

SHATTERED NATION

INEQUALITY AND THE
GEOGRAPHY OF A FAILING STATE



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Shattered Nation

*Inequality and the Geography of
a Failing State*

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1. The Roundabout

Where did you grow up? For the first few years of my life, I lived in a house on a road between a cemetery and a shopping centre. I don't remember much of those years, and I suspect that I was too young to really know where I was living within the city. I now know that there was near full employment around me, and that my rose-tinted recollections of smiling faces fitted the mood of the times. People had never had it so good. Britain had never been so equal. Life chances had never been as fair as they were then, and they were better for more people than they had ever been before, even for those who fared worst.

When I was aged six, in 1974, my family moved to a house close to a major roundabout on the east of the city. In the 1970s, which neighbourhood a child lived in mattered far less for their life chances, and which local school you went to was less important than it is today. House prices varied far less between areas, and children who grew up in private housing and council housing more often played together, largely unaware of whose parents paid rent or had a mortgage.

There were two general elections in 1974. These were becoming turbulent times, but the turbulence had not yet affected my neighbourhood....