

In what regards was
sparkbrook a zone of
transition at the time
of rex and moore'...



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I am going to look at how Sparkbrook in the 1960's could be seen as a zone of transition, as described in Burgess's Chicago school study, in relation to the housing classes, conflicting interests of the immigrants and the immigrant's position within Sparkbrook. However I will also look at how Sparkbrook in the 1960's was different to Burgess's zone of transition. After the Second World War Birmingham went through a period of economic boom, causing many low paid, unskilled jobs being available, leading to mass immigration of people from the commonwealth, in order to take advantage of the employment opportunities and to escape persecution.

This inevitably led to housing and accommodation shortages, which caused many social problems within the Sparkbrook community leading to social conflict, racism and poverty. The social conflict was mostly due to the immigrants having very different norms and values to the Sparkbrook community and also that Britain in the 1960's was not the multi-cultural society that it is today. (In praise of sociology, Race and housing in the inner city). The study was developed on Burgess's concentric zone theory of urban development, and in particular the zone of transition.

Due to the housing shortages the immigrants were forced to live in slum-like housing in this zone, where living standards were poor and there was no sense of friendly community, solidarity, or value consensus, due to inhabitants constantly coming and going. The immigrants also saw the housing as temporary, and therefore did little to improve the living standards or social relations around them, so they deteriorated. (In praise of sociology, Race and housing in the inner city).

The immigrants entering Britain had a different culture and had experienced different socialisation, therefore they had different norms and values. This threatened the solidarity and value consensus (Talcott Parsons, Haralambos and Holborn) within Sparkbrook, leading to many of the immigrants becoming marginalised and consequently suffering from racism and discrimination. They couldn't afford a mortgage, and neither were they known in Sparkbrook, so a landlord had no reference, in order to base tenancy agreements on, leading to their marginalisation.

The welfare state was of no benefit to the immigrants, as they did not fit the criteria necessary, to be allocated council housing, as it included living in Britain for a certain amount of time, so it only benefited the white population. This is reflected in Rex and Moore's study, as they couldn't find one coloured immigrant, which had been allocated a council-built property. Thus the housing choices were limited for the immigrants, resulting in housing classes developing, which is a typical feature of Burgess's zone of transition, and is what Rex and Moore see as central to the understanding of urban conflict.

However this would not be a problem today, as council policies and the welfare state have become considerably more equal in the way they treat ethnic minorities, compared to the 1960's. (Race, community and conflict and Aspects of modern sociology, social conflict, John Rex, chapter two). Although Rex and Moore focused their study on Burgess's concentric zone theory, Sparkbrook is a lot more complex in structure than Burgess's zone of transition, as in Sparkbrook the allocation of housing involved the Welfare state, for allocation of council housing.

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However Burgess's theory saw that the allocation was simply down to the competition for housing between the different inhabitants in that area. Similarly Burgess's study ignores the fact that the class struggle within the city also determines the housing allocation, as those of a higher social class position in society had a greater chance of being allocated the higher standard housing. Similarly the people of a higher social class would have a stronger link with the state and therefore their housing needs would be seen as more of a priority, than that of the immigrants and lower classes.

However in Sparkbrook, like Burgess's zone of transition the immigrants could provide each other with strength and hope in order to cope with their oppression, caused by having low paid manual jobs and living in slum-like rented accommodation. However this was not the only cause for their political and structural position within Sparkbrook and more widely society, within the police force there was little representation for the immigrants, therefore the treatment of the immigrants by the police reflected this.

There were no police policies set up to assert a legal right of equal treatment for the ethnic minority immigrants. Thus they had little faith in the police and other institutions of law and order, giving the immigrants a negative view on society in Britain and making their situation worse. (Ghetto and the underclass, John Rex). Similarly the education system did not provide equal treatment for the younger generation of immigrants, most of the teachers were white, middle class, males who stereotyped the ethnic minorities, as they were from deprived areas and didn't have the cultural or material factors to attain high grades.

Thus restricting employment opportunities, as without the qualifications they could not aspire to a well paid job. (Haralambos and Holborn, pages 868-873). The grouping together of the immigrants, was due to the fact that they had similar aims and to make money. They also sought to uphold their culture, as a way of forming an identity within society, therefore sub-communities developed within Sparkbrook where the immigrants could feel socially and culturally at home.

This can be displayed in the way in which the Irish kept their culture in Sparkbrook, in order to distinguish themselves and to provide a sense of security; however this actually reduced their integration into wider society and caused racism and discrimination. However their culture was seen as threatening to the white population and incited anger, leading to racism within Sparkbrook. (In praise of sociology, Race and housing in the inner city). Racism made the immigrants more marginalised, as it reduced their integration and assimilation into the city and kept them in segregation from the white population.

However even though this tells us about the lack of assimilation of ethnic minorities within the nineteen sixties, it isn't really useful in relation to today's society. This is due to the fact, that since the 1960's, Britain has become considerably more multicultural and racism is now seen as criminal offences and a breach of human rights. (Race, Community and conflict, chapter IV and XII. Haralambos and Holborn). The problems for the immigrants seemed to be a vicious circle, as there was little chance of social mobility and improvement in the quality of their lives.

It was only possible for them to move out of the zone of transition into the suburban area, if they got a good job and earned a sufficient amount of money. This is typical of Burgess's zone of transition as he sees the inhabitants to be in a poverty stricken situation, in which they have little control. (Ghetto and the underclass, chapter two and Race, Community and Culture, chapter XII). Sparkbrook can be seen as a typical example of the zone of transition, as displayed in Burgess's study as there were three types of housing, lodging houses, terraced housing and working class housing administered by the government.

Immigrants found themselves in this type of housing along with the undesirables in society, with the most common type of housing for the immigrants to be the lodging houses. However some of the immigrants, particularly Pakistani's owned the lodging houses and rented out the rooms to other immigrants. This gave them a higher, more powerful, position within the social strata of the Sparkbrook community and the zone of transition, as they were property owners instead of tenants. (Race, community and conflict)

However the situation in Sparkbrook is more complex than the way Burgess describes the zone of transition, as the Pakistani's in Sparkbrook have chosen the situation they were in, as it adhered to their own cultural values and it was away of making an income. Therefore they did not see themselves to be poverty stricken, or living in Sparkbrook due to lack of choice, but instead through choice. (Race, community and culture and in praise of sociology, Race and housing in the inner city).

Much of the discrimination in Britain towards the immigrants was caused by the Government and councillors mainly being made up of white, middle class, males, in the 1960's, with no intention of appointing any ministers or councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds. This was largely due to Britain not being a multi-cultural society in the 1960's and thus the protection, interests and rights of ethnic minorities were not seen as a priority. This resulted in the ruling class/bourgeoisie being represented and their ideology being reflected in government and council policies on housing and employment.

Due to inequality, the ethnic minorities were at a disadvantage within society and were disadvantaged by the council's decisions in Sparkbrook, for example the Tenancy agreements and council house criteria which did not advantage the immigrants. Therefore this displays how the zone of transition situation developed within Birmingham, as the immigrants had restricted life chances, in relation to housing and employment and therefore lived together with others who were in a similar situation and who experienced the same discrimination and prejudice.

However it could be argued that the situation which the immigrants were in was a deeper, more fundamental social problem than that described in Burgess's theory, as it was actually a problem caused by the lack of representation of society members within the state and among the powerful, influential positions held in society. (Race, Community and Culture). In conclusion Sparkbrook in the 1960's was very similar to Burgess's zone of transition, as the housing allocation problems were due to competition between the inhabitants.

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This resulted in the immigrants living in slum-like housing and having little power to do anything about it, due to lack of choice and job opportunities available to them. This meant social mobility was not an option for them. However the problems in Sparkbrook in relation to housing and the immigrants situation, also had a lot to do with the council, Welfare state and the inequalities which existed within the British society in the 1960's, in relation to marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities.

In addition the Pakistani's chose to live in Sparkbrook and buy the lodging houses, as it was a source of income and matched their cultural values, therefore they were not restricted by choice and the housing classes described in the zone of transition are therefore not so distinct. Sparkbrook at the time of Rex and Moore's study, therefore is similar to Burgess's zone of transition, but in some ways is a lot more complex.