economic considerations' (Glass, 1981). She argued strongly that the inner city was not some cliché of 'unrelieved deprivation' but that it ought to be understood in terms of the proportion of affluent people having grown (post-war growth of a new middle class) and their territory expanding at the 'expense' of poorer groups (Glass, 1981).

Glass was also ahead of her time in integrating analysis of gentrification with migration, colonialism, racism—something that we turn to again in our case of Kensington here. In her 1961 book *Newcomers: The West Indians in London* (published with her assistant Pollins after the 1958 Notting Hill riots in Kensington and republished solo in 1961), Glass showed her concern for newcomers faced with racism: 'who nowadays can hardly find any open doors—especially if their skin is dark' (pp. 141–142). She also believed that imperial rule abroad (colonialism) had created a 'colour problem at home' (Glass, 1989, p. 149) and that 'native' Britons and not 'coloured immigrants' were the issue (ibid., p. 156). 'The real "colour problem", she claimed, was the persistent discrimination faced by non-white Britons in work and housing. She went on to excoriate what she termed the "benevolent prejudice" of British society—one that condoned discrimination as long as it didn't rise to the level of violence' (Subramanian, 2020).

As Wyly (2019, p. 15) points out:

> Glass's 'gentrification' chapter is a comprehensive attack on the 'neomalthusian' assumptions built into the 1944 Greater London Plan, the 1950s 'anti-planning' amendments of the Town and Country Planning Act that relaxed rent controls and 'liberated' market speculation, and the intensified economic oppression, racism, and segregation of a British society that refused to accept and adapt to 'the postcolonial world of today'—as the descendants of indentured servants and slaves from the far reaches of the Commonwealth arrived to claim their rights of citizenship.

He goes on to argue that:

> 'Gentrification' is simply one of the newer spatial mutations of the struggle for survival in the core metropolis of a fast-changing global imperial system. As the competition for the necessities of urban life (home, work, education for the children) becomes transnational amidst 'liberated' market forces, 'any district in or near London, however dingy or unfashionable before, is likely to become expensive; and London may quite soon be a city which illustrates the principle of the survival of the fittest—the financially fittest, who can still afford to work and live there'.
>
> (Glass, 1964, p. xx cited in Wyly, 2019, p. 15)

Gentrification for Wyly (2019, p. 15) only has meaning as a local or neighbourhood-scale process if it is understood as 'the manifestation of (a) wider processes of intensified social competition, and (b) state policies that regulate or reinforce human competition over the benefits of urban life'.

Hackworth (2019) stated that Hackworth and Smith (2001) never said that their model fitted other places and they warned against explanations and models that invoked only local differences which they argued would not tell us much—hence they used New York City as a template but drew on other cases. In a similar vein, in this paper, although we look locally in Kensington 'through *Glass*', we also draw on the wider literatures on gentrification constructed in/from other places. Unlike He (2019) and Van Gent and Boterman (2019), who according to Aalbers (2019), adapted 'the periodisation of gentrification (from Hackworth & Smith's, 2001 model) to make it fit their case', we sat back and reflected on the now substantive literature on gentrification globally, on new debates around its periodisation and conceptualisation, and made no decision about the temporality of our waves until we had amassed, as much as we could, the history of gentrification in Kensington. We then thought *through* not only Glass's Kensington but also through the waves others have conceptualised. In order to understand the particularities of gentrification in different places, we need to understand local histories but also be able to understand the global similarities and connections (Lees et al., 2016).

4 | WAVES OF GENTRIFICATION IN RUTH GLASS'S KENSINGTON

4.1 | Wave zero: Gentrification before coinage of the term and before World War II

Ley and Teo (2014) alerted gentrification scholars to think about gentrification without the name—we do that here by going back to Kensington as a rural settlement and its transition into an urban neighbourhood. The first detailed mention of Kensington is found in the Domesday Book, which lists a settlement with a population of 18 villagers, 7 slaves and 1 priest, and assets including 10 ploughlands (just under 2 square miles of farmland) and 200 pigs.[3] Surrounded by meadows, woodlands and marshy flood plains, Kensington was a village on a raised hill, and it remained predominantly rural for the next five centuries (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 10). From the beginning of the seventeenth century, royal courtiers and members of the gentry preferred to live away from the smoke and dirt of the City of London, and so moved to what was now becoming the fashionable suburb of Kensington (RBKC Virtual Museum, 2006). Between 1605 and 1620, three manor houses called Nottingham, Campden and Holland (named after aristocratic titles) were built, and in 1689 King William III commissioned the manor of Nottingham House to be extended and refurbished as Kensington Palace, his rural retreat away from the dampness of the river near Whitehall (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 19). In Georgian Kensington, new streets were formed, and more grand houses were built for the gentry between stretches of fields that went down to the outlying hamlets of Earl's Court, Brompton and Little Chelsea (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 27). By 1705, topographer John Bowack wrote that Kensington had 'ever been resorted to by persons of quality', including Earls

and Lords who resided there (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 14). Indeed, Kensington Palace has remained a residence for aristocracy and the royal family, the most notable of recent times being Princess Diana. Correspondingly Kensington was renamed the '*Royal* Borough' in 1901 (RBKC Virtual Museum, 2006). With the gentry occupying the southern parts of the borough on Phillimore Estate and Edwardes Square, the rest of rural Kensington was composed largely of farmland. Dairy farms were set up in Notting Barns, pigs were kept in Notting Dale, cornfields grew in Portobello Farm, and market farming took place in Earl's Court (Starren, 2006, p. 37). Interestingly, wave zero shows rural/suburban gentrification to be happening before urban 'gentrification' in Kensington, and it is clear that 'gentrification', even before Ruth Glass coined the term, was related to the borough's landed gentry.

Landowners subsequently leased their land to speculative builders to create housing developments, part of a Victorian housing boom catering for a rapidly increasing population. In Kensington in 1811, there were 10,886 residents but by 1841 this had increased to 74,898 (Clunn, 1955, p. 398). Farm buildings were demolished and estate development extended; within 10 years, 1600 houses were built in South Kensington. Terraced houses, artist studios, garden squares and villas were made available to middle-class families. Between 1817 and 1825, North and South Kensington experienced urban expansion with numerous squares and estates being built. The 1830s were quieter, but development picked up substantially in the 1840s, and by 1851 it was no longer rural but a city-suburb. In North Kensington two-thirds of the land belonged to only four owners; there was more varied ownership in the South (LCC, 1986). It was not until after 1851 when the 'Great Exhibition' in Hyde Park attracted millions of visitors to observe the technological and industrial achievements of the British Empire that Kensington became an urban neighbourhood (Starren, 2006, p. 50). The surge of people led to the extension of the District underground railway going towards West London (RBKC Virtual Museum, 2006). Off the back of a housing boom in 1867–68, hundreds of middle-class people were moving to Kensington, and between 1868 and 1871 landlords in Kensington leased their land to the railway companies and five stations were built: South Kensington, Gloucester Road, Earl's Court, West Brompton and High Street Kensington (Starren, 2006, p. 115). From the 1880s onwards, Victorian developments also included luxury mansion blocks such as Kensington Court and Iverna Gardens, which were fitted with electric lights and lifts (RBKC Virtual Museum, 2006).

However, while there were more homes and freeholds available for the better-off, this left the poorest in often dire situations. Kensington had some of the worst slums in London, with homes not served by sewage systems and pig-keepers forced to share their small cottages with livestock (see Denny & Starren, 1998). In the potteries and piggeries at the foot of Ladbroke estate, cholera outbreaks were common, and the average life expectancy was only 11½ years old (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 30). In 1850, Charles Dickens described Latimer Road as a 'plague spot scarcely equaled for its insalubrity by any other in London' (Sullivan, 2021; Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 32). In the late-nineteenth century, essayist and Kensington resident Leigh Hunt referred to the working-class parts of the borough as 'repulsive', 'hidden' and awaiting 'improvement' (Hunt, 1902, p. 1). Such attitudes highlight a longstanding tension between Kensington's reputation as an enclave for London's elite and a more complex history as a multi-class and multi-ethnic borough. A close look at the borough's history reveals a pattern of socio-economic stratification that has shaped Kensington's geographies since it transitioned from being a rural community to an urban one in the late-nineteenth century. The clearances of slums and rookeries in the nineteenth century and the displacement of inhabitants further north are just two examples of the many historic gentrifications that took place in the borough long before Glass coined the term in 1964.

4.2 | First wave/pioneer/classic gentrification (1950s–1960s)

First wave or pioneer gentrification, or what we now call classic gentrification, took place from the late 1950s to the early 1970s and was associated with upper-income individuals moving to, and rehabilitating, older housing units in urban, working-class areas. This process, depending on the city context, was known as 'gentrification', 'brownstoning', 'homesteading', 'whitepainting' or 'red-brick chic' (Lees et al., 2008; Osman, 2011). When she coined the term 'gentrification' in 1964, Glass was living in Kensington and had observed its emergence in her neighbourhood. In the late 1950s she led the UCL Centre for Urban Studies' first big piece of research—*Newcomers* (Glass & Pollins, 1960 [1st edit]; Glass, 1961) and in her discussion of housing in Notting Hill in Kensington she had already noted if not coined 'gentrification':

> the big houses had been converted to multiple use: rows of artisan's and coachmen's cottages had become fashionable residences; luxury flats had been built. And as since World War II there had been an acceleration of this trend—a growing aspiration of some sections of the middle and upper classes to 'return to town' rather than cope with the disadvantages of suburbia—there has been an increasing competition for central London sites

> and for the previous tradesmens and servants residences, and consequently a sharp increase in their price. The process of *middle class rejuvenation* ... can now be seen in Notting Hill, Bayswater, Paddington and Islington.
>
> (Glass & Pollins, 1960, pp. 47–49, our emphasis)

Glass sees urban gentrification as a post-World War II process, a reaction to suburban living, and class led. Despite having worked on race in *Newcomers*, Glass (1964) does not observe white gentrifiers displacing lower income Blacks (at the time predominantly Afro-Caribbeans) in Kensington. Afro-Caribbean newcomers, she said, lived in 'zones of transition', 'neglected patches of inner London' (Glass, 1961)—as we know Blacks and the Irish then were not welcome in working class districts which themselves were being gentrified. Glass's coinage of 'gentrification' uses Chicago School language—middle class *invaders* and *colonists* and her 'tongue in cheek' reference to the gentry (Lees et al., 2008, pp. 4–5) links the notions of invasion and colonisation with the pre-World War II British Empire, which was fraying and decolonising in front of her.

In Glass and Pollins' (1960) discussion of Notting Hill, one of the sites of the 1958 riots, she connects uneven development to neglected twilight zones, immigrants and exploitative landlords; and later links it to British colonialism and imperialism and the difficulties British society had in adapting to a new postcolonial world (Glass, 1989). Slum landlord Peter Rachman provided squalid housing for extortionate rents to immigrants in Notting Hill. What became known as 'Rachmanism', describing corrupt landlords and their exploitation of working-class people from minority backgrounds (Green, 1981, p. 226). North Kensington was also the locale in 1959 for Oswald Mosley's 'Keep Britain White', which was racist but also antisemitic. Glass (1989), in refuting Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, argued that there is no correlation between the size of a minority population, hostility and social unrest, making analogies to the rise of National Socialism in Germany.

In 1965, Ruth Glass and John Westergaard wrote *London's Housing Needs*. In this report, they examined population data and housing in North Kensington during the 1960s. Reporting on post-war conditions, they called North Kensington one of the 'transition zones' in the city, a space where old and new problems converge and accentuate one another (p. 4):

> It seems that such shifts have already produced increasing 'polarisation' in London society: the weight of both the upper and the low social ranks seems to have increased at the expense of the intermediate strata. Most importantly, those opposite groups have for the first time directly confronted one another, and have come into conflict with one another in their housing demands, in the same districts of London. The West East-End juxtaposition of earlier days is visible within some boroughs; even within some streets—not only, for example, between South and North Kensington, but also within each of these sectors.
>
> (Glass & Westergaard, 1965, p. 45)

The extreme social polarisation that we see today in Kensington has complex micro histories. Most of the literature on first-wave gentrification in London has focused on Islington (see Lees et al., 2008; Moran, 2007); despite Glass, less has been written on Kensington. Moore (2012) refers to the 1957 Rent Act,[4] which triggered gentrification on Portland Road in Kensington. A journalist, he interviewed pioneer gentrifiers Tim and Penny Hicks of 157 Portland Road who bought their 'dilapidated' house in 1968 for £11,750 and gutted it. Penny's mother 'was shocked that they had chosen to move their family from up-market Chelsea into an area more known for rag and bone men than bankers'. Penny Hicks said: 'At the local primary school, one of the teachers when we were being shown around, said to me, "You do appreciate Mrs Hicks, this is not working class. This is criminal class"' (Moore, 2012). The lifestyle/cultural impact of pioneer gentrifiers like these in Kensington could be found in the short-lived 'London Free School' in Notting Hill in the late 1960s, where the middle-class intelligentsia (academics, teachers, writers, students) would teach classes open to all (O'Malley, 1977, p. 31). The 1957 Rent Act saw the release of many rent-controlled tenancies into the private market once the tenant had given up their home; consequently, this law encouraged corrupt landlords, like Rachman, to remove regulated tenants using whatever means possible, including intimidation and 'winkling' (see Lees et al., 2008). This continued in the 1980s second-wave gentrification when Notting Hill slum landlord, Nicholas van Hoogstraten, turned off tenants' electricity, knocked down doors and removed furniture to attempt to remove them. The decontrol of secure housing and the increasing rental levels brought more pioneer gentrifiers to the north of the borough and displaced many lower income residents.

4.3 | Second-wave gentrification (1970s–1980s)

Although not gentrification per se, another socio-economic displacement took place in Kensington in the late 1960s into the 1970s, one that spanned the first and second waves of gentrification. O'Malley (1977) pointed to the class displacements/upward trajectories taking place in North Kensington between 1966 and 1974 as being a consequence of regeneration schemes led by the local authority rather than a gentrification led by private landlords and individuals. O'Malley's (1970) report on Notting Hill pointed to the displacement of poorer by wealthier residents that happened with the slum clearances and their replacement with new council estates. Many of the houses that were demolished in the slum clearances were substantial and only a little run down by 1970, which would no doubt have created anxiety among the many working and lower-middle class residents who were displaced after losing their homes in favour of high-rise tower blocks (Walker, 2017). The Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington (including Grenfell Tower) was built in 1974, replacing houses described as slums that were razed to the ground. Housing over 2000 people, the Lancaster West Estate became one of the largest estates in the borough. The first people to live in Lancaster West Estate during the 1970s were a mixture of working-class *and* lower-middle income residents who initially responded positively to their new homes: one woman living in a three-bedroom flat in Barandon Walk called it a 'palace—we're living in luxury now and we love it'.[5] The flats had modern comforts, including central heating, gas and electrical points for kitchen appliances (Priest, 2017). Private flats were also built and O'Malley (1970, p. 104) noted the impact of these building schemes on pioneer gentrifiers: 'higher income tenants who had displaced the low-income families were now faced with a [local authority] plan to displace them with even higher income tenants or flat buyers'. Indeed, there were stories elsewhere in London of upper/middle class (pioneer gentrifier) professionals fighting these slum clearance schemes (e.g., Toby Eckersley in Southwark[6]).

Hackworth and Smith (2001) argued that policy makers and government action fuelled gentrification during the second wave. This played out in complex ways in Kensington. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) has been dominated by and controlled by the Conservative Party since 1964 and it has worked with private developers in the speculative financialisation of new-build housing, including selling of large amounts of land for private use and failing to create more social housing. O'Malley (1977, p. 101) outlined how the council's refusal to do a compulsory purchase order for a block of houses in Colville Gardens, Notting Hill, in favour of it being sold to a private property company to turn into luxury flats inevitably led to years of mismanagement, decline, threats and the displacement of many families. This was not a stand-alone case; the council heavily relied on the private market to redevelop sites, build and maintain new homes, and make so-called improvements to the area. The impact that the shortage of social housing and the increasing private market had in Kensington was noted by historians Walker and Jackson (1987, p. 102), who observed how houses were built for professional and independent classes with less families in evidence: 'it's mews and artisan terraces have long since been "gentrified"; but the number of residents of long standing dwindles as property changes hands every few years for increasingly large sums which only high earners can afford. Those who provide the essential services to such a community can rarely now afford to live nearby, as they did once'. While Kensington Council had a slightly more passive role in the second wave (compared with the third and fourth), the more underhand techniques to gentrify were evident in the 1980s. For example, in response to public opposition against the demolition of the old Victorian Town Hall as part of a redevelopment scheme on Kensington High Street in 1982, the Council ordered for a huge wrecking ball to destroy the building in the middle of the night before it could be listed by conservationists; the entire building was gone by 1984 (Walker & Jackson, 1987, p. 102).

4.4 | Third-wave gentrification (1990s)

Shaw (2008) has stated that a third wave of gentrification was 'characterized by interventionist governments working with the private sector to facilitate gentrification: quite a shift from the typical second wave position of passive support'. In the 1990s, Atkinson (2000) investigated gentrifiers in Kensington and found that residents made a fundamental distinction between gentrification in the north of the borough compared with the south. The gentrifiers from the north were regarded as the usual middle classes attempting to go into homeownership, while the south of the borough was described as already being gentrified by people with vast amounts of money who were not living in the borough most of the time. Atkinson's analysis of the rental market in Kensington took him to the top end of the market, a transitory series of empty homes that ultimately destroyed permanent communities (Atkinson, 2000). Gentrification in Kensington in the 1990s led to a 'continued upward movement in the status of those being displaced and those acting as gentrifiers'

(Atkinson, 2000, p. 317). The upper-class young people (Sloanes) were being displaced by stockbrokers, thus signifying the social change in the area. Atkinson also talked to project workers at Tenants Rights Projects in Kensington and was told that the constant turnover of residents in the south had resulted in the breakdown of communities and, consequently, increasing crime levels and anti-social behaviour. A lot of this was put down to absent owners and empty houses in the area, meaning that the transitory nature of residents left 'little social fabric' (Atkinson, 2000, p. 321). Despite being in the richer, south of the borough, gentrification 'eroded' people's desire to remain in their home (Atkinson, 2000, p. 321) because of the socio-physical, economic and environmental changes that were occurring around them (phenomenological displacement).

Trellick Tower in North Kensington (see Figure 2) is an interesting example of third wave gentrification in the area. The tower is a high-rise block of flats designed by architect Erno Goldfinger—an example of the 'new brutalism'. A council tower block that housed low-income residents, it fell into decline due to negligent management and became home to drug dealers and other anti-social behaviours; it was nicknamed the 'Tower of Terror' (Carroll, 1999). By 1998 it was a Grade II listed building, a popular tourist spot, a modernist architectural icon and valuable real estate. After Margaret Thatcher's right-to-buy scheme, which saw many working-class tenants buy, sell and leave their homes, many of the flats in Trellick Tower (with their incredible views over West London), were let out at high rents or sold on to rich private buyers—in 1999 these ex-council flats were being sold for £150,000 (Carroll, 1999). With no replacement for the loss of social housing, there was a shortage of council homes, and an influx of wealthier residents moved into North Kensington, 'young families, professionals and pensioners' (Carroll, 1999). This coincided with the introduction of expensive artisan shops, cafes and bakeries on Golborne Road (commercial gentrification). Furthermore, the Greater London Council finally decided to fix windows, install new lifts and entry phones, and arrange for regular cleaning of the marble floors (Carroll, 1999)—repairs that had been long neglected by the local authority. Trellick Tower now contains a mix of council homes and privately owned homes worth between £500,000 and £1m; property developers are encroaching on the land around Trellick Tower with plans to build more private housing—something backed by local government against the wishes of long-standing residents who do not want to lose valuable open space and suffer more gentrification/displacement (Solomon, 2022).

4.5 | Fourth-wave gentrification (2000s)

When Lees et al. (2008) mooted a fourth wave of gentrification, they said it was only really apparent in the USA at the time:

> The identification of this fourth wave of gentrification in the United States reinforces the importance of considering the geography of gentrification, for this fourth wave is not readily identifiable outside of the United States. In the United Kingdom, for example, any suggestion of a fourth wave of gentrification is more about the extension and consolidation of national urban policy ...
>
> (p. 184)

But it was subsequently observed and written about elsewhere. Scholars argued that in the fourth wave the commodification of housing intensified due to global capital and the increased financialisation of the housing market (Aalbers, 2016), and that state-led action continued. Fields and Uffer (2016) also noted how real estate investment trusts (REITs) were purchasing multifamily developments, transforming 'affordable housing into a new global asset class' for maximising profits (p. 1486).

By the 2000s, part of Kensington had certainly experienced super-gentrification (Lees, 2003; see also Butler & Lees, 2006 on super-gentrification in Barnsbury, Islington). Moore (2012) described Portland Road where the pioneer gentrifiers Tim and Penny Hicks we mentioned earlier had bought a house as 'multi-million pound houses, three-stories high, without so much as a curtain out of place. There's a beauty spa, a wine bar and a gallery selling artworks that cost tens of thousands of pounds'. The dilapidated house they bought for £11,750 in 1968 was now worth more than £2m. Echoing Golash-Boza's (2023) discussion of 'before gentrification' in Washington D.C. and the creation of (there racial) wealth gaps, Moore (2012) made an important point, that the path to gentrification was clear when Portland Road was compared with maps created by Charles Booth a century earlier (see Figure 3). The once most well-to-do part of the street was super-gentrified by 2012. Super-gentrification, as Lees (2003) argued when she coined the term, was a process

FIGURE 2 Trellick Tower, North Kensington. *Source*: Photograph by Loretta Lees.

FIGURE 3 How 'before gentrification' (from Charles Booth's poverty maps) fed into gentrification on Portland Road, Kensington. *Source*: Diagram courtesy of the BBC.

of re-gentrification of previously wealthy areas; a new layer of gentrification within the fourth wave. We see here quite clearly how the architectures of inequality are shaped and indeed reproduced over time.

Despite the 2008 recession, which saw a huge decline of owner-occupation and an increase in the private rental sector across the UK, the prime and super-prime (top 5% and 1% of the market) in Kensington stayed strong throughout the recession and onwards (RBKC, 2015). With so-called super-gentrifiers moving in, there was growing concern in the local authorities about the appearance of council estates. The RBKC (2009) Notting Barns South Masterplan, an Urban Initiative proposal to create a 'more successful urban neighborhood' (p. 5) favoured the demolition of Grenfell Tower, stating: 'We considered that the appearance of this building and the way in which it meets the ground blights much of the area east of Latimer Road Station [and] is likely to be of a type of construction that is hard to adapt' (p. 19). These plans were dropped in February 2012, the same year that cladding Grenfell Tower was proposed as an alternative (see below for more; and Rozena, 2022).

4.6 | A fifth wave (from 2008) hyper-gentrification

Fifth-wave gentrification in Kensington escalated third- and fourth-wave gentrification, corporate landlordism took off, housing became highly leveraged, platform capitalism (e.g., Airbnb) took off, and the import of transnational wealth increased significantly. Elites were using the borough as a 'safety deposit box', and there was a further 'naturalisation' of state-sponsored gentrification. Fifth-wave gentrification was qualitatively different: 'tapped into a global flow of finance, hyper-gentrification is a process that sees distorted local dynamics between property values, rent, and salaries' (Kaminer et al., 2023, p. 14).

Akin to the recessions found in Hackworth and Smith's (2001) model, Hyra et al. (2020) discussed how in 2007 the US housing market bubble burst, and gentrification briefly slowed while credit markets froze. Gentrification in the USA stalled during the 2007–09 Great Recession; the stalling, however, was temporary, some gentrifications continued, and a fifth wave emerged. There is evidence that from the UK property market crash in 2008 (related to the 2007–08 global financial crisis) onwards a fifth wave of gentrification emerged in Kensington. Since the 2008 housing market bubble, there has been an increase in overseas buyers across the UK, but more significantly so in Kensington and Chelsea. In 2008, for example, an Abu Dhabi consortium under the ownership of the former UAE president, bought up the housing plot, One Kensington Gardens, for £320m; most of the flats in this luxury block still remain empty (see Rozena, 2023, on 'buy-to-let gentrification'). This has heightened the issue of empty homes, increases in both the rental and property markets, and increasingly transient communities. Burrows et al. (2017, p. 185) have asserted that the super-rich takeover of the city (fifth-wave gentrification in London) was 'not just an extension or intensification of "super-gentrification"

processes' (like those described by Butler & Lees, 2006, in Barnsbury, London); but in another global city—New York City—Halasz (2018) argues differently that super-gentrification and financialisation in elite, global cities began during the third wave of gentrification and has escalated in the fourth and fifth. Corporate landlordism, a factor of housing being seen as 'just another asset class' (Aalbers, 2019, p. 6) is best exemplified in Kensington by an entire block of rent-controlled tenement flats above a high street in Kensington being bought by a global investment company worth billions of pounds in the mid-2010s (Rozena, 2023). We concur with Burrows et al. (2017), for as Manuel Aalbers (interviewed in Kaminer et al., 2023, p. 50) has said, 'super-gentrification' is more about people investing in cities in their own countries, while 'hyper-gentrification' is people investing in cities in other countries.

Atkinson, Burrows, Glucksberg et al. (2016) and Atkinson, Burrows and Rhodes (2016) describe an upward colonisation by capital in which raw money-power increasingly dictates the social, political and symbolic landscapes of the city; this is what happened in Kensington. Glucksberg's (2016) research on Kensington went further than Atkinson's (2000) examination of empty homes in the south of the borough; she wanted to find out how high-value land was used as a housing investment in Kensington and what the motivations of foreign investors were. She identified money laundering and politicians encouraging foreign investment and the property business for their own financial benefit. She identified four different categories of investment: buying to invest, buying for business, buying for children, and buying to leave. Minton (2017, pp. xi–xiii) wrote how the alpha elite neighbourhood of Kensington was the perfect place for foreign investors, oligarchs and the super-rich who change places 'out of all recognition' (pp. xi–xii), so 'even the wealthy are displaced from Kensington' (p. xii). Knowles (2022) has used the term 'plutocratification' to describe the ways in which global plutocrats 'make the city in their own image' by displacing the poor, demolishing homes and rebuilding or renovating for the property market (pp. 125–126), and this term fits the case of Kensington well.

Kensington and Chelsea claims the largest percentage (27.9%) of mega-large basement developments in the capital (Burrows et al., 2021); where affluent professionals have created basement swimming pools, cinemas, gyms, game rooms, wine cellars, saunas and even staff quarters (Batty, 2021). In Kensington streets we can see the advanced signs of 'plutocratification' (Anthony, 2022; Knowles, 2022) with houses owned by mega-rich men, including Dubai leader Sheikh Mohammed, former Chelsea F.C. owner Roman Abramovich, Sultan Hassanal Bolkaih of Brunei, China's richest man Wang Jialin, Russian ambassador Alexander Vladimirovich Yakovenko and Lakshmi Mittal, the CEO of the largest steel production company in the world. Heythrop College, University of London, closed down to be redeveloped into a 'caviar care home' for over 65s, with the lowest rents set at £156,000 a year (Knowles, 2022, p. 163). These largely empty mansion houses and new-build luxury apartments have made Kensington and Chelsea an infamous ghost town for the super-rich. Contributing towards this is the sheer number of Airbnb rentals (4463 listings in 2022 according to Inside Airbnb), which has resulted in displacement effects or 'Airbnbificaiton' (see Rozena & Lees, 2023). Kensington also has one of the highest figures in London for empty homes (1700 in 2017) due to the increase in new-build empty luxury apartments built over the last 15 years (see Rozena, 2023). This luxury new-build gentrification is of a higher economic order than the new-build gentrification first identified in central London by Davidson and Lees (2005) at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the south of the borough, the council has allowed towering new-build structures that are completely private and purchased by overseas buyers, including investors, developers or the super-rich. While the council has claimed it does not (currently) intend to build *more* luxury homes for the transient super-rich in Kensington, these large, luxury buildings remain primarily empty, un-used and lifeless.

How Kensington 'looked' (how it saw itself through the looking glass) became increasingly important during fifth-wave gentrification. Brutalist post-war architecture that symbolised socialism was out, unlike the gentrifying Trellick Tower, other modernist Grade II listed buildings were demolished. Figure 4 shows one of these to be replaced with a neo-Georgian terrace similar to that which stood there before it was bombed during World War II. Culture Critic on X said:

> London is healing. This depressing postwar block in Kensington was torn down and replaced with a neo-Georgian terrace—similar to what stood there before it fell victim to an aerial bombing. The postwar brutalism was once designated a Grade II listed building in 2007, on the basis of its 'simple but forceful expression of the Modernist principles of form and function'. Fortunately, this was quickly revoked citing a 'procedural error'. What we have now is a beautiful, white stucco fronted townhouse, complete with porticoes and balconies like its neighbours—restoring life back to the otherwise intact square.[7]

Ungentrified architecture that could not be got rid of was covered up or concealed. In 2012, RBKC proposed cladding Grenfell Tower (see Davidson & Lees, 2010, on the recladding of the council tower block Aragon Tower, and its privatisation into Z Apartments) with the aim of upgrading the heating and improving the appearance of the building. We

FIGURE 4 Neo-Georgian building replaces 1950s building in Kensington. *Source*: Image from X.

now know that the aluminium plate cladding fitted in 2015 was a cheaper alternative to the zinc that had originally been planned and was responsible for the external spread of the deadly Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, alongside many other internal failures that had been neglected by the tenant management organisation (see Apps, 2022). The cladding was part of a wider regeneration scheme in the area itself in which local facilities were created (e.g., Kensington Aldridge Academy) or upgraded (the nearby leisure centre) for some of the new wealthier residents. The focus on appearance or 'facadism' in this context has led many low-income residents in the north of the borough to suffer exclusionary and physical displacement on top of the deaths of 72 people in the Grenfell fire—an extreme, yet pertinent, example of the devastating effects of local authority-led fifth-wave gentrification (see Figure 5).

5 | CONCLUSION

As we write this paper in 2024, it is 60 years since Ruth Glass coined the term 'gentrification':

> [m]arginalized in a male-dominated academy, Glass struggled to carve out space for herself... Yet even beyond coining gentrification—the term that outlived her—Glass set the agenda for a generation of postwar social scientists, breaking new ground in both the study of race relations and in community studies. In an increasingly divided world, where the fragmentation of community has shattered older notions of belonging, and where backlash against immigration is reshaping the political landscape, Glass's work resonates more than ever.
>
> (Subramanian, 2020)

In this paper, we set out to develop a gentrification stage model for London, looking through (including before and after) Ruth Glass, in Kensington, the context from/in which she coined the term 'gentrification' (see Figure 6). What is clear is that Ruth Glass understood gentrification to be even more complex than her oft cited 1964 coinage indicates, but she was wrong in asserting that a whole district and population would change. In our research, we found gentrification to have

FIGURE 5 Grenfell Tower fire and remains of cladding on the morning of 14 June 2017. *Source:* Photograph courtesy of Satish Pujji, 2017.

begun much earlier than previous stage models have identified—in our wave zero we found rural/suburban gentrification to have happened before urban 'gentrification', gentrification by a more traditional 'gentry', earlier examples of displacement of the poor, new-build gentrification in the second wave displacing pioneer gentrifiers, and what can best be described as the structures of social polarisation that still characterise the borough. As Verlaan and Hochstenbach (2022, p. 439) argue: 'Bringing a historical perspective into the field of gentrification studies will not only demonstrate how history matters for the appearance and functioning of our cities today, but will also lead to a better understanding of long-term developments and the temporalities of social life'. The first wave of gentrification we discuss is akin to Glass's classic identification, but we also looked beyond her oft cited work on social class to include her other writings on race and colonialism to consider whether race was an issue she somehow ignored in post-war gentrification. We concluded it was not because the areas that Black (mostly Afro-Caribbean) immigrants (and indeed the Irish) lived in at that stage were not gentrifying; we also identified the early role of the state in the 1957 Rent Act as the end of first generation rent control. This concurs with Verlaan and Hochstenbach (2022, p. 440), who argue 'it is often falsely assumed that state involvement was absent in previous waves and that gentrification therefore used to be a spontaneous process, when in fact early forms of gentrification also saw considerable state involvement'. In our second wave, we reveal the complex manoeuvring of public and private housing development, including class displacements/upward trajectories taking place in North Kensington as a result of regeneration schemes led by the local authority rather than a gentrification led by private landlords and individuals. The same was evident in Vienna, as Matznetter and Kadi (2022, p. 451) found: 'Gentrification by pioneers coincided with state-led urban renewal activities and triggered modest gentrification in selected areas of the city'. In the third wave, gentrification in Kensington really takes off and you get the sense that the borough now wants to expunge any signs of non-gentrification. By the fourth wave, the process of 'super-gentrification' and a big push from

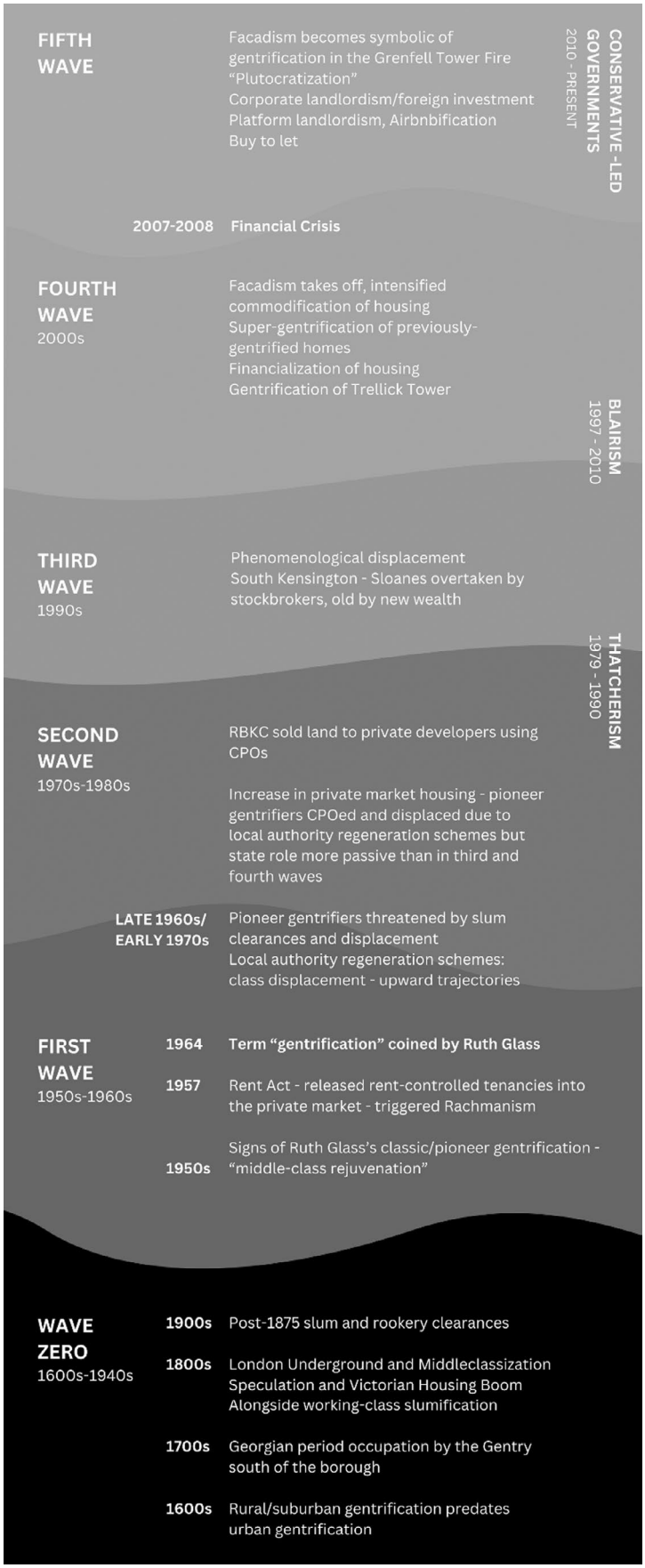

FIGURE 6 A stage model of gentrification in Ruth Glass's Kensington. *Source*: Drawn by Ting Wei Li.

global capital are evident. In the fifth wave, this becomes 'plutocratification' and facadism is rife, even as the Grenfell Tower fire reveals the appalling inequities and injustices being enacted on Kensington's poor and is now characterised as a repercussion of racial capitalism in a different immigration context than Glass saw post-war. What is clear is that gentrification in Kensington has intensified over time. The hyper-gentrification now happening in Kensington is sitting awkwardly, yet also unashamedly, with micro pockets of extreme, and now increasingly racialised poverty. As Hyra et al. (2020) discuss, some dynamics of each gentrification wave carry over and largely this is contextual and depends on the local history; yet each wave also describes a significant driving force of urban change. We concur, but would argue that each wave can include more than one significant driving force of urban change. Within our big or cascading waves are little waves or surges: events or flashes that occur within the big waves, for example, policy changes like the 1957 Rent Act or the cladding of Grenfell Tower and subsequent fire. What is really concerning is that gentrification constantly unfolds and mutates, there is no end point (Lees, 2003), it is on repeat, and the big and little waves become folded into the regular structure of neighbourhoods and cities under capitalism.

In undertaking this exercise, we have found previous stage models of gentrification and even conceptualisations of different types of gentrifications to be somewhat problematic: some claims have not been quite right. Going back in time and revisiting earlier stage models and histories of gentrification will help us revise our theories and concepts and think through the predictive, or not, capabilities of gentrification stage models. Stage models in urban research have long sought to make sense of urban processes and phenomena, trying to answer the basic question—why? Birch (1971) discussed the development of stage theories of urban growth as urban planners sought clear statements about the relations between urban environmental change, population movements and characteristics, but in many ways it is the wave metaphor within stage models that we should focus on.

There is an interesting history to the wave metaphor in social theory. Helmreich (2020, p. 289) states that the figure of the wave merged in the nineteenth century to describe the social world, then in the twentieth century waves became vehicles through which social scientists grappled with scale and causality. Waves posed questions about structure versus agency—but he says it is not clear if they were overpowering structural forces or signs of ground up collective social agency. Helmreich (2020, p. 303) discusses two ways of conceptualising waves: cyclical and successional; the former emphasises structure over agency; the latter are manifestations of social or collective agency. But in reality, the two often blend, as our discussion of Kensington shows. A stage-model of gentrification attempts to add clarity and orderliness to an ever-changing urban landscape, it attempts to describe and even reveal the different ways that capital has, and continues to, dramatically influence housing, neighbourhoods, and indeed cities (Aalbers, 2019). The waves in our stage model are not stages per se; the wave metaphor is more flexible, 'one wave dissipates, and the next one comes. The waves are always overlapping a little and they can merge' (Manuel Aalbers interviewed in Kaminer et al., 2023, p. 50).

Drawing on the now extensive research on gentrification in London which we have both contributed to, we put together our stage model of gentrification in Kensington as a first step to see if it might help us develop a stage model for London as a whole (which has not been done to date). Our conclusion is that there is no real value to drawing up such a model beyond what we have already done for Kensington, for the borough has experienced most, if not all, of the gentrification types that have been identified to date in London, and as such acts as a useful schema. Some argue that the advantage of stage models is that they might aid us in being able to predict future stages of gentrification and thereby resist them. In looking back at previous stage models of gentrification, they do not seem to be able to predict the next wave of gentrification, context seems a better predictor. In part this helps explain the emergence of new attempts to model and predict gentrification; for example, Yee and Dennett (2022) who use machine learning to uncover the past and future of gentrification in London, and even identify different types of gentrification. Hyra and Lees (2021) wondered about a sixth wave of gentrification post-COVID, but we feel that a sixth wave has not emerged in Kensington or London; this might be explained by new data that suggest that London is no longer actively gentrifying, whereas other British cities like Manchester are (Tunstall, 2024).

So do gentrification stage models, like ours, still have a value? We would argue yes—*but*. In the round they are useful in terms of trying to make sense of the process over time, and they have particular value in terms of looking backwards and considering (even rethinking) past trajectories, theorisations and conceptualisations of gentrification. Newly emerging work (see, for example, Mezaros et al., 2025, on 'gentrification regimes') is being, and we would argue should be, more critical of gentrification stage models going forward.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable - no new data generated, or the article describes entirely theoretical research.

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ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/urban-lab/research-projects/2022/feb/remembering-ruth-glass/

[2] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/urban-lab/research-projects/2022/feb/remembering-ruth-glass/

[3] https://opendomesday.org/place/TQ2479/kensington/.

[4] The Rent Act of 1957 decontrolled rents in more valuable houses and all new tenancies after a landlord had secured vacant possession. Basically it was the end of first generation rent control, it also brought about changes in the maximum rents payable, and so on.

[5] https://inews.co.uk/news/perfect-storm-disadvantage-history-grenfell-tower-80807

[6] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/18/toby-eckersley-obituary

[7] https://twitter.com/Culture_Crit/status/1736005174999552479

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