

**ETHNICITY AND THE MULTICULTURAL CITY**  
**Living with Diversity**

**Ash Amin**  
**University of Durham**

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## Introduction

Issues of race and ethnicity have come to the fore in British public life, and partly as a result of the public commitment that the Government has made since 1997 to the desirability of a non-racist and multicultural Britain. The last few years have seen the profiling and condemnation of racially motivated violence and harassment, a hand-wringing debate on institutional racism following the publication in 1999 of the Macpherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, proposals to tighten up action against racism and to improve the lot of minority ethnic people, discussion of what nationhood and belonging means in a multiethnic society, following the publication of the Parekh Report (Runnymede Trust, 2000), and a raw argument on the rights of asylum seekers feared to be 'swamping' this crowded island. Most recently, after the street confrontations in 2001 involving Asian youths in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, new issues have entered the national debate. These include alarm at the scale of ethnic deprivation and segregation in poor urban areas, growing Islamophobia and unashamed questioning of the cultural and national allegiances of British Muslims (reaching pitch fever after September 11), widespread moralising about what it takes to be British, and concern about the activities of racist organisations such as the BNP, now tapping into anxieties of neglect and resentment among poor White communities.

Almost no day goes by without discussion of some of these issues in the media by politicians, journalists, experts and stakeholders, all surrounded by a mountain of new research and existing knowledge. Much as the issues are varied and complex, such is the pace and volume of opining that the scope for radically new insight is becoming narrower by the day (even though public arena continues to crave for new discoveries). This is not a sign of deficiency, but possibly one of maturity, for it marks the availability of excellent research and the visible tracks of sustained debate on the issues. The value of by 'think pieces' such as this one lies in the kind of story told and the proposals that follow from it. This is the scope of this modest contribution within a field of excellent existing scholarship on race and ethnicity in Britain. Its focus falls on the everyday urban – the daily negotiation of ethnic difference - rather than on the national frame of race and ethnicity in Britain. It emphasises the politics of local liveability, that is, the role of local micro-publics of social contact and encounter – how they are constituted and the terms of engagement within them – as a prime site for reconciling and overcoming ethnic cultural differences. It also aligns itself with a perspective that takes ethnicity as a mobile and incomplete process, seeking, firstly, to recognise - against current popular stereotyping - the very real cultural dynamism that is to be found within minority ethnic (and White) communities, and secondly, to interpret questions of inter-ethnic understanding and exchange as a matter of democratic participatory politics - fragile and temporary resolutions springing from the vibrant clash between empowered publics - rather than as a matter of policy fixes or cross-ethnic community cohesion.

The study focuses on the problem of inter-ethnic intolerance and conflict in urban contexts where mixture has failed to produce social cohesion and cultural interchange. There are many neighbourhoods in which multiethnicity has not resulted in social breakdown, so ethnic mixture itself does not offer a compelling explanation (for that matter, race hatred is frequent in White deprived areas). The first part of the study attempts to uncover the forces behind entrenched ethnic suspicion and moments of urban conflict through an analysis of the triggers and enduring factors behind the civil unrest that erupted in the northern English mill towns in mid 2001. It explores in particular the dynamics of deprivation, segregation and changing youth cultures. The prime purpose of the study, however, is not to dwell on

the 2001 riots, but to use the issues raised by them as a springboard to discuss what it takes to combat racism, live with difference and encourage mixture in a multicultural and multiethnic society. The second part of the study on rights to the city discusses the possibilities for such inter-culturalism. It does so at the level of everyday negotiations of difference within local micro-publics of prosaic interaction. But, it also addresses structural influences and national questions of political engagement, citizenship and belonging in a multiethnic society which influence the capacity of individuals and groups to interact fruitfully as equals. The study concludes with a discussion of how action to strengthen micro-publics of negotiation might be framed. In addition it suggests that the achievement of a genuine inter-cultural society requires a new language and popular understanding from which the strong overtones of Whiteness are removed from understandings of British citizenship and national belonging, so that citizens of different colour and culture can coexist as equals and with the same right of claim to the nation.

### **Urban Ethnic Conflict – Race Matters?**

The civil unrest that erupted in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley during the Spring and Summer of 2001 was a palpable reminder of the geography of racism and cultural intolerance in Britain. While there is no denying that isolated incidences do occur almost anywhere, that the fear and hatred of others cast as racialised strangers is woven into a national psyche of belonging based on Whiteness, there is a discernible geographical pattern to sustained and everyday ethnic intolerance and conflict. Its striking feature is that inter-ethnic relations are played out as a neighbourhood phenomenon, linked to particular socio-economic conditions and cultural practices that coalesce into a local way of life. It is known that within the same city even adjacent neighbourhoods can be different in terms of the degree of racial and ethnic understanding and conflict. Thus, the temptation to associate 'race trouble' with entire cities or particular types of city (e.g. provincial or metropolitan) needs to be avoided. An aggregated geography of numbers is a poor indicator of the nature of inter-ethnic relations in Britain (except, perhaps, in terms of size affecting the capacity of minority ethnic communities to organise and retaliate against racism).

The ethnographic research on areas of marked racial antagonism seems to identify two types of neighbourhood. The first are old White working class areas in which successive waves of non-White immigrant settlement have been coupled to continued socio-economic deprivation and cultural or physical isolation between White residents lamenting the loss of a golden ethnically undisturbed past, and non-Whites claiming a right of place, often against each other (Back, 1996; Alexander, 1996; Mac and Ghail, 1999). Their cultural dynamics are quite different from those within many other mixed neighbourhoods where greater social and physical mobility, a local history of compromises, and a supportive institutional infrastructure have come to support co-habitation of some sort. The second are 'White flight' suburbs and estates dominated by an aspirant working class or an inward-looking middle class repelled by what it sees as the replacement of a homely White nation by another land of foreign cultural contamination and ethnic mixture. Here, frightened families, White youths, and nationalist/fascist activists disturbed by the fear (rarely the experience) of Asian and Black contamination terrorise the few immigrants and asylum seekers who happen to settle there (Back and Nayak, 1999; Hewitt, 1996).

The latest unrest in the northern English towns exemplifies the processes at work in the first type of neighbourhood, but also the White fear and antagonism characteristic of the second type of neighbourhood. The main reason, however, for focusing this section on them, is to identify the underlying causes, some of which appear not that different from those behind other urban disruptions past and present. This is not to

diminish the significance of the particularities of time and place. Over the years, different triggers have sparked urban clashes in different cities, and the nature of the conflicts has varied, involving different ethnic groups, different grievances, and different entanglements between the police, media, activists, and youths. Similarly, the intensity of conflict in a given place has varied in the course of time. Southall and parts of Leicester have learned to live with, and even move on from, the open racism that blighted them in the 1970s. These particularities, therefore, do matter. In the case of the 2001 disturbances, as Arun Kundnani (2001: 105) graphically describes:

The fires that burned across Lancashire and Yorkshire through the summer of 2001 signalled the rage of young Pakistanis and Bangladeshis of the second and third generations, deprived of futures, hemmed in on all sides by racism, failed by their own leaders and representatives and unwilling to stand by as, first, fascists, and then police officers, invaded their streets. Their violence was ad hoc, improvised and haphazard. It was no longer the organised community self-defence of 1981 when Asian youths burnt down the Hambrough Tavern in Southall, where fascists had gathered .... And whereas the 1981 and 1985 uprisings against the police in Brixton, Handsworth, Tottenham and Toxteth has been the violence of a community united – Black and White – in its anger at the ‘heavy manners’ of the police, the fires this time were lit by the youths of communities falling apart from within, as well as from without; youths whose violence was, therefore, all the more desperate. It was the violence of communities fragmented by colour lines, class lines, and police lines. It was the violence of hopelessness. It was the violence of the violated.

The triggers in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford have been extensively debated in the public arena since summer 2001. One important trigger was the visibility (street and electoral) of the BNP, and its ability to play on stories of Muslims as cultural aliens and pariahs, as recipients of preferential treatment, and as perpetrators of race attacks on innocent White people. The ‘invasion’ of Asian areas by the police has been seen as further provocation, condemned for its rather too quick condemnation of Asian youths, compared to its treatment of fascists and White racism. Another trigger was media reporting itself, which sensationalised the disturbances and sparked further anger through its highly racialised account of events as they unfolded. The easy labelling of ‘bad Asian youths’ declaring their areas as ‘no-go areas for Whites’, ‘local authorities taken over by Asian interests’, ‘tradition-bound communities’ - in the end helped to confirm prejudice. This includes the reactions of the disenfranchised White working class, which turned to the BNP as the voice of a new victim community, as it heard about Asians allegedly hogging state funding and making Whites feel like minorities in their own land. The final trigger was the sheer accumulated anger and frustration of pockets of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men with their life circumstances and their marginalisation, the paternalism of their so-called community elders, vilification in the media, heavy-handed or insensitive policing, and the incursion of ‘outsider’ claimants such as the BNP. Much of their protest, it seems, had to do with years of victimisation: ‘the racist killing of Tahair Akram in 1989; the arrests of Asian school children for defending themselves against racist attack; the expulsion of a young woman from a local school for wearing a head dress; the false accusations of ‘conspiracy to commit racist crime’ which is now routinely used by the Police against Asian young people’ (Kalra, 2001: 6). And yet, as Les Back (2001: 6) notes, while every other possible viewpoint has been publicised, ‘the voices that are conspicuously absent from the public attention are those of the ‘rioters’ themselves. Nowhere are they to be heard. They are much talked about, but they do not speak’.

To the extent that these triggers can be seen as immediate 'causes' of the disturbances, they need to be tackled. Other outbreaks will not be prevented unless steps are taken to control the cultural hate and incitement worked up by the NF and BNP, if the police remain relatively inactive about the all too frequent incidences of racism against Asians in these towns, or if the young rioters continue to be labelled as racialised others and criminals. The media too has a responsibility to reflect on the provocations of partial or biased reporting, and it needs to air the voices of the youth. There are, however, longer term factors of significant general policy implication behind the long history of cultural tension and social conflict in these northern English towns. The three factors that stand out are socio-economic deprivation, segregation, and new youth politics, all three of which, importantly, cut across ethnic divides, and to that degree, blunt the power of ethnic culture-based explanations.

### ***Deprivation***

The history of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities is intimately tied to the histories of the Lancashire and Yorkshire towns on both sides of the Pennines as mill towns. After the war they provided the cheap labour that allowed the mills to face the growing international competition in the textile industry. While this was sustainable for a while, after the mid 1960s, the employment base shrank unrelentingly as a result of job-displacement by new technologies and the closure of mills unable to compete with cheaper textiles from the developing countries. There were few other alternatives in these one-industry towns. Kundnani (2001: 106) explains the consequences for the Asians:

As the mills declined, entire towns were left on the scrap-heap. White and black workers were united in their unemployment. The only future now for the Asian communities lay in the local service economy. A few brothers would pool their savings and set up shop, a restaurant or a take-away. Otherwise there was minicabbing, with long hours and the risk of violence, often racially motivated. With the end of the textile industry, the largest employers were now the public services but discrimination kept most of these jobs for Whites.

Old divisions in labour market outlets for Whites and Asians were swept aside by mass unemployment, intense competition for public sector or low-paid and precarious work, and economic insecurity in general. For over twenty five years, large sections of the population in these towns have faced severe economic hardship and uncertainty, with more than a generation living with unemployment (around 50% among young Asians in Oldham). These are also years of related social deprivation. The string of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities across the Pennines that are among Britain's most impoverished one per cent (Kundnani, op. cit.), and many other White working class estates share acute problems of social stigmatisation, low educational achievements, unpleasant housing and urban amenities, elevated health and drug-abuse problems, and a pathology of social rejection that reinforces family and communalist bonds .

Ethnic resentment has bred on socio-economic deprivation and a sense of desperation. Economic collapse removed the workplace as a central site of integration and common fate, for, as Kundnani (op. cit.: 106) notes, the 'textile industry was the common thread binding the White and Asian working class into a single social fabric. But with its collapse, each community was forced to turn inwards on to itself'. Competition for scarce local opportunities combined with economic

marginalisation to fuel resentment, especially as stories grew of Whites getting better jobs and better housing estates, and of Asians receiving preferential welfare support. Social deprivation too exacerbated ethnic differences, for it removed part of the material well-being and social worth that can help in reducing jealousy and aggression towards others seen to be competing for the same resources. Much popular analysis has ignored this factor in preference for cultural explanations, but the 'violence of the violated' on all sides of the ethnic divide cannot be grasped without an understanding of the contributing material privations.

### **Segregation**

Both the Ouseley (2001) Report on community fragmentation in Bradford and the Home Office (2001) Report *Building Cohesive Communities* on the disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, have identified ethnic segregation as a major long term cause of the disturbances. Both highlight the long drift towards self-segregation among working class Asians and Whites, barricaded in their own neighbourhoods, socialised through enclave ethnic cultures (Muslim or White preservationist), and educated in local schools of virtually no ethnic mixture. The Ouseley Report, for example, lists a range of developments symptomatic of an eroded commons and of cultural closure on ethnic lines. These include: lack of communication between communities; a political structure bowing to community leaders and regeneration programmes forcing communities to bid against each other; a poor public image of the area and poor public services, exacerbating White and minority ethnic flight; and a segregated school system that has failed to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes and played a marginal role in brokering cultural shifts between family, school, and public life. These are the forces that have led to inter-cultural intolerance of a highly ethnicised nature, in a public realm of relinquished commitment to the commons.

Rather too much has been made of Asian retreat into inner urban wards to preserve diaspora traditions and Muslim values, while not enough has been said about White flight into the outer estates as also ethno-cultural in character - deliberately escaping Asian ethnic contamination and wanting to preserve White Englishness. This imbalance needs to be addressed, since there is no shortage of recommendations to get Asians to step out of their cultural shell (by learning English, giving up faith schools, moving into White areas, embracing British liberalism, questioning traditional beliefs and practices), while the cultural practices of Whiteness and the resulting exclusions are never commented upon in the same way. It is not clear who has wanted to be put into an ethnic cultural cage. The segregation of the Asians and their cultural isolation has also been forced: as Whites moved out of cramped and dilapidated houses in the inner-city areas to new housing estates, with the help of discriminatory council housing policies, poor Asians had little choice other than to settle in the abandoned areas. As Kundnani (2001: 107) explains:

The fear of racial harassment meant that most Asians sought the safety of their own areas, in spite of the overcrowding, the damp and dingy houses, the claustrophobia of a community penned in. And with Whites in a rush to flee the ghettos, property prices were kept low, giving further encouragement to Asians to seek to buy their own cheap homes in these areas.

Segregation in housing led to segregation in education, and a record of poor results in both White and Asian areas due to deprivation, and a schooling system 'mired in a culture of failure' (Kundnani, 2001: 107) and family/community dissatisfaction. In this context of ethnic separation, all manner of ethnic accusations and myths flourished,

one of which – perhaps a self-fulfilling myth – was that Asians, now a majority, did not want to mix with the Whites, a beleaguered minority.

Awareness of the historical link between discrimination and segregation in these northern mill towns helps to position the increasingly popular thesis that cultural isolation lies at the heart of the disturbances, so that the way forward lies in greater ethnic mixing. The Home Office report has recommended that future housing schemes should be ethnically mixed, while others have suggested that existing estates should create mini-villages and develop imaginative schemes so that interaction can take place between ethnic groups (Power, 2000). The Ouseley Report focuses on ways of fostering a coherent and integrated social unity, by proposing citizenship education in schools, equality and fair treatment standards within the public sector, and workplace reforms to meet multi-cultural needs. These are genuinely well-meaning proposals to advance cultural dialogue, but underlying them is a worrying assumption of cultural fixity and homogeneity within both the majority and minority ethnic communities, one that possibly makes too much of the demons of segregation.

Virinder Kalra (2001) has raised a number of challenging questions about this assumption. First, he notes that cities such as Leicester, now considered by many as an example of trouble-free and progressive urban ethnicity (after many years of conflict and negotiation, it has to be said), is as ethnically segregated as Bradford. Indeed, put differently, there are many mixed neighbourhoods in a number of British cities that are riddled with prejudice and conflict between Asian, White and African-Caribbean residents. Second, therefore, there are other processes cutting across the spatial patterns of residence to shape cultural practices, such as the inwardness produced by deprivation and inequality, the hatred, suspicion and fear aroused by popular, organised and institutional racism, the experience of sustained discrimination or exclusion along racial and ethnic lines and the stories that communities – proximate, distanced and virtual – end up tell of themselves and others. For Kalra (2001: 14), the work of the young men in the streets of the mill towns had to do with the 'defence of their territories from the incursion of racist groups and from police harassment', not cultural closure. Third, Kalra actually contests the assumption of cultural homogeneity and closure within the Asian community. He notes (2001: 12-13):

A young Asian Muslim born in Oldham has a deeply different structural upbringing from his sister who lives with him as well as his brother in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir. From a young age this young man will be exposed to an English language media promoting the dominant values of the society. From the age of four compulsory schooling formalises the process of value transmission. ... Even in those schools where the *hijab* is a norm, where there is a prayer room for daily prayer, where *halal* meat is served at lunch times, the history curriculum will still consist almost entirely of European subjects and particularly of the British monarchy. ... It is the case that White children know nothing of the values of other traditions but certainly Asian Muslim young people are educated into the operative dominant values of the wider society.

It needs to be asked, therefore, who is likely to benefit from mixing and whether all the Asians in question fit the stereotype of the bearded mullah in traditional dress who speaks only broken English and looks exclusively to the East. Fourth, and particularly among the very people who were involved in the protests, there is plenty of commonality and cross-over with the so-called mainstream. Kalra gives the mundane example of the halal food takeaway which serves many White clients who

routinely interact with Asian staff, and where Asian consumers 'engage with the fast food consumptive culture of the wider society' (p. 13). In a similar vein, Les Back (2001) comments that there is a strong masculine culture that is shared between the young White men and young Asian men mobilised by the riots. Their violent confrontations display a common aggressiveness, common 'gang' codes, and a similar bodily language. Of course this sameness is used to mark division, but only some aspects of this division are about ethnic cultural difference, with the rest about the frustrations of youth alienation and diminished social prospects on both sides of the ethnic divide, the particularities of gang formation, and masculine protections of turf and territory. The trope of cultural segregation along ethnic lines takes us only so far.

### ***Generational Change and a New Youth Counter-Public***

Like most inner city race riots in Britain since the 1970s, those in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford involved young men, whose defiance in the streets earned them – as before – the reputation of criminals, militants, ungrateful immigrants and cultural separatists. The media gathered snippets of fact and fiction to demonise them as drug dealers or addicts, petty criminals, school drop outs, car-cruisers, perpetrators of gratuitous attacks on elderly Whites, beyond the control of their families, women and elders, disloyal subjects and Islamic militants. They were seen to be as bad as gangs of White racists and other violent marginals, and possibly worse, especially when cast as budding terrorists by the frenzied Islamophobia that has followed September 11.

There is, however, an alternative narrative of the young Asians that puts their actions in 2001 in context (without denying a social pathology that includes some of the demonic occurrences). Once again, Kundnani elegantly explains:

By the 1990s, a new generation of young Asians, born and bred in Britain, was coming of age in the northern towns, unwilling to accept the second-class status foisted on their elders. When racists came to their streets for a fight, they would meet violence with violence. And with the continuing failure of the police to tackle racist gangs, violent confrontations between groups of Whites and Asians became more common. Inevitably, when the police did arrive to break up a meleé, it was the young Asians who bore the brunt of police heavy-handedness. As such, Asian areas became increasingly targeted by the police as they decided that gangs of Asian youths were getting out of hand.

The setting for the riots, thus, was in place, as was their interpretation as Asian gang trouble. It is clear, however, that the young Asians have to be seen as a counter-public with distinctive citizenship claims – one that cannot be reduced to ethnic and religious moorings nor to a passing youth masculinity. Theirs was a strong claim of ownership of particular bits of turf in these towns of racialised space allocation – now public spaces such as streets, parks and neighbourhoods, no longer just private or closed spaces. As such, it was an act of questioning the ethnic assumptions of belonging in Britain. By asserting a presence on their terms within British public life, the Asian youths challenged those who want to keep them in their own minority spaces, and they unsettled the majority opinion that minorities should behave in a certain way in public (essentially by giving up all but their folkloristic cultural practices). It is this disruption of the racialised coding of British civic and public culture that has made these riots so politically significant.



Crucially, as a counter-public, this new generation has its differences with its own ethnic elders and self-appointed Asian community leaders. As Kundnani (2001) explains, the 'state's response to earlier unrest had been to nurture a black elite which could manage and contain anger from within the ranks of black communities' (p. 108). Thus 'a new class of 'ethnic representatives' entered the town halls from the mid 1980s onwards, who would be the surrogate voice for their own ethnically-defined fiefdoms. They entered into a pact with the authorities, they were to cover up and gloss over black community resistance in return for a free reign in preserving their own patriarchy' (p. 108). The result was the subtle retreat from a politics of combating racism and economic and social inequality to a politics of ethnic recognition and ethnic cultural preservation (around mosques, special schools, and the like) which kept the Asian patriarchs in place and the White leadership one removed from the violence of the violated (Black and White). The new politics, however, kept a lid on difficult problems such as gender inequality and a growing drug problem within the Asian community, it fragmented the Asian community as different ethnic groups were pressed into competing with each other for grants, and it allowed White communities and White activists to develop a language of victimhood based on special state deals for Asians. But, above all, it suppressed the voice of younger Asians - a voice mixing tradition and modernity, diaspora and English belongings. This is evident in the desire of young women for better and longer education and a choice over marriage partners, but within a frame of commitment to Islam and kinship ties (Dwyer, 2000; Macey, 1999), and in the desire of young men to mix consumer cultures and meet racist insult with attitude, but also not to question existing gender inequalities and diaspora beliefs.

There is a complexity to the cultural identity of the Asian youths that cannot be reduced to the stereotype of traditional Muslim, Hindu, Sikh lives, to the bad masculinities of gang life (although the masculinity of the rioters cannot be denied), to the all too frequently repeated idea of their entrapment between two cultures. These are young people who have grown up routinely mixing 'Eastern' and 'Western' markers of identity, through language, bodily expression, music, and consumer habits, who are not confused about their identities and values as cultural 'hybrids', and who, partly because of racial and ethnic labelling and the rejection that comes with deprivation, have developed strong affiliations based on kinship and religious ties. Their frustration and public anger cannot be detached from their identities as a new generation of British Asians claiming in full the right to belong to Oldham or Burnley *and* the nation, but whose Britishness includes Islam, halal meat, family honour and cultural resources located in diaspora networks (Dwyer, 2000; Qureshi and Moores, 1999). They want more than the ethnic cultural recognition sought by their community leaders in recent years. Their actions in Summer 2001 were about claiming the public turf as bona fide British subjects, without qualifications, and freed from the politics of community consensus practised by their so-called representatives.

This connection between multiple and mobile youth 'ethnicities' and a new politics of turf is a widespread phenomenon. There is a sophisticated literature on the anthropology of young British Bengalis and Pakistanis (Alexander, 2000; Alibhai-Brown, 2000), British African Caribbeans (Back, 1996, Alexander, 1996) and British Whites (Hewitt, 1996; Back and Nayak, 1999) living in poor mixed urban neighbourhoods. Claire Alexander (2000), for example, in a subtle and compassionate study shows that the young Bengalis she worked with in a London neighbourhood are both far more and far less than their typecast role as members of violent and criminal 'Asian gangs'. Their acts of violence are shown to be contradictory and spontaneous, the product of racist name calling, group rivalries, insensitive school exclusions, rejecting but also playing up to easy labelling (by the

police, by community elders, by teachers), strong friendship loyalties, and, above all, pretty miserable socio-economic circumstances. Such contextualisation is not meant to diminish the significance of the acts of violence, but to puncture the reduction to ethnic characteristics of the youths behind them, to grant them a multiple and evolving identity that can take them in different directions:

... these are the same young men who are now three-quarters of the way through their Duke of Edinburgh bronze award; who pored over books about Bangladeshi history, religion and language for their cultural display [a fashion event called *Style and culture '96*]; who practised routines for nearly two months; and who turned up on the day with white boxer shorts, a neat row of shirts from the dry cleaners and – the biggest sacrifice of all – no hair gel. And if at times none of them felt they would make it, the motivation to show what they were capable of, given the chance, overrode everything else. On the night they were foot-perfect, acne-free and, when they walked on in traditional Bengali dress, they brought the house down (Alexander, 2000: 22).

How these complex identities mingle with the everyday local public culture to shape youth race politics is tellingly revealed in Les Back's (1996) ethnography of White and Black youth identities in two adjacent South London neighbourhoods – 'Riverview', a run down area of White flight and marked racism, and 'Southgate', a so-called 'no-go Black' area that, in fact is consciously less racist and more open to cultural exchange. Southgate, with its higher number and street power of Black people, its Black cultural institutions, its history of steady ethnic mixture, its relatively higher social and geographical mobility, and its sense of place shared by White and Black people, has produced an inclusive 'our area' local semantic system (as opposed to Riverview's local semantic system based on 'White flight') that does not tolerate popular racism (though institutional racism remains a problem). For Back, the young people's negotiations through Southgate's inclusive social semantics have opened up the possibility of genuine cultural syncretism, resulting in 'a new ethnicity that contains a high degree of egalitarianism and anti-racism' (p. 123) and re-orientations of meanings of race and belonging. He explains that these everyday negotiations have nudged White youths to vacate concepts of Whiteness and Englishness, creating 'a cultural vacuum into which a host of Black idioms of speech and vernacular culture were drawn (p. 241), while Black youths have developed a non-defensive notion of Blackness based on diaspora connections, a local vernacular, a reworking of Britishness by claiming a Black aspect to it, new hybrid musical forms, and mixed-race identities. Identities and attitudes on the move on different sides of the ethnic divide, and in this case, towards each other.

To conclude this first part of the study, the analysis has emphasised the role of three factors behind the 2001 protests, all echoed in the ensuing Home Office (2001a) report, which details nine factors: (i) the lack of a strong civic identity or shared values; (ii) the fragmentation and polarisation of communities on a scale that amounts to segregation; (iii) disengagement of young people from the local decision making process, inter-generational tensions and an increasingly territorial mentality in asserting identities; (iv) weak political and community leadership; (v) inadequate provision of youth facilities; (vi) high levels of unemployment; (vii) activities of extremist groups; (viii) weaknesses and disparity in the police response to community issues; and (ix) irresponsible coverage of race stories by sections of the local media. My analysis is not far from these factors, but the tone and emphasis has been different, concerning especially the implications of physical segregation, the assumption of cultural homogeneity within the Asian communities, the complex performances of Asian youth identities and aspirations, and the discussion of

citizenship and belonging in terms of disputed rights claims (rather than as questions of civic identity or shared social values).

### **Rights to the Multicultural City**

The issues raised by the 2001 riots – and other examples of marked racial and ethnic antagonism in Britain – are not unique. They are part of the broader question of what it takes to combat racism, live with difference, and cultural exchange in multiethnic society. This question too is influenced by racism (popular, organised and institutional), differentials of inequality and deprivation, discourses of immigration and minority rights, and patterns of cultural contact. This section discusses the possibilities for ‘inter-culturalism’ at this broader level. The term is used to stress cultural respect and dialogue, and it contrasts with versions of multiculturalism that either stress cultural difference without resolving the problem of communication between cultures, or versions of cosmopolitanism that speculate the gradual erosion of cultural difference through inter-ethnic mixture and hybridisation. The literature on race, multiculturalism and citizenship has tended to discuss these possibilities at the level of national rights and obligations, individual or collective. My emphasis, in contrast, falls on everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, on micro-cultures of place through which abstract rights and obligations, together with local structures and resources, meaningfully interact with distinctive individual and inter-personal experiences. This focus on the micro-cultures of place is not intended to privilege bottom-up or local influences over top-down or general influences, since both sets make up the grain of places. It is intended to privilege everyday enactment as the central site of identity and attitude formation. The section begins with a discussion of the nature of the local spaces in which inter-cultural exchange can occur, and then goes on to discuss the aspects of national belonging and citizenship which sustain a democratic everyday urbanism.

### ***From Public Space and Housing to Prosaic Negotiation and Banal Transgression***

That identities are mixed and increasingly unhinged from traditional moorings is a poor indicator of any shift towards progressive attitudes on ethnic and cultural difference (Hall, 1996; Cohen, 1999). For example, only too often, young people from different ethnic backgrounds living in mixed neighbourhoods, unconsciously borrowing from each others’ cultures and routinely drawing on mosaic global consumer cultures, avoid each other on ethnic grounds. Their own mixity and that of others is sublimated – in service of the security of purity - to a consciously ethnicised construction of self identity. This is evident among White youths steeped in Caribbean music and African-American consumer culture, but sympathetic to racist views and the idea of a White Britain. Many young Asians, too, at home with everyday British cultural practices, are keen to draw on Islam or Hinduism and family or diaspora beliefs to mark their identity as specifically that of a distinctive minority ethnic group (Jacobson, 1997; Saeed, Blain and Forbes, 1999). Inter-ethnic understanding, therefore, is not guaranteed by everyday cultural hybridisation. It requires the removal of fear and intolerance associated with racial and ethnic difference, living with or coming to terms with ethnic difference, and, ultimately, an acceptance that cultural pluralism (ethnic, racial, sexual, generational) is the mark of a vibrant and evolving society.

How this can be achieved is a matter of considerable contemporary debate, but there is an emerging consensus that a crucial factor is the daily negotiation of difference in sites where people can come to terms with ethnic difference and where the voicing of racism can be muted (Allen and Cars, 2001). What is the nature of these sites, and

what kind of engagement or outcome can be expected? This is where the debate is on less firm ground. One line of thought, with roots in republican urban theory, has long looked to the powers of visibility and encounter between strangers in the open spaces of the city. The freedom to associate and mingle in cafés, parks, streets, shopping malls, and squares is linked to the development of an urban civic culture based on the freedom and pleasure to linger, the serendipity of casual encounter and mixture, and public awareness that these are shared spaces. Diversity is thought to be negotiated in civic public sphere. The depressing reality, however, is that these spaces tend to be territorialised by particular groups (and for this often steeped in surveillance) or they are spaces of transit with very little contact between strangers (Amin and Thrift, 2002, Rosaldo, 1999). The city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement.

This is not to endorse inaction to make public spaces inclusive, safe and pleasant. Nor is it to diminish the significance of efforts in cities such as Singapore, Vancouver, Leicester or Birmingham to publicize their commitment to multiculturalism by using public sites to support world cultures, minority voices, ethnic pluralism, and alternative local histories. For example, Birmingham officially supports a history of the city as one of global connections and of different layers of White and non-White migration. In Leicester the year 'is punctuated with events that are celebrated especially by one community but enjoyed by all (Winstone, 1996: 39). These include Council-supported celebrations for Eid, Hannuka, the Leicester Caribbean carnival, Diwali, an Asian Mela' or fair, and the City of Leicester Show, which 'includes Asian and African music and food as well as traditional English pastimes such as horse racing (ibid.). These are important shifts in the public culture. My point is to caution against raised expectations from the uses of public space for inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, for even in the most carefully designed and inclusive spaces, the marginalised and the prejudiced stay away, while many of those who participate carry the deeper imprint of personal experience that can include negative racial attitudes (see, for example, Parker's, 2000, ethnography revealing the uneven and racialised power geometry of the Chinese takeaway). In the hands of urban planners and designers, the public domain is all too easily reduced to public spaces, with modest achievements in changing race and ethnic relations.

A similarly ambiguous space is mixed housing. As already discussed, housing segregation has been blamed for the legacy of 'parallel lives' (Home Office, 2001a) in the northern mill towns. There has followed considerable policy interest in mixed housing, so that people from diverse backgrounds can engage as a community with shared interests. It is worth noting, however, that many mixed estates in deprived parts of cities are riddled with racism, inter-ethnic tension and cultural isolation. They too are places of 'parallel lives'. In addition, many neighbourhoods dominated by minority ethnic groups are not trouble spots and manage to maintain a fragile social pact, as Baumann (1996) has shown in the case of Southall. The colour of an area is a poor guide to what goes on in it. The Home Office (2001a) report *Building Cohesive Communities* is sensitive to these issues and shifts its emphasis towards stopping deliberately discriminatory housing allocation and the deliberate concentration of minority ethnic groups in 'some of the worst housing stock through, for example, fear' (p. 22). The policy implication is that ethnic mixture through housing cannot be engineered. Past attempts along these lines (e.g. placements of refugees or new immigrants), have resulted in White flight and deep resentment or violence from the older settled White and, at times, minority ethnic inhabitants locked in pathology of 'neighbourhood nationalism' (Back, 1996; Back and Keith, 1999; Allen, 2000). Mixture of this sort can have nightmarish consequences (see Wrench, Brar and Martin, 1993, for evidence on a New Town).

In a study on barriers to council housing facing Bradford Asians, Anne Power (2000) has suggested that mixture might be encouraged in existing and new Council estates by coupling comprehensive upgrading to other improvements designed to break down ethnic barriers and curb (White) racism. Based on people's views, the study suggests action to: (i) make estates more secure and more attractive; (ii) develop community facilities and activities, youth and play programmes, where all groups can mix; (iii) control anti-social behaviour, enforce tenancy conditions, and improve security and community safety; (iv) bring different racial groups together by creating multi-racial staff teams; (v) encourage minority families to move into estates in small groups or clusters with the support of local staff and resident representatives; (vi) knock through properties to make larger units (for large or extended families) and repair and improve property, and (vii) develop more community ownership and management to encourage pride. The emphasis falls as much on the quality of bricks and mortar as it does on building community and a sense of belonging through shared facilities.

But the discussion on what makes ethnic mixture work can be pushed a bit further. Power (1999), in a comparative study of 'estates on the edge' in several European cities, discusses the example of Taastrupgaard, a once unattractive and dehumanised mixed-ethnic estate on the outskirts of Copenhagen. In the mid 1980s, a re-development project was launched called the Environmental Project, with 'tenant involvement, local responsiveness and community development ... a central focus of the initiative' (p. 225). The initiative galvanised a considerable level of involvement from residents of different ethnicity in redesigning the estate, deciding on the uses of communal areas, and actual regeneration work. For example, 'all the garden work was done by the tenants. On some blocks, 40 or 50 people joined in. The Turkish families, many of whom were of recent peasant origin, knew a lot more about gardening than the Danish households, who usually came from inner Copenhagen' (op.cit: 127). While Power acknowledges that at the end of the project 'formal relations continued to be strained between ethnic communities' (p. 231), she suggests that the estate has become more attractive, possessing greater resident belief in the estate's viability, perhaps even as a multicultural venture.

The contact spaces of housing estates and urban public spaces, in the end, seem to fall short of inculcating inter-ethnic understanding, because they are not spaces of inter-dependence and habitual engagement. Les Back (personal communication) has suggested that the sites for coming to terms with ethnic difference are the 'micro-publics' where dialogue and 'prosaic negotiations' are compulsory, in sites such as the workplace, schools, colleges, youth centres, sports clubs and other spaces of association. If these spaces come segregated at the start, the very possibility of everyday contact with difference is cut out, as highlighted by the current debate on the implications of faith-based schools and by the cultural closure to be found in predominantly White or Asian schools in so many inner city and outer estate schools in Britain. Here too, however, contact may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for multicultural understanding, for these are sites of mercurial social interaction, divided allegiances, and cultural practices shaped also beyond the school gates. Mairtin Mac an Ghail's (1999) study of multi-ethnic urban schools, for example, tells the story of multiple and segregated ethnicities involving White English working class children resentful of Asian students seen as 'successful' and beneficiaries of special 'race' treatment, other White students proud to be English and in the context of a multiethnic Britain, but disapproving of White girls who step out with Asian boys, English-born Asian boys dismissive of 'tradition-bound' recent arrivals from Pakistan or Bangladesh, street-wise African-Caribbean boys mocking clever Asians, and so on (see also Alexander, 2000 and Back 1996 for a similar anthropology of urban youth centres).

The policy implication is that the gains of prosaic interaction need to be worked at in the city's micro-publics of banal multicultures. But, other than engineering endless talk and interaction between adversaries as well as providing individuals chances to broaden their horizons, there can be no formula, since any intervention needs to work through, and is only meaningful in, the context of situated social dynamics. In one youth centre or project, a tough policy against racist language and behaviour might keep the calm, while in another one the imagination and persistence of committed youth workers to garner friendships and sociability across ethnic boundaries might yield positive results. In one housing estate, the enforcement of strict rules on anti-social behaviour and tough action against racial harassment might be effective for some families and individuals. In another one, action on flash-points of conflict such as rubbish dumping and night-time noise might be effective, while elsewhere, carefully managed resident meetings that are able to steer discussion without stifling views with the help of effective conflict resolution methods might garner understanding (Allen, 2000; Norman, 1998). Similarly, in one school, discussions of national identity, citizenship and multiculturalism in the curriculum, or twinning with a school of different ethnic composition (as suggested by the Government in the aftermath of the 2001 riots) may reach the minds and hearts of some children, while in another school, efforts to involve children from different ethnic backgrounds in common ventures might prove more effective. The anthropology of everyday interaction in a given place at a given time plays a decisive role in influencing possibilities for inter-cultural understanding.

Habitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange. It can entrench group animosities and identities, through repetitions of gender, class, race, and ethnic codes, and paradoxically, through interventions working the grain of everyday interaction. Cultural change in these circumstances is likely to be encouraged if people can step out of their daily environments into other spaces acting as sites of 'banal transgression'. Here too, interaction is of a prosaic nature, but these sites work as spaces of cultural displacement and destabilisation. Their effectiveness lies in placing people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments. They are moments of cultural destabilisation, offering individuals the chance to break out of fixed relations and fixed notions, and through this, to learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction.

There are many micro-publics of banal transgression that could be worked into a new urban politics of cultural mobility. These could of course include novel experiments within the sites of prosaic negotiation already discussed, such as attempts to place 'acquaintances' from different cultural backgrounds in common ventures. And they can be new sites of displacement. For example, Colleges of Further Education, usually located out of the residential areas which dominate the lives of the young people, are a critical liminal or threshold space between the habituation of home, school and neighbourhood on the one hand, and that of work, family, class and cultural group, on the other hand. For a short period in the lives of the young people, the Colleges are a relatively unstable and open meeting place, bringing together people from varied backgrounds engaged in a common venture, unsure of themselves and their own capabilities, and potentially more receptive to new influences and new friendships. These openings do not always encourage cultural exchange (especially when past friendships and acquaintances carry over to reinforce strong herd instincts at this age), but the scope for it can be raised through joint work in mixed ethnic groups and by the juxtaposition of sociality in this space with that of home and neighbourhood. There is a similar unsteady sociality at play in night-time/week-end leisure spaces for young people. For example, sports

associations and music clubs draw on a wide cross-section of the population, they are spaces of intense and passionate interaction, with success often dependent upon collaboration and group-effort, their times are not the times of normal habit, and they disrupt racial and ethnic stereotypes in so far as excellence draws upon talents and skills that are not racially or ethnically confined. But, here too, the transgressive element of sociality needs to be made explicit and 'engineered' in any effort to make them multicultural ventures. There are many sports clubs and music clubs segregated on ethnic lines precisely as means of preserving White and non-White communal traditions, often against a background of majority rejection of minority members. A sociality of banal transgression would need to avoid such defences.

The sites of banal transgression – based on multiethnic common ventures – can be based within the heart of residential areas. Communal gardens and other ventures run by residents and community organisations (e.g. community centres, neighbourhood-watch schemes, child-care facilities, youth-projects, regeneration of derelict spaces) are a good example. Often these initiatives are challenged by the lack of involvement from all sections of the community, by long-standing racial and ethnic tensions within the experiments, and by being dominated by activists and intermediaries. But, they can become sites of social inclusion and discursive negotiation, through the application of organisational and discursive strategies designed to build voice, arbitrate over disputes, inculcate a sense of common fate or common benefit, publicise shared achievements, and develop confidence in proposals that emerge from open-ended discussion (Allen and Cars, 2001). The transgression here is based on small accommodations that work their way around, or through, difference, rather than on any conscious attempt to shift the cultural identities and practices of local residents. The key lies in the terms of engagement:

We must ... come to processes of learning how to collaborate, how to be together, both in our difference and in our unity. There is work to be done in which we hold the cultural differences in community and communication as both basic problematics to be worked out and opportunities for enrichment. Groups and communities coming together can be seen as places of emergence, creation and transformation (Grand, 1999: 484).

One medium that is explicitly geared for emergence and transformation is legislative theatre, based on audience participation and oriented towards raising consciousness through enactment and response to 'difficult' issues in a community (Boal, 2000). The performances, which are entertaining as they are run by professional artists, can be emotionally charged as they unravel controversial local issues and deeply held prejudices within the community. The theatrical event is a means of questioning entrenched views and altering opinions through enactment. This form of theatre has been used to tackle urban racism and ethnic relations. For example, Sophie Body-Gendrot (2000) cites the example of the Theatre-Forum in Marseilles, which puts on plays written with residents living in tough mixed neighbourhoods and based on their experiences. The plays encourage 'role exchanges and audience participation during the play, thus de-dramatizing daily life problems' (p. 207) and encouraging inter-ethnic and inter-generational understanding. Similarly, some organisations in South Yorkshire have become involved in a project called Race to Train, which explores issues of race and diversity within the workplace. In the project, 'volunteers from the organisations work with writers and directors talk about their experiences, which are then presented to an audience of employees in a play entitled *Crossing the Line (Housing Today, 22/11/01, p. 19)*. Then, 'the audience is split into workshop groups where the issues raised in the play are investigated further through a series of mini plays, and general discussion (ibid.). The plays highlight problems in a very

direct and poignant way, helping not only to shake opinions and attitudes, but also to suggest solutions based on employee participation. Legislative theatre has an important part to play in an imaginative urban policy.

The principle highlighted by legislative theatre is that banal transgressions rely upon displacement, more precisely, the *practice* of negotiating diversity and difference. The opportunity for an intercultural ethics based on 'wisdoms' of social engagement (Varela, 1999) is exactly what has been put to the test in these times of associating with only those like you or whom you like. An option is to encourage young people – perhaps with the help of tangible rewards (e.g. income, funding for education, training certification) - to undertake social and civic duties of various sorts through state and voluntary organisations for a given period. There are interesting examples of national and local civic programmes promoted by state-third sector partnerships in the US (Dahle, 1999). One successful scheme – City Year – provides a modest living allowance and partial college scholarships to young adults from all walks of life, to work on community projects such as cleaning up vacant lots, providing HIV education, tutoring other students and helping the elderly. Public Allies is another scheme that has spread to many cities and also attracted a large number of participants, promotes citizenship by placing young people in ten-month paid apprenticeships with local non-profit organisations. Similarly, there are many US youth and ethnic minority entrepreneurship schemes, as well as urban farm and food projects, which simultaneously pass on valuable skills and experience to the socially excluded and provide invaluable grounding in citizenship (Shuman, 1998). The essential point here is that changes in attitude and behaviour spring from lived experiences. In Britain too, there are many projects that have been running for years with similar aims - e.g. working with people with learning disabilities/physical disabilities/enduring mental health problems – that routinely stress the 'citizenship' aspect and break down barriers between majority and minority group understandings of living life socially.

These experiences can be short-lived, as illustrated by most of the examples above. Their value lies in the intensity and perceived success of the venture, in a liminality that leaves its tracks for long after (as wonderfully illustrated by the effect of war-time collaboration on the later friendship in Britain between the Bengali Samad and the Englishman Archie, in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*). The spark of being different as a result of dislocation can lead to an openness to becoming different if future circumstances allow. This is the value of bold and radical surprises of non-conformity, which should be publicised through local inter-cultural policy initiatives. These could include, as Body-Gendrot (2000) describes in the case of St Denis near Paris, hiring youths bent on writing graffiti, to create urban murals, establishing *auto-écoles* ('self-schools') that use a loose curriculum and ad-hoc methods to reintegrate youths who have dropped out of the school system, organising adolescents from around the world to come and play in an international football tournament, holding regular public debates on themes of relevance to residents, and bringing live music to a hospital to break down ethnic and cultural barriers.

### ***The Politics of Community?***

The tenor of the discussion so far, with its emphasis on prosaic negotiations and banal transgressions, raises some important questions about the normative pitch of a politics of local inter-cultural negotiations. In the aftermath of the 2001 riots, politicians, policy advisors and media commentators have come to agree that civic agreement and shared values are needed to reconcile inter-cultural differences. The spotlight has fallen on local community and a shared sense of place, both said to constitute the local glue for agreement and understanding within a mixed community.



This is certainly the tenor of the Cantle Report (Home Office, 2001b) that informed the Home Office Report following the 2001 riots. Cantle offers the term 'community cohesion', grounded in individual commitment to common norms and values, interdependence arising from shared interests, and individual identification with a wider community, as the basis for positive multicultural engagement:

Community cohesion ... is about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole. These divided communities would need to develop common goals and a shared vision. This would seem to imply that such groups should occupy a common sense of place as well (Home Office, 2001b: 70).

Cantle identifies five domains of community cohesion: (i) common values and a civic culture, based in common moral principles and codes of behaviour; (ii) social networks and social capital, based on a high degree of social interaction within communities and families, voluntary and associational activity and civic engagement; (iii) place attachment and an inter-twining of personal and place identity; (iv) social order and social control, based in absence of general conflict, effective informal social control, tolerance and respect for differences; and (v) social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities, based in equal access to services and welfare benefits, redistribution of public finances and opportunities, and ready acknowledgement of social obligations. While the last two domains reflect national social standards and policies, the first three domains can be located in a strategy to (re)engineer place as an 'integrated community' and, in turn, to mobilise community bonds for social progress. The idea of a cohesive local civic space that mediates difference and makes the most of diversity by inculcating trust, reciprocity and collective commitments has come into the centre of a new policy discourse supported by an influential US academic literature on communitarian values and moral principles and on the virtues of social capital rooted in local networks of inter-personal connections and ties (Putnam, 1993; 2000).

But, is community cohesion, thus defined, the key resource for cultural understanding and co-habitation in neighbourhoods marked by strong ethnic polarities decades of neglect and socio-economic deprivation? Indeed, is community cohesion and community coherence feasible in these circumstances? The work on urban youth anthropologies that I have referred to confirms the existence of a strong sense of place among both White and non-White ethnic groups, but it shows that it is one based on turf claims, or when shared, defended in exclusionary ways. This suggests the need for initiatives that exploit the potential for overlap and cross-fertilisation within these spaces constituted as territorialised and multiple publics, instead of the pursuit of a unitary sense of place. The distinctive feature of mixed neighbourhoods is that they are communities without community, each marked by multiple and hybrid affiliations of varying geographical reach and each intersecting momentarily (or not) with another for common local resources and amenities. They are not homogeneous or primarily place-based communities (especially for residents with strong diaspora connections and those with virtual and/or mobile lifestyles). They are simply mixtures of social groups with varying intensities of local affiliation, varying reasons for local attachment, and varying values and cultural practices. This blunts any idea of an integrated community with substantial overlap, mutuality, and common interest between its resident groups. Mixed neighbourhoods need to be accepted as the spatially open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially variegated spaces that they are, not imagined as future cohesive or integrated communities. There are limits to how far community cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place and local networks of trust – can become the basis of living with difference in such neighbourhoods.

The anatomy of the 2001 riots and the examples of prosaic negotiation and banal transgression discussed earlier suggest a different vocabulary of local 'accommodation' - a vocabulary of rights of presence, bridging difference, getting along. These are not achievements of community or consensus, but openings for contact and dialogue with others as equals, so that mutual fear and misunderstanding may be overcome and so that new attitudes and identities can arise from engagement. If common values, trust, or a shared sense of place emerge, they will do so as accidents of engagement, and not from the pathology of community. The decisive factor is the nature of the local public sphere, specifically the politics of the micro-publics that make up a place and that determine the terms of social engagement. A progressive micro-public can be helped by an agonistic political culture, that is, a culture of participatory and open-ended engagement based on the 'vibrant clash of democratic political positions' (Mouffe, 2000: 104) between free and empowered citizens, respectful of each other's claims. This is a politics of emergent solutions and directions based on the process itself of democratic engagement. Open and critical debate, mutual awareness and an altered subjectivity through engagement are the watchwords of agonistic politics, in preference to the language of rational deliberation seeking consensus or compromise. Such engagement may well leave conflicts and disagreements unresolved, but it will uncover the reasons for resentment and misunderstanding and the pathos and legitimacy of the aggrieved, so that future encounters (considered essential in an agonistic public culture) can build on a better foundation.

Local multicultures are borne out of the continual renewal of an equal and discursive public, so that the contest between claimants can become one between friendly enemies (agonism) rather than antagonists. A good example of the always ambivalent/unresolved politics of such engagement is provided by Engin Isin and Myer Siemiatycki's (2002) study of disputes surrounding applications in the mid 1990s to establish mosques in Toronto. The study shows that for all the official multiculturalism in Canada that supports the practices of a variegated citizenship, the proposals were hotly contested because for many, Islam and its visible signs on the landscape were somehow 'non-Canadian', requiring proof of the right of public presence. It also reveals, however, that after many compromises, the proposals were eventually approved, as the product of open and frank debate at hearings and in the media, supported by democratic and fair planning procedures, channels for minority ethnic representation, permissive legislation, and sensitive mediation between the local authorities and other stakeholder organisations. All these factors combined to form a civic space of vibrant opposition and negotiation – without question full of power play and jostling between vested interests – but open to the discursive clashes of distributed citizenship.

Such a politics of active citizenship – irreducible to a politics of community – comes without guarantees, but it can flourish under certain conditions to ensure that minority interests can be advanced and to maximise the scope for new meanings through engagement. Much of this, as already argued, has to do with the practice of citizenship, but it is also intricately linked to the structures that define the terms on which people see themselves and others as citizens. The process fails – as confirmed by the 2001 riots – if the social context supports or tolerates racism or inequality along ethnic lines, because in such a context rights are perceived to be unevenly distributed and ethnically coded, bracketing people from a minority ethnic background as second class citizens. In this sense, the Cantle report is right to identify what it chooses to call 'social order and social control', and 'social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities' as two of its five domains of community cohesion. Without effective policing of racism, without strong legal, institutional and

informal sanctions against racial and cultural hatred, without a public culture that stops bracketing minorities as 'guests' or worse in Britain, and without better minority ethnic representation and influence in mainstream organisations, the ethnic inequality that flows from a national culture assuming White supremacy will not be tackled. Similarly, a democracy of a universal commons (Amin and Thrift, 2002) based on more widely distributed economic prosperity (through the enlargement of opportunity, the redistribution of income and reductions in wealth disparities) and the guarantee of high quality public and welfare services for all, can help to contain the politics of envy between excluded groups as well as to strengthen social solidarity and loyalty to a national project based on universal rights and goods. Reforms to the structures of citizenship and belonging affecting racial and ethnic relations have been discussed in detail in the much publicised Parekh Report (Runnymede Trust, 2000) and in ways that can both support cultural autonomy and strengthen inter-cultural solidarity in a multiethnic Britain. There is no point in repeating the suggestions here.

In a democratic multiethnic society, if community cohesion remains elusive and when agonistic engagement is vigorous and therefore open-ended, the key challenge is indeed that of striking the balance between cultural autonomy and social solidarity, so that the former does not lapse into separatism and essentialised identities, and so that the latter does not slide into minority cultural assimilation and western conformity. This question has come to the fore in the contemporary debate on the strengths and limitations of multiculturalism. The creative political philosophers Bhikhu Parekh (2000) has suggested that it is possible to develop a political structure of multicultural society based on a strong sense of unity but also ingrained respect for diversity. For Parekh, such a structure should draw on the two political philosophies - liberalism, with its emphasis on the rights and freedoms of the individual, and multiculturalism, with its emphasis on the rights and freedoms of group identities and cultures - but it should also aim to go beyond by strengthening 'a common sense of belonging among its citizens' (p. 341). Parekh is clear that such a:

sense of belonging cannot be ethnic or based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics, for a multicultural society is too diverse for that, but political in nature and based on a shared commitment to the political community. Its members do not directly belong to each other as in an ethnic group, but through their mediating membership of a shared community, and they are committed to each other because they are all in their own different ways committed to the community and bound by the ties of common interest and affection. [...] The commitment to a political community ... does not involve sharing common substantive goals, for its members might deeply disagree about these, nor a common view of its history which they may read differently, nor a particular economic or social system about which they might entertain different views. Decoded to its barest essentials, commitment to the political community involves commitment to its continuing existence and well being... (Parekh, 2000: 341).

Parekh proposes a number of national reforms to support a multiculturalism based on the idea of *political* community, including: (i) a collectively agreed constitution based around fundamental rights (along the lines of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms), and backed up by a Supreme Court; (ii) impartial justice by the state in policing, employment, education, public services and the law, within a frame of equal rights and opportunities (including cultural ones) for all citizens; (iii) recognition of collective or group rights (e.g. the right of Sikh men to wear a turban or the right of Muslims to pray at work), but measured against the standard of contribution to human well-being; (iv) realms for equal cultural interaction (e.g. via measures to

ensure equal interaction, provision of opportunities for groups and cultures to meet, and explicit official celebration of multiculturalism; (v) multicultural education based on a mixed and open curriculum that reflects the nation's historical and contemporary cultural diversity and its place in the wider world, and (vi) a shared national identity based on politico-institutional values (e.g. human rights, universal welfare) rather than ethno-cultural ones, so that national belonging can be based on multiple identities and cultural affiliations.

To return to urban concerns, Steven Vertovec (1996), drawing on the experience of managing multiculturalism in Leicester, has suggested that such a 'renegotiated political culture of the public domain' can be helped by local 'facilitation of multiple modes of minority representation and local government interface' (p. 66). Such facilitation could result in a local associative democracy based on widespread bottom-up organisation that, in addition to multicultures, yields checks and balances and overlaps between associations and a division of labour between associations and a local state that nourishes a common public culture and a shared – but not necessarily unitary - sense of place. Leicester has a long history of anti-racist organisation and affirmative action, self-organisation and civic activism within the minority ethnic communities, and an official policy of pride in cultural diversity and support for minority ethnic associations harnessed to a commitment that cultural events and services should benefit all residents (Winstone, 1996). Winstone claims that in the mid 1990s there were over 400 minority ethnic associations in Leicester, many possessing contracts with the City Council to carry out particular services. This institutional structure has made local authority consultation with the associations 'an essential element in the management of change', but on the basis of linkage into 'a complex mixture of organizations including separate groups of women, youth and older people' (p. 38), rather than reliance on a small group of 'community leaders' speaking for everybody. In turn, through public incorporation, political office, the experience of self-organisation, and frequent contact with other minority and non-minority bodies, the ethnic associations 'have been able to champion also [the needs] of the majority who are disadvantaged through poverty, homelessness and low pay – problems shared by all' (Winstone, 1996: 38). For Vertovec (1996), such a model of multiculturalism, involving 'a variety of modes of incorporation', works because:

it can (a) promote more democratic functions surrounding 'community leaders' (by recognising a breadth and depth of leadership through effective neighbourhood groups, umbrella organizations, and civic representatives all democratically elected); (b) stimulate more active civil participation among minority group members (who have come to realize that they can, indeed, successfully elect and interact with, important public figures from their own ranks); (c) publicize more positive images of minorities (by it being shown that they can produce effective organizations and leaders who contribute in many ways to various civic activities and decisions), and (d) generally foster, among members of the 'majority' population as well as among ethnic groups, a more open and malleable understanding of 'culture' (through being seen to be able to perpetuate a variety of practices, meanings and values drawn from complex and varying backgrounds and seen to be open to hybridized forms without threat to collective identities. (pp. 66-67).

These four elements of a 'renegotiated public culture' have obvious implications for places like Bradford and Oldham steeped as they are in a politics of elitist, segregated and exclusionary democracy that has failed to bind group interests into a local commons.

## **Conclusion: Local Questions, National Questions**

The emphasis of this study has fallen on the micro-cultures of place as both routes into racism and discrimination and routes of escape. The underlying argument in the first part of the study was that while factors such as deprivation and social exclusion, Islamophobia, popular and institutional racism, and media stereotyping cast a long shadow across the nation, additional local factors and the particularities of place explain spatial variation in the form and intensity of racial and ethnic inequalities. Bradford, Oldham and Burnley too have been marked by processes common to other flash-points of urban civic and ethnic unrest in Britain in the last three decades – from ethnic isolation along ethnic lines and the hopelessness or resentment caused by poverty and marginalisation (White and non-White), to insensitive policing, the provocations of racists, institutional ignorance and youth anger. But each situation has been the product of unique combinations, new forces (e.g. the role of community leaders and of segregation in the latest disturbances) and a layered local history of resentments and accommodations. Every one highlights the powers of situated everyday life in neighbourhoods, workplaces and public spaces, through which historical, global and local processes intersect to give meaning to living with diversity.

The significance of the micro-cultures of place is reflected in the role of micro-publics of prosaic negotiation and banal transgression in dealing with racism and ethnic diversity. The second part of the study argued that, ultimately, coming to terms with difference is a matter of everyday practices and strategies of cultural contact and exchange with others different from us. For such interchange to be effective and lasting, it needs to be inculcated as a habit of practice (not just co-presence) in mixed sites of prosaic negotiation such as schools, the workplace, and other public spaces, or as an experience of cultural displacement and transgression in liminal sites such as Colleges of Further Education, youth leisure spaces, communal gardens, urban murals, legislative theatre and civic duty. The implication of this argument is that while the micro-publics can be identified (through, for example, literature reviews and case studies of good practice around the world), as can the general principles of effective communication and constructive dialogue (e.g. conflict resolution techniques, stakeholder empowerment, deliberative strategies, effective leadership and intermediation), these do not guarantee success, which remains the product of local context and local energies. This is why a search for national and international examples of best practice that seeks to implant them in different settings, or to derive a common standard from them, is futile, because it removes the site-specific circumstances and social relations that made a local solution workable. The exercise also loses sight of the national public cultures that structure the rights and obligations that guide local practices, such as immigration and citizenship rules, national and local integration policies, attitudes to minorities, and sanctions against racism and ethnic discrimination. These are two reasons why the culture of social and urban regeneration policies needs to shift towards attending to 'the best in the worst' (Judith Allen, personal communication), that is, to possibilities that spring out of, and resonate, with the dynamics of social engagement in particular places.

Another shift in policy approach implied by the discussion on agonism concerns the problematic nature of attempts to build community and local consensus, and the limitations of seeing 'difficult' areas as places of fixed identities and social relations. I have suggested that the problems of interaction – and therefore also their resolution – are fundamentally related to the political culture of the public domain, more specifically, to the scope there is for vigorous but democratic disagreement between citizens constituted as equals. This shift in register from the language of policy fixes to that of democratic politics is important, firstly because it highlights the significance

of questions of empowerment, rights, citizenship and belonging in shaping inter-ethnic relations; secondly because it shows that an open public realm helps to disrupt fixed cultural assumptions and to shift identities through cultural exchange; and thirdly because it reveals that living with diversity is a matter of constant negotiation, trial and error and sustained effort, with possibilities crucially shaped by the many strands that feed into the political culture of the public realm - from the entanglements of local institutional conflict, civic mobilisation and inter-personal engagement, to national debates on who counts as a citizen, what constitutes the good society and who can claim the nation.

These latter intimations of citizenship and national belonging – and the general idea of a relationally defined public sphere – question the adequacy of framing the problems of a multicultural society through the language of race and minority ethnicity alone. This is not to gloss over the very real and distinctive problems faced by minority ethnic groups in Britain or to imply that their subjectivity and place in British society is not marked by assigned or voluntary codes of ethnic and racial difference which function to separate them from the mainstream. It is not an excuse for not tackling racism and ethnic discrimination, or failing to recognise the legitimacy of minority or subaltern cultures (Solomos, 1993; Modood, 2000). But, the ethnicisation/racialisation of the identities of non-White people is also part of the problem. It stifles recognition of the many other sources of their identity formation based on experiences of gender, age, education, class and consumption, which are shared with other groups and cut across ethnic lines. These crossings also disrupt assumptions of intra-ethnic homology, notably those concerning gender practices and identities – Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1997).

This has been amply illustrated by the complex affiliations of young Black and Asian people, whose cultural anthropology reveals mixtures that cross and subvert ethnic boundaries and stereotypes, and whose politics of resistance gather around both ethnic exclusions as well as other cleavages (e.g. generational and gender conflicts, youth non-conformity, gang masculinities). But, in a racialised frame of belonging, they are allowed to hold the multiple and shifting identities that are assumed to be normal in the case of White people as an abnormality! This kind of essentialisation on grounds of culture and ethnicity also brackets non-White people as minorities whose claims can only ever be minor within a national culture and frame of national belonging defined by others and their 'majority' histories, usually read as histories of White belonging and White supremacy (Parekh, 2000; Hage, 1998). Not for them the fact of Englishness/Britishness based on centuries of ethnic mixture and cultural borrowing from the colonies and beyond (Alibhai Brown, 2001; Ware, 1996; C. Hall, 1996). The claims of the Asian youths of the northern mill towns and those of Black Britons since the 1980s (S. Hall, 1998), however, are now asserting more than a desire for minority recognition in Britain. Theirs is a bid for the centre and the mainstream, both in terms of the right of visibility and the right to shape it. It is a claim of full citizenship – a tacit exposition and rejection of the assumption that to be British/English is to be White or part of White culture. But, as long as this assumption remains intact, the status of minority ethnic people as British citizens will remain of a different order to that of White Britons – to be proven, under question, inferior, incomplete, reluctant (Alibhai Brown, 1999; 2001). The latest manifestation is the Government's proposal that immigrants should be required take an oath of allegiance to British cultural norms (such as fair play) and citizenship norms (presumably liberal). Apart from the dubious ethics of testing the allegiance of very many immigrants born and brought up in Britain, the real insult is that White Britons – who presumably also include racists, internationalists, anti-capitalists, socialists, Muslims, anti-nationalists, cosmopolitans, eco-globalists - are not expected to prove their loyalties.

The implication – one of fundamental importance - is that in order to enable all citizens, regardless of colour and cultural preference, to lay claim to the nation and contribute to an evolving national identity, the ethnic moorings of national belonging need to be exposed and replaced by criteria that have nothing to do with Whiteness. This obligation also applies to multicultural models of nationhood, which are seen by many as the most progressive solution for multiethnic societies, through their offer of special rights and measures for minorities and their official endorsement of cultural diversity. Ghassan Hage (1998), in an excoriating critique of the Australian model of multiculturalism, has argued that underlying the opposing ethics and politics of multiculturalists and those White Australians who have become anxious about ethnic mixture, there is a common fantasy of White nation. For Hage, 'many of those who position themselves as 'multicultural' and 'anti-racists' are merely deploying a more sophisticated fantasy of White supremacy' (p. 23), because buried under the language of tolerance, welcome, and positive action for immigrants is a benign White nationalist governmentality: 'those who tolerate are the ones who fantasize that it is up to them whether people speak Arabic on the streets or not, whether more migrants come or not [...] Such people are claiming a dominant form of governmental belonging and are inevitably White Australians .... Those in a dominated position do not tolerate, they just endure' (p. 88). The (non-White) immigrants – despite their Australian nationality – are placed in a national 'space that is not naturally theirs' (p. 90) and their subjectivity as citizens is determined by others. Hage suggests that this 'nationalist practice of inclusion' (p. 90) is simply the mirror opposite of the 'nationalist practice of exclusion' (p. 91) manifest in the White backlash against state multiculturalism and immigration, and epitomised by the now familiar language of White victimhood (e.g. complaints that Whites are down-trodden and neglected), cultural pollution and incompatibility, and nostalgia for a halcyon pre-immigration White culture believed to provide national cohesion and prosperity. Both responses, suggests Hage, 'are rituals of White empowerment – seasonal festivities where White Australians renew the belief in their possession of the power to talk and make decisions about Third World-looking Australians' (p. 241).

The issues alluded to by Hage are exactly those confronting a multiethnic society such as Britain, with its national imaginary steeped in memories of colonial rule and racialised assumptions of national identity and belonging (from Whiteness to village cricket and British fair play). The objections and practices of those caught up in the tide of White backlash are exactly those of their Antipodean counterparts, perhaps worse because of the stronger legacy of White rule and White nostalgia and because of the more pronounced overt racism and ethnic discrimination that exists in Britain. Similarly, the discourse of multiculturalism in Britain masks a White 'nationalist practice of inclusion', possibly of a much cruder nature, given that the national debate is at an earlier stage and that policy practices fall short of those in Australia and Canada. This is well illustrated by the all too frequent reference to people of a non-White colour purely in terms of their ethnicity, the endless public talk about the rights, obligations and allegiances of new and settled immigrants, the constant questioning of the Englishness or Britishness of non-Whites – with none of this asked of White Britons.

Such racial and ethnic coding of national belonging – benign and malign – needs to be revealed and publicly debated so that the 'racial ontology of sovereign territory (Gilroy, 2000: 328) can be recognised and contested, perhaps by thinking 'postnationally' (Anderson, 2000). Without such moves, there will be little in the armoury to deal with the increasingly sophisticated and popular claim of racists and White worriers that for reasons of cultural incompatibility the majority and the minority should remain separate. Nor will there be an end to the treatment of minority ethnic

people as a different sort of British subject. Race and ethnicity need to be taken out of the definition of national identity and national belonging and replaced by ideals of citizenship, democracy and political community (in the sense suggested by Parekh, 2000) as the basis upon which nationhood is constructed. This is not the place to discuss the strands of this politically - rather than culturally or racially - defined sense of national citizenship, but it is clear that it has to be one that constructs citizens as empowered subjects (so that genuine agonism is made possible), as equals in the right to claim the nation, and as members of an open and plural political community. It requires imagination of the nation as something other than a racial territorial space, perhaps via a 'planetary humanism' (Gilroy, 2000) that returns the nation as a space of travelling cultures and peoples whose varying geographies of attachment. Then, both the problems faced by the ethnic minorities and the neglected anxieties and difficulties of marginalised White working class communities can be tackled as problems of citizenship and social justice in a country for all, with differences of ethnicity not overblown or played for exclusionary political gain.

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