This chapter builds upon and progresses from the last chapter’s exploration of the intersection of the discourses of coloniality with the formation of Whiteness, villageness, Englishness and middle-class identities. To do this I focus upon the discourses that support and maintain sharp divisions of race, class and place that mark the White Leicestershire landscape off from the urban BrAsian cityscape in Leicester. In short, I scrutinise the ways in which the tropes of ‘the city’ and ‘the country’ provide a route into thinking about the reproduction of discourses of Whiteness, coloniality, Englishness and classed identities.

In the previous chapter, my argument was that central to the routine and mundane beliefs and practices that embed notions of villageness within Whiteness, Englishness and middle classness is the articulation of colonial notions of cultural difference that serve to screen out and displace BrAsian residents’ historical colonial and postcolonial relations with Englishness and Britishness. The result of this process is that BrAsians are depicted as immigrants and cultural outsiders to the village, the nation and ultimately the West. The rural thereby becomes associated with seemingly ‘timeless and quintessential’ national values (see also Chakroborti and Garland, 2004).

In this chapter, I shall develop this aspect of my argument to examine how collective denial of Britain’s colonial history not only brings about the Whitening of the village and the countryside but also hardens and fixes negative racialised images of the city (Gilroy, 1987; Hesse, 1993; Keith, 2005). For example, the supposed ‘anarchy’ caused by BrAsian and Black settlers to British cities was famously dramatised in the 1960s by the nationalist politician Enoch Powell, in his evocation in a speech of ‘an old White woman, trapped and alone in the inner city’ (Gilroy, 1987, p. 86). Gilroy suggests that the old White woman symbolised
the ‘bleak inhumanity of urban decay’ that Powell and his supporters believed postcolonial settlers to spread. Clearly, this representation of BrAsian and Black settlers to the British city as intruders and cultural outsiders to the nation rested upon the forgetting of the relations of Empire that connected postcolonial settlers to British cities in the first place.

Hesse (1993) maintains that the effect of forgetting BrAsians’ and Black Britons’ colonial relations to Britain is to denote British inner city neighbourhoods as ‘ghettos’ in the postcolonial present. The latter are neighbourhoods that are home to BrAsian, Black British and other minorities in the UK; they become depicted as places that represent not only local but also national degeneration and decline. According to Hesse (1993, p. 164), attached to ‘the ghetto’ are signifiers of racial difference that encapsulate the totality of Black and BrAsian lifestyles, which are juxtaposed to the wholeness of White British identity, history and tradition that lie elsewhere.

In this chapter, I will examine how, on the one hand, the process of White amnesia of the colonial past underpins the idea of the city of Leicester as an exotic place that is the site of BrAsians and their culture, which at times becomes entwined with a working-class aesthetic; and, on the other hand, how the countryside is portrayed as a White middle-class domain that represents the true spirit of Englishness. In making this argument, it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of some of the history that connects BrAsians and Black Britons to the countryside, the city and the nation. This history is routinely screened out in the racialisation of the country and the city. For example, the building and upkeep of British stately homes was financed and built through the profits of African Caribbean slavery (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997). In addition, whole villages of people from South Asia were brought to Britain to work in the Lancashire and Yorkshire cotton mills (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997). The history of the English nation’s stereotypically favourite beverage – tea with sugar – can be traced to colonial histories of slave labour in the African Caribbean and in India, which is also connected to the exploitation of Other people’s land (Colls, 2002).

Closer to ‘home’ in Leicestershire, older White people have memories of working for colonial institutions, and relics from Empire remain buried in the landscape. It is precisely the collective amnesia of this history that allows Leicester BrAsians to be depicted as immigrants and cultural outsiders who belong categorically in the city and not the English countryside. One consequence of this discourse is for the countryside to come at times to represent the English nation. In this way, an