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## Race, affect, and emotion: young people, racism, and graffiti in the postcolonial English suburbs

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**Abstract.** The majority of studies on young people, race, and racism have focused upon multiethnic inner-city areas. This can have the unintended effect of locating the ‘problem’ of race within the sites where ethnic minorities reside and upon their racially marked bodies. To disrupt this way of looking I attempt to turn the geography of racism ‘inside out’ by recognising the predominantly white English suburbs as a complex site of emotion where racist graffiti, violence, and social deprivation may reside. Here, it is suggested that a ‘global sense of place’ can be evoked through a postcolonial reading of the suburbs and used to unsettle the familiar emotional-laden landscapes of whiteness. Secondly, through ethnography with young people who self-identify as a Skinhead gang, I seek to provide a meaningful geography of racism that engages with emotion, bodily encounters, and events as they become charged with feeling and affect. Thirdly, the ethnography considers the practice of whiteness and white territoriality. In these encounters race and racism are approached as an event or happening that may be given material weight through inscriptions of racist graffiti, emotional sentiments regarding ideas of white suburban belonging, and physical manifestations of popular racism. I conclude that studies of race and racism need to better engage with the visceral way in which affect and emotion seep into the lives of young people and enable the idea of race to pass from immanence to emergence in daily encounters.

### Introduction

The idea of race has long been constituted through feelings, emotions, and affective dispositions. Such has been the virulence of these passions that they may occasionally erupt into sporadic genocide, armed conflict, and enduring segregation. It may seem slightly strange to feminist and race scholars, then, that those within the arts, humanities, and social sciences are once again interested in bringing the emotional consequences of the social to bear upon everyday life. For many of us, these emotions have never gone away but are part of a postcolonial present haunted by the histories of past trauma and the geographies of dislocation. This paper contributes to existing work in race and ethnicity: first, by considering the emotional geographies of race in young people’s lives through the accounts of a Skinhead subculture; second, by developing an ethnography of racism located outside of the inner city through a critical analysis of the English suburbs; and, third, by interrogating whiteness and the practice of white territoriality through racism and racist graffiti.

Despite a reinvigorated approach to experience, feeling, and sensation, Pain recently attests how much of the current work on affect lacks “grounding, embodiment or emotion” (2009, page 2), slipping into the ether of philosophic abstraction. Indeed, Thrift admits this disembodied tendency “risks ethnocentrism” (2004, page 59)—not least because bodies are marked in ways that are ascribed particular emotional and physical capacities—but also, as Tolia-Kelly (2006a) contends, universalist applications of the emotional and affective domain are historically prevalent in Western thought. By paying close attention to bodies, spaces, and encounters in-the-flesh I seek to develop an emotional geography that is alive to the happening of race. Drawing upon work on emotions, performance, and embodiment I develop a corporeal and ethnographically grounded perspective that aims to supplement what Nash (2000) regards as the

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“more abstract discussions of dance or performativity” (page 657) that presently proliferate in contemporary cultural geography work on affect. A particular concern in this paper is to recognise the grid of power through which race is enacted so as not to lose sight of “the ways in which different material bodies are expected to do gender, class, race and ethnicity differently” (page 657). In exploring the ‘doing’ of race I demonstrate how a constellation of feelings, practices, and imaginaries breathe life into the concept of race and summon it to life with grave effect.

Some of the finest work on young people and race can be traced within the “new ethnicities” (Hall, 1993) paradigm of scholarship which includes vibrant ethnographies of hybrid cultural exchange within the metropolis (see Alexander, 2000; Back, 1996; 2007; Cohen, 1997; Hewitt, 1986; Wulff, 1995). These neighbourhood accounts are enmeshed within a transnational network of cultural flows that come to articulate a “global sense of place” (Massey, 1996 [1991]), and outward-looking cosmopolitanism (Keith, 2005). Thrift (2004, pages 57–58) has previously identified cities as “roiling maelstroms of affect” replete with a “buzz” and “creativity”, so it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of urban investigators have situated their accounts of race within the “multi-ethnic city” (Amin, 2002)—the sensual site for a prosaic, multicultural, coming together that on occasion is marked by conflict.

In moving away from the thick urban interaction described, and returning to the seemingly ordinary landscapes of English suburbia, with this neighbourhood ethnography I seek to develop a critical account of these ‘out of the way’ places and add much needed detail to the extensive research already completed on racism and belonging in rural locations (Darby, 2000; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006; Jay, 1992; Neal, 2002; Tolia-Kelly, 2006b; Williams, 2007). By departing from the conventional metropolitan focus of race enquiry I seek to turn the geography of racism ‘inside out’. It is argued that the suburbs are primary spaces where racist terror and “banal nationalism” (Billig, 2004 [1995]) is ritually performed, as witnessed in the gruesome murders of young black teenagers Stephen Lawrence and Rohit Duggal in the outskirts of London, and Anthony Walker in the northern periphery of Liverpool. Furthermore, rural and suburban sites are now being targeted by far-right parties for support in a bid to envision these places as idyllic, pastoral English retreats far removed from the multicultural city where different bodies throng together and rub up against one another (see Dench et al, 2006; Jackson, 1988; May, 1996).

Another theme addressed concerns the meaning of whiteness and its links to race, place, and nationhood. It is evident that many neighbourhoods are seen as racially marked terrain, often erroneously cast as ‘black’, ‘white’, or ‘Asian’ (Gilroy, 1987; Watt, 1998). But less is known about the structural processes and habitual practices through which everyday spaces are ‘whitened’ and come to perform as ‘white territory’. The focus throughout this paper is upon everyday geographies of racism and how the effect of white power comes to be materially situated through spatial, discursive, and affective registers. To illustrate this I use visual and ethnographic methods to interpret the practice of racism in an ostensibly white neighbourhood. The paper begins with a brief description of visual methods, before I turn to an embryonic literature on racism in suburban settings. This literature is used to extend the geography of racism beyond its conventional urban focus and signal the ways in which rural spaces form a repository for particular kinds of race affects. Here, I attempt to sketch out an alternative post-colonial understanding of the suburbs to displace the pull of emotional connections to Englishness, nationalism, and whiteness. I argue that a postcolonial geography of the suburbs can be used as a circuit breaker to disrupt the affective ‘chaining’ of race to particular bodies, sites, and landscapes. To further displace the encoded representations of

suburban life I consider the work of a local photographer whose neighbourhood images complicate and parody these spaces from the inside out.

Following this critical appraisal of the suburbs I discuss the role of racist graffiti in a neighbourhood estate to examine how these inscriptions function to configure arbitrary spaces into white territory. Where government reports citing ‘parallel lives’ have remarked upon the ‘self-segregating’ practices of minority ethnic residents, geographers instead have found that the “Key obstacles to mobility included poverty, institutional exclusion, racist harassment and feeling out of place in certain city spaces” (Phillips et al, 2007, page 228). Given these arrangements, surprisingly little attention has been paid to white territoriality and how practices of racist exclusion may perpetuate parallel lives. An engagement with whiteness and the perpetrators of racism is politically pressing if we are to complement valuable social geography accounts completed on the constrained use of space endured by religious and ethnic minority communities (Dwyer, 1999; Hopkins, 2007; Phillips, 2006). Unseating whiteness from its throne of privilege can enable us to see what form segregation takes, how it is sustained, and why it persists (Smith, 1989, page 170). Exposing the actions, doings, and performance of young perpetrators of racism is revealing of the choreography of whiteness and the precarious assemblage of race in modern multicultural Britain. Through an ethnography of doings, happenings, and events the study sheds light on the practice of white territoriality, revealing how ethnic minorities are made to feel ‘out of place’ in parts of English suburbia and are thus rendered Other to the nation-state.

### **Emotional geographies and visual ethnography**

A tendency in much social constructionist thinking is to treat race as a floating signifier that has no meaning outside of the discursive field of representation. However, the ‘deadening effects’ of discourse can symbolically erase how race is embodied, lived, and put into motion in everyday encounters. Of course, affect and emotion are not ‘new theories’ from which to interpret race—rather, the designation of race has always carried an emotional quality (Fanon, 1970 [1952]). More recently, cultural geographers have been trying to develop ways of capturing something of this immateriality by recognising race as an “absent presence” (Nayak, 2006a), reontologising the category to consider the “machinic geography of phenotype” (Saldanha, 2006) and discussing how nonrepresentational theories can help us understand how race is pushed into life in encounters between human and nonhuman actors (Swanton, 2008).

These experimental lines of flight are not wholly unproblematic [see Jackson’s 2008 critique of Swanton (2008)]. Such work must remain vigilant to the ‘power geometries’ of race and cognisant of the abiding essentialisms prevalent in popular understandings of somatic difference related to skin colour, hair texture, and so on. In this way I hope to *stretch*, rather than repudiate, the significant social constructionist contributions offered by geographers towards what has been an explicit antiracist engagement (Bonnett, 1993; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; Nayak, 2008; Smith, 1989). The politics of representation continue to be of critical concern for feminist scholars and those using participatory methods. Rather poignantly, Lorimer has questioned, “what is representation intended to achieve, and what *else* might be done?” (2007, page 89, emphasis in original). This ‘what-else-ness’ does not imply a forgoing of representation and textual approaches, but asks us to consider more performative methodologies that engage with events, practices, and activities (see Crouch, 2003; Latham, 2003). Using a form of visual ethnography I attempt to combine signs, images, and text with a “more-than-representational” (Lorimer, 2005) geography that connects with sensations, feelings, and emotions. Through an analysis of the performance of race and its affects I hope to develop a more animated cultural geography that holds in tension representation

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and postrepresentational methods of enquiry (Nayak, 2006b). For, as Slocum (2008, page 854) persuasively argues, simply “fictionalizing race makes some of the most interesting aspects of race disappear.”

To elicit this ‘more-than-representational’ account, I combine ethnography, events, and encounters with photography and filming undertaken in a suburban estate. The photographs include images of racist graffiti I collected during the fieldwork period which offer no more than a frozen snapshot of community, suspended in the lens shutter speed of time. Where a purely representational account of this kind “renders inert all that ought to be most lively” (Lorimer, 2005), this analysis opens the way for more performative interpretations that do not attempt to ‘fix’, ‘stabilise’, and ‘capture’ social life but to regard it as a composition in the making. The processural approach involves the inclusion of some rather different images photographed by a local resident, Keith Berry, whose neighbourhood walks have furnished him with multiple and often rather contrasting pictures of suburbia. Using a type of “auto-ethnography” (Cook and Crang, 2005), Berry offers a critical but sympathetic portrait of the community in which he lives. Where Berry’s still images critically explore the rural representation of suburbia, my own interrogate the concrete landscapes of shops, bus shelters, and pavements familiar to working-class estates. My intention is to unsettle each of these representational modes to create a performative, polyvocal dialogue that recognises a multiplicity of positioned interpretations and understandings. Breathing life into these incessant presentations enables us to view them as different types of ‘doings’ and not only reveals how particular landscapes are classed and racialised, but also may disclose the different emotions evoked in pastoral and urban residential settings. This desire to obtain a broader, humanistic ‘sense of place’ is in part a self-reflexive critique of my own ethnographic impressions but is also an attempt to avoid a narrow anthropological gaze that renders white working-class subjects mute and the places they reside abject (Haylett, 2001; Nayak, 2003; Skeggs, 1997).

This performative interpretation of race and place gestures towards its mercurial and affective resonances. For Thien, “placing emotion in the context of our always intersubjective relations offers more promise for politically relevant, emphatically human, geographies” (2005, page 450). In tracing contrasting images of ‘community’ through one another we can move towards an intertextual and precarious positioning of these relations as forever in the making. For Cresswell (2003, page 280), “The challenge for cultural geographers of landscape is to produce geographies that are lived, embodied, practised; landscapes which are never finished or complete, not easily framed or read”. This ‘opened-out’, multidimensional perspective can challenge the simplistic perception of suburban landscapes as bland and homogenous “non-place spaces” (Watt, 1998). The visual method is supplemented with neighbourhood ethnography combining observation, interview, and experiences garnered through everyday race encounters. In the tradition of anthropology and longitudinal ethnography, I harness past and present materials in the working together towards new theory, ideas, and performativities. Rather than settle upon a final resolution, the ethnography itself can be seen as a moment of becoming in its unfolding. The people and places depicted cannot be reduced to ‘still life’, framed by a neat beginning and end imposed by the researcher, but are part of a continuous composition in the making (Thrift, 2003).

Adherents of ethnography such as Laurier (2003) note how geographers should grow more attuned to following people and objects in action as they move. This attempt to “follow the thing” (Cook, 2004) can be seen as an explicit recognition of the interconnected world in which we live but also, I suggest, as an opportunity to elicit a more mobile cultural geography. In chasing the lines of racist hatred and the flow of race signs, what I seek to convey is the spaces, bodies, and objects around which these

affects accumulate. The ethnographic observations illustrate the affective intensities attributed to race encounters in which the highly charged velocity of race hatred carries into racist language, graffiti, and occasional violent assaults. In examining mundane objects—clothes, shops, bus stops, roads and lamp posts—I disclose how they become transformed into the material canvass for expressions of race hatred. According to Billig (2004 [1995], page 93), “nationalism suggests that nationhood is near the surface of contemporary life” and is triggered in encounters with strangers. It is through these prosaic encounters that ‘white lines’ of power are enacted, embodied, and condensed, giving rise to an affective geography that tenuously secures, and thickens, the accumulation of race difference.

### **The postcolonial suburbs**

Much of the work conducted by British geographers on race and racism has concentrated upon the spaces within which the majority of ethnic minorities live, namely the inner cities (Amin, 2002; Phillips et al, 2007; Smith, 1989). This approach, is familiar in classic urban ethnographies and studies of race encounters (Back, 1996; Jones, 1988; Rex and Moore, 1979 [1967]). In the past two decades there has been a flowering of research on rural racism (Bonnett, 1993; Derbyshire, 1994; Gaine, 1987; 1995; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006; Neal, 2002; Nizhar, 1995; Troyna and Hatcher, 1992) and its geographical connections to English nationalism (Darby, 2000; Kinsman, 1995; Matless, 1998; Pollard, 1989; 1993; Tolia-Kelly, 2006b) as signified through “rolling green fields, winding lanes, cream teas, chocolate box villages” (Neal 2002, page 443). For Anderson and Smith (2001, page 8) such emotional geographies recognise “emotions as ways of knowing, being and doing” that carry beyond discursive representations.

Despite these significant contributions, recent scholarship on rural racism can do more to examine the liminal spaces existing between the now familiar binary of “the country and the city” (Williams, 1985). This includes explorations of suburbia, “Middle England” (Watt, 1998), new towns (McGuinness, 2000), and coastal locations (Grillo, 2005). These places are figured through complex “structures of feeling” (Williams, 1973) that at times constitute asylum seekers and other newcomers through the emotive register of “contagion, depravity and decline” (Ray and Reed, 2005, page 223). As the deathly tropes of disease and decay suggest, ideas of whiteness are bounded in place as US suburban accounts testify (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). Recent studies with London suburbanites further demonstrate the way in which these seemingly benign places can become charged with an affective current of whiteness which is brought to bear in such everyday activities as food purchases (Jackson, 1998), parental school choice (Byrne, 2006), and homeownership in localities where ‘white flight’, housing displacement, and the struggle for welfare are historically evident (Dench et al, 2006; Smith, 1989). This overbearing whiteness is documented in Watt’s (1998) investigation of the way young people from the Home Counties in the South East commuter-belt area of England racialise and territorialise local spaces to the extent that certain areas are *felt* to be ‘black’ or ‘Asian’, even if they numerically contain a larger number of white residents. This microgeography informs us how “Place contextualises the construction of ‘race’ and nation, generating geographically specific ideologies of racism and nationalism” (Jackson and Penrose, 1993, page 205). Indeed, village life may often be constructed through repertoires of feeling where the English pub, church, or village fete act as emotional contours around which the landscape of local community and national belonging is drawn (Ageyman and Spooner, 1997). The relational nature of space means that such depictions have as much to say about the suburbs as they do about the constructions of the inner city.

Although suburban spaces may be conceived through a silent cartography of whiteness in which home ownership, nuclear families, white-collar commuting, and feelings of safety preside, these sticky race affects can yet be dislodged. A postcolonial reading of suburbia has the potential to displace intrinsic associations with whiteness. This turn is felt in King's forensic account of the suburban bungalow, a Bengali term, "generated by the interaction of cultures under the conditions of colonialism" (1997, page 57). Such culturally hybrid accounts disperse the affects of whiteness that gather and adhere to suburban spaces by recognising "That the bungalow is both a product, and a symbol, of a complex yet inter-related world" (page 263). This "global sense of place" (Massey, 1996 [1991]) is a different means of "globalizing the suburbs" (McCarthy, 2008, page 131), offering alternative "visions of suburbia" (Silverstone, 1997). Recasting the suburbs in this way connects the beating heart of Englishness to the arteries of empire. As Thrift (2003, page 2022) reflects, "the fabric of space is so multifarious that there are always holes and tears in which new forms of expression can come into being". This global way of looking holds out new possibilities for a postcolonial geography of the seemingly 'ordinary', giving rise to the type of transnational relations captured in Kureishi's (1990 [1989]) novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The suburbs are increasingly sites for a "parachuted plurality" (Peach, 2000) that has seen ethnic minorities and new migrants move into ostensibly white middle-class areas leaving Silverstone to remark that "The modern suburb is a social as well as a cultural hybrid" (1997, page 7). These movements and a resistance towards them can be traced in disputes surrounding the design and building of mosques and places of worship in suburban spaces (Naylor and Ryan, 2002).

At a prosaic level the postcolonial presence can be felt in such suburban routines as the ritual of coffee mornings, afternoon tea, or the historical export of cricket from quiet English village greens to distant colonies. Such everyday practices suggest a more intimate relationship where empire, trade, and the 'space of flows' can connect up such seemingly distinct parts of the world to render obsolete the deadening affect of whiteness. Suburban gardens filled with foreign rhododendrons, tranquil fish ponds swimming with Japanese Koi carp, gentle English nursery plants supported by Chinese bamboo, the fashion for Continental balconies or elegant Indian verandas are all part of this 'inside' story of Englishness that is also its 'outside' story (Hall, 1995). Having used postcolonial theory to shade out some of the whiteness accompanying suburban representations, I want to turn now to the work of Keith Berry. Berry is a photographer whose images of suburbia—captured in the neighbourhood where this ethnography is conducted—pose a challenge to the bounded meaning of place as fastened to notions of the 'invincible green suburbs'.

### Unsettling doxic landscapes

Drawing upon Bourdieu, Cresswell (2003) has claimed how the rural can be considered a "doxic landscape", wherein what is in fact a social product of history presents as seemingly natural. The way in which rural and suburban spaces are constructed through imaginary notions of whiteness and Englishness instead informs us how these landscapes exist as carefully manicured sites of practice. Yet beneath the veneer of tree-lined avenues, neatly trimmed hedgerows, and rose-bushed gardens the suburbs remain deeply divided and starkly stratified spaces of class polarisation (Power, 1997). By focusing upon the photography of Keith Berry in the suburban neighbourhood of Kempton Dene in the English Midlands we can begin to displace doxa.

Despite its pastoral name, the Dene, as it is known, is an estate located on the border of southeast Birmingham. On one side residents look out onto open fields and farmland, while the other side borders a relatively affluent town and its surrounding borough.

The estate was developed in 1952 as part of a process of postwar rebuilding. Like other outer-ring areas in the Midlands it has been a repository for white flight and at one time appeared a desirable place to live. Today, the Dene seems run down and isolated compared with the wealthy areas nearby. Crime and unemployment are high and the estate is much maligned in populist websites as a district “not even God himself can enter without equipping riot gear” (<http://www.chavtowns.co.uk>). At the time of the research Kempton Dene housed 4182 residents, around half of whom were homeowners, and of which only eighty six were from minority ethnic backgrounds. With a black and Asian population of around 2% the Dene exists as a *white enclave* that contrasts markedly to inner-city Birmingham where around a quarter of the population are drawn from various minority communities. The Dene has much in common with the outer-city district of Chelmsley Wood discussed by Cashmore (1987) which contained just 2.1% of people from New Commonwealth countries and was accompanied by relatively high levels of racism, differing markedly from the multicultural exchange evident in Birmingham’s inner-city locales (Jones, 1988; Rex and Moore, 1979 [1967]).

Berry’s images of the Dene offer a counterpoint to nostalgic representations of the suburbs. They also made me rethink the manner in which I presented my data and an early tendency I had to instil fixed, monochrome geographies of race. Performative perspectives act as an reminder to researchers of how the anthropological gaze can freeze people and place to render them Other. As a local resident, Berry finds beauty in a nearby brook where streams, bluebells, buttercups, and wild garlic prosper [figure 1(a)]. This representation appears far removed from the concrete, graffiti, bus stops, and shops I later depict as formative of the estate. There is also something strikingly different about the tonality and texture of our images. Berry’s photographs are predominantly green, lively, and luminescent, whereas the ones I discuss later are slate grey, flat, and chilling in their intensity. For Berry the pastoral affects in his own work are always contested evoking variegated emotions as seen when he displays a photograph of the same brook, this time appearing as a muddy ditch with a discarded child buggy [figure 1(b)]. This positioning acts as a stark reminder of the cultivated effort to purvey the rural idyll as a timeless and unadulterated landscape.

In another striking juxtaposition a wrought iron fence and tree in full summer blossom are pictured next to what appears to be a rural cottage [figure 2(a)]. Later this is revealed



**Figure 1.** [In colour online, see <http://dx.doi.org/10.1068/a42177>] Contrasting images of the brook: (a) bluebells, buttercups, and wild garlic; (b) muddy ditch with a discarded child buggy (source: copyright Keith Berry).



**Figure 2.** [In colour online] Country cottages or council housing? (a) A wrought iron fence and tree in full summer blossom next to a country cottage, (b) are revealed to be part of a council housing development (source: copyright Keith Berry).

to be part of council housing development where satellite television and UPVC double glazing proliferate [figure 2(b)]. A feature of Berry's work is that he takes pictures of the same space from different angles and moments in time, making us aware of proximity, distance, and the kaleidoscopic nature of the research gaze. There is something tenuous, momentary, and fleeting about this way of looking: a restlessness that forces the viewer to rethink what is already ingrained in our imagination. Like Pollard's (1989; 1993) much-discussed photographs of the English countryside, Berry inspires new cultural imaginings of suburban and rural areas that incite alternative productions of these emotionally laden landscapes. These portrayals inform us of some of the 'deadening' effects of discourse which can solidify the experience of being, living, and doing into lifeless prose. The experimental, if inevitably shaky, ethnographic collisions of events, text, and meaning I have utilised allow my research methods "to dance a little" (Latham, 2003, page 2000), enabling a contingent and 'opened-out' analysis of race and its accompanying affects. Suburban landscapes are then much more than lifeless cultural texts but are compositions in process. As we shall go on to discover through an examination of racist graffiti, these sites carry emotions, feelings, and historically generated ideas related to race, class, and family life. Here, the doxic landscape of whiteness "is very much a product and producer of practice" (Cresswell, 2003, page 277)—a styling of particular race affects. This argument is taken a step further when I examine my own photographs of the same suburban neighbourhood and explore how it is constituted through forms of white territoriality.

### **Race, space, and affect**

As a borderland between the multicultural city and the English countryside, the Dene and other suburbs are imagined as the last bastions of whiteness. In the racialised imagination they appear as new frontiers that need to be protected from the 'invasion' of ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, and other newcomers who allegedly have 'flooded' into urban areas and 'taken over' (Jay, 1992). But it is not simply that the suburbs are constituted through a grammar of race that equates these places with quotidian expressions of whiteness. They are also being composed through an emotional register

of ‘white fright’, fear, and late-modern anxiety. As Fortier (2007) explicates through a media deconstruction of a television documentary *Last of the White Kids*, which claims to centre upon the experiences of the last remaining white English family in a Muslim neighbourhood, such mediated fears emotionally connect with unspoken grievances and nostalgic reminiscences, resuscitating what Brah (1999, page 4) poetically calls “the scent of memory”. In these readings suburban life is memorialised as clean, safe, innocent, and in need of protection from the grimy urban vices of multiculturalism. The idea that the suburbs represent the ‘white man’s last stand’ (figure 3) is the type of racialised, masculine, heroic narrative woven around Colonel Custer’s resistance to the arrows of the Sioux Indians, or the outnumbered British who grimly held on in Africa against the spearing attacks of a Zulu onslaught. Racist graffiti makes palpable a silent assumption that white working-class communities are the victims of an encroaching multiculturalism that must result in a fatal ‘last stand’. These emotions have a critical role to play when it comes to the feelings and resentment that surround access to public housing throughout the West Midlands conurbation. As Ahmed (2004a, page 128) recalls, “fear does not involve the defence of borders that already exist; rather, fear makes those borders, by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can stand apart”. These affects then are always in emergence, calibrated through the sediments of past histories of race that exist in the folds of contemporary English suburban dwelling. It is an exterior that we can now penetrate with a closer analysis of racist and nationalist graffiti that graphically capture how space is transformed into white territory.



**Figure 3.** [In colour online] Last white man’s stand (source: copyright author’s own).

During local by-elections a selection of Birmingham’s outer-ring estates were targeted by extremist right-wing groups in an attempt to secure these areas as ‘white enclaves’. These actions are part of a political and cultural geography of racialisation that is mapped onto everyday landscapes and the people that lie therein (Bonnett and Nayak, 2003). As other researchers have shown, far-right groups like the British National Party (BNP) frequently draw upon a register of affect in an appeal to public support (Ahmed, 2004b; Hopkins, 2007; Ware and Back, 2002). The marking of public spaces such as walls, bus stops, shop fronts, roads, and lamp posts with racist stickers and graffiti construct these suburban areas as emphatic ‘white spaces’: fearful, ‘no-go’ areas for ethnic minorities and outsiders (figures 4 and 5). Through these performances, “Spaces can be stabilised in such a way that they act like political utterances, guiding subjects to particular conclusions” (Thrift, 2003, page 2022). Where isolated black and minority ethnic residents are moved into the estate, they are invariably harassed, have their properties repeatedly broken into, and are forced to ask



**Figure 4.** [In colour online] National Front graffiti (source: copyright author's own).



**Figure 5.** [In colour online] Large National Front symbol (source: copyright author's own).

local authority housing to relocate them. As a consequence of these “economies of hate” (Ahmed, 2004b) ethnic minorities frequently ‘return’ to the multiethnic inner city leaving the suburb intact as a largely white ‘block’.

The presence of far-right activity on the estate is evident in political slogans referring to the BNP and the National Front. The signature of another outfit, Combat 18, an extremist splinter cell of the BNP whose name is derived from the initials of Adolph Hitler (1 equates with the first letter in the alphabet ‘A’ and 8 with the eighth letter ‘H’) is also found. Although rumours abound in the neighbourhood about the appearance of ‘men in suits’ orchestrating the racist propaganda, a conspiracy of silence exists when it comes to identifying these perpetrators and the neighbours who oust black and minority families from their houses. This wall of silence extends due to fear of retribution, white collusion and a working-class convention of no ‘grassing’.

Some residents had voted for far-right parties in the past but disliked the fact that political groups from outside the neighbourhood had plastered spaces with graffiti which then featured in a front-page issue of the local newspaper. There is an intense localism against outsiders from nearby estates where graffiti can be seen as a spatial marker of territoriality (Ley and Cybrinsky, 1974). This meant that when the local shopping parade was used by the far right to scrawl the slogan ‘England for whites’ (figure 6) the graffiti was received with no little ambivalence from residents: some were outspoken against racism, most were concerned that any graffiti denigrates the estate, and a few felt the statements reflected widely held unarticulated sentiments. Noticeably, this particular strap line faces out towards the neighbourhood and is distinct from much of that undertaken by the local youth which is aimed directly at the Asian-owned shops



**Figure 6.** [In colour online] England for whites (source: copyright author's own).

on the parade. This reveals different levels of emotional intent, motive, and complicity with racism. It also suggests that racism cannot be disaggregated from its lived context in the moment, but is situational, an “on-going dynamic embedded in time, space and place” (Bowling, 1998, page 285), a performance that makes palpable the lines of hate. What is particular about racist graffiti is that it makes white territoriality concrete. It also bleeds into the atmosphere of a place and has a permanence that hangs in the air and may carry forward into daily interactions.

### **Assembling race ...**

We sit in silence. Numbed by the sensory overload of raw encounter we remain stuck to the seats of a small Vauxhall Metro resting motionless on the Kempton Dene estate. Occasionally the windscreen wipers flick into life but the sleet of a dark December day has long dissipated. This small metallic vehicle has carried us on our night flight from inner-city Birmingham across amber-lit dual carriageways, beneath long echoing tunnels and over tongue-arched flyovers towards our eventual destination. My friend and colleague Les Back usually exudes serenity, but just now he is sat beside me mildly perspiring and looking distinctly unnerved. For a few still moments we maintain a monastic silence. Les is the first to speak: “I’ve never experienced anything like that”, he splutters, breaking the cotton-wool quietness we are cocooned within. We have just had our first encounter with the young Skinhead ‘gang’ who were to become a formative part of our ethnography on racist violence.

The Skinheads are composed of around ten young men who congregate around the shopping parade and in the local youth club. All are from white working-class backgrounds with the exception of Calvin and Leonard who are brothers, and have a black father living in a multiethnic urban neighbourhood and a white mother who now lives on the estate. The young white men are shaven headed and come from three large families on the estate notorious for crime, violence, and intimidation. Many spoke of family members who had voted for far-right political parties in the past suggesting racism to be part of a deeper biographical profile. The interviews and video footage we record as part of the research display extreme levels of racist intolerance, a marked sense of hypermasculinity, and an obsession with the local estate as ‘territory’. The ethnography that follows engages with the emotional geography of racist antipathy and how it works on and through ideas of place, community, housing, jobs, sexuality, or supermarkets.

We began by asking the young men about their neighbourhood and whether they liked living on the Dene.

**Robbie:** “Yeah, I love it. Got a name, that’s what I like.”

*“What kind of name?”*

**Darren:** “Born on the Dene and I’ll live on the Dene all my life.”

**Robbie:** “Ruff ‘n’ tuff. That’s what we are. We stick together.”

The intense feelings of attachment to the estate are a riposte to the rootlessness expressed by previous postwar generations, many of whom experienced suburban displacement as an alienating process bound up with the atomisation of working-class community (Young and Wilmott, 1980 [1957]). At the same time pride of place is securely linked to the masculine association the Dene has as an area that is reputed to be ‘ruff ‘n’ tuff’. Concrete, broken glass, barbed-wire meshing, and racist graffiti is the architecture through which this image of embattled working-class whiteness is assembled (figure 4). When asked if there are any places on the estate that the Skins would avoid, Robbie emphatically replied, “No ‘cos this is the Dene”, to which Daniel added, “And we kick black ass!” The fantasy of white masculinity is embodied through a particular localism performed through the guise of Skinhead style and a commitment to ‘sticking together’. The head-shaving ritual is an outward display of ‘white pride’, where the immanent markers of race and whiteness are made to appear as-if-real.

**Darren:** “That’s what everyone has down the Dene—a Skinhead. Don’t they?”

**Robbie:** “It’s the trademark.”

**Darren:** “I used a BIC [type of razor] and ...”

*“What’s it a trademark for?”*

**Robbie:** “Don’t mess with the Dene!”

**Darren:** “Don’t mess with the Skinheads!”

**Robbie [chanting]:** “Skiiiiin’eads!”

The young men regard their look as a ‘trademark’, a guarantee of their status and rights to white working-class masculinity. The image is emblematic of the ‘hard’ regional culture and appeals to an imagined sense of authenticity. A local youth worker later informed us that the young men adopted the Skinhead crew cut from an older youth with a criminal record for violence who was released from prison and began hanging out with the young men. Each of them shaved their heads at the same time, overnight embodying a “geometry of menace” (Hebdige, 1982) that could collectively intimidate other youth who happened to cross their path. The Skinhead look functions as a mutable sign articulating various fantasies of hard masculinity through associations with manual labour, militarism, or an ‘ex-con’ identity—a cultural register for ‘hard times’ that reveals a certain vulnerability: the bald truth of a bleak future.

However, the Skinhead style is also a “post-imperial mode of mimicry” (Mercer, 1994) originally rooted in black culture and Jamaican protest music that was to give way in the UK to multicultural dance events where Ska, Reggae, and Two-Tone induced new racial tonalities (Hebdige, 1987 [1979]). The Skinheads in this study were interested in the equally ambiguous hybrid styles of Rave, Ragga, and Trance, but any pretensions to blackness were bleached from existence. In the mainly white estates the Skins manifested an unequivocal white pride, yet in more cosmopolitan spaces the look can induce queer affects in gay culture that disturb and unsettle this seemingly resolute and ‘closed off’ signifier of masculinity (Healy, 1996; Nayak and Kehily, 2008). This appearance is accentuated through the explicit production of white masculinity as wrought into the landscape in everyday pronouncements (figure 7).

During the ethnography the Skins were either unemployed, performing poorly in school, or, in the case of Daniel, had been expelled for ‘paki bashing’. Although some of the young men had undertaken part-time jobs with their fathers or other



**Figure 7.** [In colour online] Don't fuck with whites! (source: copyright author's own).

male relatives, work was sporadic. As Cockburn (2007) has recently shown, perpetrators are not homogenous, they may well have working-class and lower-middle-class labouring biographies, and are capable of change. The young men we spoke with recognised that, if they wished to enter more secure employment, in all likelihood they would have to travel to the larger diverse towns and cities nearby. Given their obsession with local pride the Skinheads viewed the South Asian shopkeepers who owned two small shops on the strand with outright contempt.

**Daniel:** "It's our country, not theirs."

**Leonard:** "Yeah, they don't belong in our country."

**Daniel:** "Fuck 'em off. They've got all the jobs, like me and Mark could be working now but fucking two pakis have jumped in our place haven't they?"

The sense of ownership over the nation ('our country') and the labour market ('our place') reflects the way economic relations can become racialised through an appeal to white privilege based on imaginary notions of nationhood (Phizacklea and Miles, 1979). As Robbie proudly asserts, in an affective remark that collapses nationhood with white masculinity, "The English fight for their territory." An interesting dimension of the research concerns Calvin and Leonard, mixed-heritage youth who are able to align themselves against South Asians in a fraught, often fleeting white alliance. In a joint discussion away from other members, they spoke about this uneasy position, claiming to mix with the Skins in part because there was no one else to hang around with, but also to protect other family members from assaults. The Skins were equally contradictory describing Calvin and Leonard as 'mates', 'mongrels', and 'half breeds' where their mixed-race biography did not permit for the possibilities for new 'postrace' subject positions to prevail (see Ali, 2003; Nayak, 2006b). In these statements there is a 'chaining' of bodies, place, and belonging that is rooted rather than rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), where race becomes tied to blood, bone, and sinew. Calvin and Leonard later left the group leaving a youth worker to report that, once our research had been completed, "They could no longer paper over the cracks", a charge we are unable to verify but remain open to.

The racist graffiti conducted by the Skinhead gang on the estate has a particular local inflection. Unlike the far-right graffiti shown previously it is specifically orientated at the Asian shopkeepers and placed on their shutters, walls, and the area behind the shops. As one spray-painted message emphatically declared, "Pakis off the Dene—It's War!" Where far-right graffiti frequently deployed political, pagan, and Nazi symbols, the young men on the estate more usually evoked iconography that has particular meaning to their local struggles (hence, "Don't fuck with whites" as opposed to the previous nationalist rhetoric "England for Whites"). Another popular motif is the inscription



**Figure 8.** [In colour online] APL ('Anti-Paki League') (source: copyright author's own).

APL which stood for the Anti-Paki League (figure 8). Although there is no organisation of this ilk, the symbol is charged with race affects designed to formalise the unofficial practices of the Skins and simultaneously counter the ANL, the socialist Anti-Nazi League. When the Skins seek to appropriate the signifiers of the far-right, their attempts are often amateurish (figure 9), emphasising performance over politics.

The shopping parade contains half a dozen small shops and two of these businesses are owned by South Asian shopkeepers who are the recipients of much racism in the neighbourhood. Dr Sidhou, a Sikh lecturer who works at a local university and had bought the shop for his wife, is the primary target for racist assaults, having in the past stood up to the perpetrators and reported them to the police. He explained how theft and racist abuse are habitual experiences: how his wife had been spat on, his car and shop had been repeatedly damaged, and how he too had been violently attacked. The Asian corner shop, like the Chinese take away Parker (1995) describes, is a potentially explosive space where strangers meet in "encounters across the counter".

The Skinheads experience the acquisition of shops by Asian businessmen as a form of territorial infiltration. It emotionally connects with a wider 'Asian invasion', perceived to have taken place throughout the West Midlands and the nation-state. This resonance is felt when Robbie remarks how a grocery, hardware store, and shoe shop have been knocked through and transformed into an Asian supermarket:

"He bought one shop, then he bought another, then he bought another fucker. He owns four shops. The big supermarket which was four shops individually, they were all owned by white people."



**Figure 9.** [In colour online] Flawed swastika (source: copyright author's own).

In these entangled emotional relations South Asians are both the symptoms and the causes of the break up of (white) working-class communities. They appear to have accepted but not returned the assumedly generous national embrace of modern multiculturalism (Fortier, 2007). Yet these outpourings of white injustice conceal other neighbourly gestures. Dr Sidhou had briefly employed some of the young men for loading jobs but was forced to release them when he caught them stealing.

In new suburban estates the shopkeeper was once a figure around which social ties were cemented but is now seen to represent white working-class marginalisation and social dislocation. In the popular imaginary the corner shop is no longer a place where credit is allowed, small sums are waived, and conversations of kith and kin predominate. It is now a space for anomic consumption where new faces, languages, and commodities are on display. As one disgruntled elderly white resident remarked, “They even make you pay 5p for a plastic bag.” As Slocum (2008, page 857) recounts in an intricate analysis of farmers’ markets in Minneapolis, USA, for some customers, “trust and comfort may come from engaging with a white vendor.” As an emotional space the shop is an intense site of feeling in which resentment and hostility percolate, centring upon the nostalgia of “England lost” (May, 1996, page 201). It is a symbol of social change that has seen white British people metaphorically transformed from a ‘nation of shopkeepers’ to service sector workers, underemployed, and unemployed. The Asian corner shop is then a ‘meeting place’ of a different milieu to the one Massey (1996 [1991]) depicts in North London and far removed from the metropolitan “culture of conviviality” Gilroy (2006) alludes to in the same city. Instead this is an embattled “contact zone” (Pratt, 1992) for regular hate events in which the potential of transcultural hybridity is reduced to implacable race difference.

The Asian shops on the parade are then situated in national and historical “structures of feeling” (Williams, 1973). They come to symbolise larger transformations in the nation-state that are lived out and experienced in the micropolitics of the local. Although South Asians are also victims of these new class relations they are cast as its beneficiaries, an alien wedge blocking national and neighbourhood ‘community cohesion’. In one race event Dr Sidhou arrived to discover white youth on the estate had superglued the locks on his shop and sprayed “Wot’s up don’t your key work?” on a shutter. On the other shutter they daubed “Lick our arseholes—Paki interbredders [sic] ... Cos I wouldn’t fuck one of you ugly cunts” (figure 10). This slogan emerged as a consequence of a rumour that the shopkeeper was having an affair with a white female worker, though there is no information to support or contradict this. As Ahmed (2004) notes, the construction of such borders occur through the proximity of the other and the feeling that transgression has already taken place. What is evident is that an



**Figure 10.** [In colour online] Race and sexuality (source: copyright author’s own).

assemblage of feelings concerned with ‘white rights’ are exacted upon national and local economies, territories, and bodies. In understanding “emotion as motion” (Thrift, 2004, page 60) a fictive sense of ‘community’ is used to mark the suburb as a purified white space uncontaminated by marauding minorities. These psychosocial acts reveal an obsession with violation concerning: the place of Asian grocers on the parade, a fear that white women could be sexually intimate with Asian proprietors, the symbolic ‘rape’ act of penetrating the shop’s keyhole and filling it with glue, and the crude orifice references to ‘arseholes’, ‘interbreeding’, and ‘fucking’.

As the term ‘paki interbreeders’ indicates, a sense of bodily disgust is ritually attributed to ethnic minorities which bleeds into popular discourse and seeps from the wounds of everyday raw encounter. Through such statements whites and South Asians are represented as distinct ‘species’, where race functions as a regime of truth that can be transgressed only through the seemingly unholy act of ‘miscegenation’ or interbreeding (see Young, 1995). In these moments white people, such as the woman shop worker, could also become targets for abuse. She discusses the intensity of these hate affects:

“I’ve been walloped around the head with rolled up newspapers, had footballs kicked at me and my car attacked ... You should hear the abuse we get when we’re locking up at night. The language those kids use is unrepeatable and it’s all racist.”

Certainly, our ethnographic discussions with the Skins were emotive, exhausting, and occasionally volatile affairs. This is apparent when I enquired about interethnic distinctions and was confronted with violent, embodied, and sensual understandings of race.

**Anoop:** “Is it Asians that you hate more or black people?”

**Daniel:** “Pakis.”

**Anoop:** “Why?”

**Leonard:** “’Cos they smell.”

**Anoop:** “Who told you that?”

**Daniel:** “Fucking smell it! No one has to tell us. Fucking can smell it.”

**Youth worker [intervening]:** “When you go into an English person’s house ...”

**Daniel:** “It smells of nice air-freshener ... If you go into a paki’s house stinks of curry and shit.”

Echoing Douglas’s (2000 [1966]) early anthropological accounts of how tribal groups deploy purity and danger as tropes of distinction, the Skinhead gang repeatedly described black minorities as ‘filthy’, ‘dirty’, and ‘smelly’ in a powerful “ritual of uncleanliness” (page 8). The concentration on smells and pollution—“a paki’s house stinks of curry and shit”—serves to make South Asian bodies, food, and homes *abject*, going beyond visual registers of difference to mark these encounters with deeply imbued race affects. This iteration is suspended waiting to be actualised in any given moment—“Even the little kids go, ‘APL Pakis smell!’”, reported one of the Skins. Race is assembled through these affects and intensities of emotion. This is seen in our video recordings of the young men. Towards the end of one session Daniel, a Skinhead of slight build, asked “How come you’re filming us?” We replied that we wanted to record what they had to say. Robbie, Daniel’s cousin, immediately quipped, “Show the pakis what we say!” Daniel then turned towards the camera and said, “We hate pakis, fuck ‘em off.” It was clear that the group wanted their video to be broadcast to their ‘objects’ of fury. As we were packing away the equipment Robbie ventured, “What you should do is bring some Pakis down and we can have a debate. We can listen to what they got to say and we’ll tell ‘em what we think.” He paused for a moment and then said excitedly, “Bring some big, dirty, smelly Paki down and we can have an argument!”

For Robbie, this monstrous image of Asian otherness was necessary for him to inflate his own 'white selfhood'. This exchange demonstrates how race is a 'sticky' sign that fixes itself to bodies, objects, and imaginaries. It is through these emotional intensities that we witness what Ahmed (2004, pages 25–26) calls the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies, where "such bodies can only be imaged as pure by the perpetual restaging of this fantasy of violation." This reveals the interlocked process whereby white identities are expressed through the fixed construction of contrasting racial otherness.

A vivid illustration of the mutually constitutive dynamics of race became apparent when the young men alluded to its performance through bodily practice. Throughout discussions they treated race as a fixed and immutable category, yet at the same time stressed young people should "act their own colour", thereby implying that there are different ways of 'doing' race and that it is open to unsettlement. I pursued this theme:

"What do you mean 'act your own colour'?"

**Mark:** "We act like we act, and get all the black people like walking, swinging their fucking arms like fucking apes."

**Darren:** "We wear jeans. Niggers wear cuts in their jeans. Pakis wear pyjamas."

**Daniel:** "And fucking towels."

The deployment of contrasting race signs and actions enables whiteness to be consolidated at the expense of racialised others. For example, black people are identified as animals who indulge in hyperbolic performances, "swinging their fucking arms like apes", while whiteness is construed as normative, "we act like we act". The normalcy of whiteness is represented through the mundane, everyday Western symbol of 'jeans', an effect which film theorist Dyer found to portray whiteness as "emptiness, absence, denial" (1993, page 141). The way race adheres to certain youthful bodies and not others becomes intelligible if we also consider the deeper articulations of class, gender, and sexuality. The crude statement, "niggers wear cuts in their jeans", locates African-Caribbean youth as urban, street-wise ethnicities that are potentially impoverished, threatening, and dangerous. The reference to apes symbolises their uncivilised and base nature, yet at the same time comes to rearticulate a familiar fantasy of blackness as *hypermasculine*. It is a complex 'doubling' of emotions that Fanon (1970 [1952]) eloquently captures as *fear and desire*, where racialised Others are simultaneously despised and desired. This 'unspoken' yet secretly admired black identity connects with the assemblage of global race affects that are summoned to life in successive iterations of black masculinity in US film, sport, and popular music video. The black body is unable to fully escape the high resonance of these technological affects since "a body that is signified as a source of fear through its markedness cannot be free to affect and be affected similarly to one that is not" (Tolia-Kelly, 2006a, page 215).

In contrast to the hypermasculine portrayal of black youth is placed the *feminised* image of South Asians, registered through other tropes of affect. The references to 'towels' and 'pyjamas' which refers to turbans, Indian suits, and saalwar-kameez is a stringent attempt to mark their identities as 'out of place' in the suburban English landscape. In contrast to the rough, 'cut-up' denim wear of African-Caribbean youth—a style which brazenly exposes black skin—Asian garments are seen to conceal, veil, and cover up the body, marking it as mysterious and potentially suspicious in the post-9/11 environment. Towels and pyjamas are also soft domestic items that elicit affects which connote South Asians as weak, effeminate, and on occasion potentially homosexual. This is seen when my own masculinity was appraised through an on-screen production of Hanif Kureishi's previously mentioned novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

**Darren:** "He looks like the one off ... *Buddha of Suburbia*."

**Robbie:** "Oh ahh—that dirty Paki. He gives that bloke a blow job at the end."

**Darren:** "I think it's him."

In these early encounters ‘piss taking’, wind ups, and denigrations of race and masculinity were deployed to test out my reaction through the negotiation of “feeling rules” (Blee, 1998). Such exchanges remind us that “life is composed in the midst of affects” (Lorimer, 2008, page 552) and that the emotionally charged nature of ethnographic fieldwork may confront us with visceral productions of race. As Saldanha (2006) has argued, race has a viscous quality that adheres to bodies, spaces, and things, thickening relations between people and generating felt capacities of difference.

The impulsive dialogue with the Skins reveals how the performance of white masculinity is seen to be dependent upon the production of racialised Others. Despite concerted attempts to display whiteness as ‘natural’, the hyperbolic performances indicate that whiteness is carefully choreographed through the ensemble of Skinhead styles and practices. There is a conjoining of dirt with seemingly illicit sexual practices that can be distributed onto the bodies of same-sex couples or those who cross the racial divide that locates them as paki interbreeders. Being ‘dirty’ in this context involves the visceral qualities of dirt, race, sex, class, homosexuality, immigration, invasion, and excrement. In the above scenario the economies of race hate are mediated through the fiction of screen production before coming to settle, contingently, upon my own visibly marked body. The wilful adherence of race signs is seen where comments about ‘pakis’ in ‘pyjamas’ were made in front of me despite the fact that I dressed in jeans throughout the ethnography.

The resonance of race signs and the affective qualities they come to inhabit are condensed in a marker pen inscription scribbled outside Dr Sidhou’s shop. The message simply declares “Pakis stink of shit”. Accompanying this statement is a facial pen portrait of Dr Sidhou with a beard, wearing his turban—a signifying trope of ethnic and religious difference, and a mark of external boundaries that produces white residents as clean and the shopkeeper as filthy, taboo, and the deserving subject of ‘ethnic cleansing’. While it is certainly true that “race and racism operate within ocular grammars of difference” (Back, 2007, page 119), it is also vital to pay attention to the wider palette of emotional registers. Odours, auras, smells, and tastes are used to evoke difference and emphatically cast racialised minorities as abject. Importantly, such derogatory epithets are littered with a scattering of affect and emotion simultaneously used to anchor ideas about the pure white body. These assemblages may invoke a geography of real and imagined “smellscapes”, where “the practice of food preparation, its odours and eventual consumption in public spaces also offer grounds for ethnic discrimination and a contested urban geography” (Lorimer, 2005, page 87).

Despite such intense racism Dr Sidhou remains defiant in the face of abuse. Having erased the graffiti on previous occasions he reflects,

“I stopped taking it off at one time. I left it there. In the daytime when the shutters are up, there’s nothing you can see, it’s at night when you’re closing [that you see the graffiti]. I think to myself, ‘Let the people who live here see what their children are doing’. Let them have to look at it.”

Dr Sidhou’s pugnacious stance inverts the narrative power of graffiti redirecting its emotional content back upon the community as a marker of shame. As Pain (2009) lucidly describes, there is very little in the work on fear and affect that considers resistance, agency, and action where emotions can be reshaped and reformulated. In appealing to a common humanity Dr Sidhou engages in a repatterning of emotional politics that is also a challenge to the wider “perpetrator community” (Sibbitt, 1997) — white residents who stand idly by, say nothing, and do nothing. In opening out what Anderson and Harrison (2006) term “silences of testimony”, we can perhaps slowly unpick “the force of signification” and the “realms of existence which are irreducible to, but exist in complex relations with, discursive and ideological orders” (page 335).

### Afteraffects ...

The spectacle of racist violence in the English suburbs disrupts many of our imagined geographies of race, place, and nation. It challenges the metropolitan focus of race investigation and moves beyond the more familiar urban–rural binary of conventional enquiry. As everyday spaces of ‘betweenness’ suburban estates are anything but non-place spaces: they are as diverse and divided as cosmopolitan urban areas and are becoming the new frontiers of racist violence. This would suggest that the academic gaze needs to be recast from the cities to the suburbs and elsewhere if we are to develop a cultural geography of racism that is as rich, extensive, and detailed as that which has taken place on the inner city and more lately the countryside. This entails rethinking the suburbs through postcolonial frames that disturb attending associations with gentility, prosperity, and white respectability. In focusing upon minority integration and assimilation, government policy on cohesive communities has had relatively little to say about how white enclaves are produced and perform as white space. By bringing together performance literature with photography, events, and encounters, this ethnography has attempted to capture something of the visceral making of race practices. It has been argued that race difference is always produced through emotional registers that carry global affects. The ‘doing’ of race is performative and evoked in events, “‘presentations’, ‘showings’ and ‘manifestations’ of everyday life” (Thrift, 1997, pages 126–127). In these barely understood yet deeply felt encounters, emotion is an unreliable barometer for calibrating race. And yet the feelings attached to suburban living, family values, and a past work ethic can incite an inward turn to whiteness in the face of rapid socioeconomic transformations that have given rise to nostalgia, resentment, and felt grievances. This accumulation of emotion leaks out into everyday life and as we have seen may often be displaced onto ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, refugees, and new communities. Moreover, these emotions do things, coming to inscribe certain spaces through a monochrome geography of race that marks minorities as ‘bodies out of place’.

In a cosmopolitan world of fleshy multicultural encounters, beards, bodies, turbans, veils, urban territories, curry, or corner shops become the rubric through which difference is assembled and the grammar through which race is made legible (Swanton, 2008). The affects attributed to these arbitrary signs put into motion a range of emotions that may reveal felt attachments to whiteness as a way of being and living in the world. In the push of race difference whiteness is also silently summoned to life through the forms of white bonding and belonging that surface around ‘community’. These affects adhere to idyllic notions of rural suburbia, crew cuts, honest labour, homeownership, cars on drives, benevolent shopkeepers, respectable families, and school choice. These events, such as they are, are performative: they are the means through which the nation is ‘flagged’ (Billig, 2004 [1995]) and whiteness is done in the familiar routines and prosaic habits of everyday life. These ritual choreographies articulate what so often goes unspoken in day-to-day exchanges between white residents and Asian shopkeepers: the barely uttered gestures, fleeting glances, strained silences, and discreet performances of othering. What these daily events and small acts achieve is that they bring the silent, immanent markers of race into emergence. As Thrift (2004, page 60) notes, these “emotions are largely non-representational” but nevertheless I suggest they materialise in objects, landscapes, and corporeal encounters that render race to life and provide it with an illusory substance.

An understanding of the emotional politics of race is needed if we are to deliver more critical understandings of self and other that recognise encounters as temporal relations: an assemblage of event, performance, and affect (Nayak, 2006b). As we have seen, these emotional collisions are forged through historical ‘structures of feeling’ that

configure suburbia or the corner shop as a once pure space now polluted by foreign bodies. The ethnography suggests that the intense feelings surrounding race cannot simply be peeled away, dried out, and desiccated into semiotic meaningless mulch. In the post-9/11 landscape, race affects—in all their messy, misrecognised, and globalised assemblage—live on: they are displaced onto people, objects, and things and then brought to bear in everyday events and “encounters with strangers” (Ahmed, 2000).

An engagement with what I have called the emotional politics of race should not lead us to ignore the materiality of bodies and the “geometries of power” (Massey, 1996 [1991]) constituted through racist practices. Instead, it allows us to supplement the representational aspects of ethnographic interpretation with more “abstract descriptors” pertaining to “events, auras, rhythms, cycles, flows and codes” (Lorimer, 2007, page 96). In this rendering of race and place, concepts such as ‘parallel lives’, ‘social exclusion’, or ‘community cohesion’—powerful as they are—appear to overlook the emotional connections of being and belonging and the ambiguous ways in which multicultural intimacies and visceral hatred coexist. Conflict and conviviality are performed and worked through ‘on-the-ground’ and ‘in-the-moment’. If policies for multicultural living are to have any meaning they need to connect much more closely with the sensory aspects of affect, event, and encounter. This entails more open understandings of people’s ‘sense of place’ and how this registers with ideas of nation, region, home, or locality as geographically located and emotionally experienced. For it is through these felt connections that race materialises from immanence to emergence.

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