

Purging the nation: race, conviviality and embodied encounters in the lives of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women

Anoop Nayak

This paper critically engages with debates on race, conviviality and the geography of encounters. Where much of this work is undertaken in multicultural places, far less is known about the doing and undoing of conviviality in mainly white localities. The study further contributes to this work by offering a richly embodied account of racism and belonging based on the biographical testimonies of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women. Through these accounts, I identify topographies of power, social inequality and forms of exclusion that disrupt the melody of multicultural conviviality. I demonstrate the visceral aspects of race as it is summoned to life in live encounters, where it is lived on the body, bleeds into the locality and congeals around imaginary ideas of the nation state. I argue that antagonistic encounters that serve to mark out British Bangladeshi Muslims as ‘Other’ perform a bigger role: purging the nation, detoxifying it from encroaching multicultural intimacies and stabilising it as white. Despite this ritual cleansing I demonstrate how respondents are implicated in new forms of civic belonging, laying claim to nationhood, locality and rights to the city that subvert and hollow out the fantasy of a white nation.

Key words Bangladeshi; Muslims; racism; youth; conviviality; nationalism

School of Geography, Politics & Sociology, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU
Email: anoop.nayak@ncl.ac.uk

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Introduction

It is early morning and I am strolling along Armstrong Bridge, a long wrought iron construction which stretches across the Ouseburn River and Newcastle’s surrounding parks. At the other end, somewhere in the distance, I spot three teenage boys on BMX bikes cycling towards me. There is something in their manner and movement that immediately makes me wary. Almost unconsciously I alter my posture, make myself look bigger and purposefully stride forward, knowing that in a few seconds our paths will cross and there will be a flashpoint. The surge of adrenaline pulsing through my veins allows me to make millions of micro-calculations in rapid time. As the distance closes and the three figures grow more vivid, I can tell they are travelling too fast to brake suddenly and execute a physical assault. As I attempt to prefigure their actions, time slows and I find myself focusing on the face of one of the young men, sensing him to be the initiator. Eye to eye, our gazes lock together; I attempt to read every facial gesture so I can prepare myself for impending hostility. The merest flicker of a smile plays at the corner of his lips, betraying his thoughts. As his mouth opens, for a brief moment I wonder if I will be spat at, and have angled my body to make it difficult for the

young men to score a direct hit at speed. ‘Suicide bomber!’, he screeches, whizzing past in a kinetic blur of arms, legs and hoodie, ‘Islamic terrorist – Bin Ladin!’ yells another, and the rest I don’t recall. Relieved that the passing encounter is of a low-key nature, it seems no more than an everyday event of seemingly banal inconsequence.

This paper seeks to produce a deeper understanding of such everyday race encounters. It does so by showing how race is made live in these events and the way in which bodies, objects and emotions are central to these encounters. This involves exploring the empirical grounding and conceptual unwrapping of race in everyday life. By race encounters I am not referring to what is sometimes euphemistically termed ‘inter-cultural’ encounters, which can suggest there are distinct ‘communities’ or bounded ‘cultures’ that interact with one another (Alexander 2008). Rather, my interest lies with how the fictitious notion of race is made ‘real’; or more accurately how the ‘floating signifier of race’ is made intelligible (Hall 2002). The study develops work on race by focusing on bodies, emotions and the multi-scaler dynamics of encounters. Throughout I seek to provide a fleshy, embodied account of ‘multicultural intimacies’ (Fortier 2008) that shows how race is lived through the body and comes-

into-being in encounters with other bodies. This intercorporeal approach responds to recent demands for ‘research on the embodied, emotional, and relational aspects of different forms of “encounter”’ (Hopkins 2014, 1583) by demonstrating the visceral and bodily dimensions of racism in the lives of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women, who are among the most marginalised and poorest groups in British society (ONS 2012).

This study discloses how the enactment and distribution of ‘felt intensities’ towards Muslims, migrants or multiculturalism brings race into emergence, marking out Bangladeshi Muslim young women as abject. It supports the view that the ‘national’ remains an important spatial register in debates on multiculturalism (Gilroy 2004; Nayak 2012; Parekh 2000), despite the prevalence of global diaspora and new forms of transnationalism (Antonich and Matejskova 2015). Throughout, I argue that the micro-politics of race hate that occurs in everyday encounters at a local scale can perform as a means of purging the nation and exerting white territoriality. This is a process of expelling unwanted feelings and memories, but also of ridding the nation of abject bodies. Writing in the Australian context, Hage (1998) records how white supremacy is achieved through the spatial management of the nation, which comes to define national territory, its proper citizens and legitimate forms of behaviour. I contend that making the white nation is more than a social and material act. It connects with deeper psycho-social feelings related to whiteness and national belonging regarding who ‘really’ has a right to belong. These felt intensities slide over the political grammar of legislation on citizenship, equality and human rights, inscribing their own felt interpretations of whiteness into the national landscape and the bodies that lie therein. It is through these embodied and emotional encounters that a fictive community is produced, and the nation is stabilised as white.

I begin by documenting contemporary scholarship on geographies of encounter that have focused on ‘everyday multicultural’ and ‘super-diversity’ (Neal *et al.* 2015a; Vertovec 2007; Wise and Velayutham 2009), ‘contact zones’ and ‘micro-publics’ (Amin 2012; Askins and Pain 2011), as well as bodies, affects and emotion (Ahmed 2000; Ho 2009; Nayak 2010; Simonsen and Koefoed 2015; Swanton 2010). I suggest that a broader ‘convivial turn’ is taking place across a number of disciplines offering rich insight into the doing of multiculturalism, how it is lived and practised in daily life (Gidley 2013). While recognising the potential of urban encounters to create and sustain cosmopolitan ways of living, I argue that it is important not to yield to ‘flat ontologies’ that overlook the friction that accompanies what are often unsettling

encounters. I then go on to outline the research methods and spatial demographics of the study to provide a context for the type of in-depth, qualitative analysis and interpretation through which a thoroughly relational, embodied and emotional account can transpire. The study explores youth encounters in two contact zones: education spaces as well as home spaces including the surrounding locality. Although encounters in other zones of contact were present, these spaces are primary social sites in which young people spend a large amount of time. As such, they are formative of their identities and influential in how they come to understand themselves and others. The paper concludes by drawing out the transformative potential of encounters to corrode the mythic properties of whiteness attached to national belonging. This is achieved through forms of tolerance, resistance and a slow-burn multiculturalism whose fuse is already ignited.

Geographies of encounter and the convivial turn

Contemporary scholarship relating to people, place and urban encounters has been broadly influenced by what we may characterise as a *convivial turn*. For Gilroy (2004) conviviality is a phrase that captures the humdrum nature of most encounters, the manner in which people learn to ‘live with difference’ (Hall 1993) and how they generally come to rub along together in a globalised, multi-ethnic metropolis. Conviviality is said to be expressive of new forms of urban citizenship, where belonging is not necessarily reliant on the fixed markers of race, ethnicity and nationality. Rather, people may exhibit multiple attachments to place and identity through hybridised migrant belonging and a shared sense of cosmopolitanism enriched through numerous, often repetitive encounters. These relations are organic, generating an ‘unkempt, unruly and unplanned multicultural’ (Gilroy 2004, x). The convivial turn is elaborated on in urban scholarship that seeks to celebrate the ‘throwntogetherness of place’ (Massey 2005), new forms of ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2007) and a prosaic, ‘everyday multiculturalism’ (Wise and Velayutham 2009). The breadth of this scholarship includes transient encounters in cafés, parks, caravan sites, allotments as well as bustling cities (Crouch 2003; Latham 2003; Laurier and Philo 2006; Neal *et al.* 2015a). For example, in their study of urban green space, Neal *et al.* (2015a, 475) extend these insights by exploring how public parks are not only sites for the ‘being together’ of multicultural strangers but formative in the ‘bringing together’ of these diverse populations. In other urban spaces they further explore the ‘high affectivity’ and ‘social sociability’ that underpins conviviality (Neal *et al.* 2013). Laurier and Philo consider

how the convivial aspects of café culture engender 'low-level sociability between strangers' (2006, 193). This ethos of easy mixing engenders a 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2013, 407) where ethnic, religious or linguistic differences become normative.

These studies indicate that many encounters with difference are congenial; developing familiarity, reciprocity, warmth, friendship and trust. These intangible sensations suggest 'conviviality can be understood as an atmosphere and an affect' (Wise and Velayutham 2014, 412). This affective cordiality is illustrated in the harmonious, 'quiet politics of belonging' Askins (2015, 475) detects in the intimate relations between refugees/asylum-seekers and the volunteers who befriend them. This body of work offers an important political rejoinder to contemporary national policy that is preoccupied with community cohesion and fears around segregation, securitisation and governance. Wessendorf's proposition that 'encounters in public associational space do not necessarily enhance deeper cultural understanding, but that the *absence* of such encounters can enhance prejudice' (2013, 410) is particularly instructive. It affirms the value of 'light-brush' encounters in the making and remaking of a progressive sense of place where difference constitutes the new norm.

Nevertheless, in this paper I seek to stretch the elastic concept of conviviality – almost to breaking point – to demonstrate how points of tension and rupture come to mark daily encounters. The aim is not to do away with the potential of conviviality as both a descriptor of lived multiculturalism and a generative thinking concept, but to undo some of 'the knotty issues of inequalities' (Valentine 2008, 333) and lay them bare.

In responding to this challenge, my attention is less with celebrating the 'everyday multiculturalism' interwoven into local–global relations and more with recognising the 'everyday racism' that pulls at the fabric of conviviality and works to whiten the nation. I suggest that like a long-playing vinyl record, the sonic melody of multiculturalism advanced through the convivial turn can risk deafening us to some of the scratchiness and bumpiness that lie in the grooves of many encounters with difference. It is these atonal infractions – scratches, bumps, crackles and hisses – that I seek to pay attention to. For not only are these auditory interruptions part of the relational, embodied and emotional aspects of encounter social geographers request we pay attention to, but they are central to how multiculturalism, difference and diversity is lived. As such, they are characteristic of the 'disjuncture and difference' that accompanies living in a global society (Appadurai 1990). Together, conviviality and conflict come to form the major and minor chords of citizenship and national belonging.

Emotions, embodiment and mobility

If much of the writing on encounters in super-diverse societies is largely celebratory, gesturing towards a new urban cosmopolitanism, empirical international research that focuses directly on the experiences of religious and minority ethnic people is less sanguine. Noble and Poynting's survey and interview with Arab and Muslim young men in Australia in the post-9/11 era uncovers mobility constraints, where 'movement is experienced differentially, and the pleasures and powers it confers are not distributed evenly but linked to relations of inequality and practices of social exclusion' (2010, 490). In a study of middle-class Sikh young men in Scotland, Hopkins (2014) found subtle inequalities existed, whereby respondents had to publicly self-present in ways that were polite and civil in order to at least partially allay the fears associated with routinely being read as 'strangers'. More explicit experiences of incursion are identified in Simonsen and Koefoed's (2015) study of Pakistani Muslims in Denmark, Phillips *et al.*'s (2006) account of British South Asian residential exclusion in the English Northern Pennines and Thomas's (2011) work on multicultural girlhood in the USA, disclosing how particular routes and spaces for minority ethnic youth in school are regulated and restricted.

To this extent, everyday encounters must be seen as context-bound, site-specific interactions located in time and place. Moreover, much of the work on multicultural encounters has been located in multi-ethnic cities, including London (Neal *et al.* 2015b), Leicester (Clayton 2012), Bradford (Phillips 2015) and Birmingham (Wilson 2015) and far less is known about interactions in predominantly white preserves. This paper attempts to fill this lacuna. It moves beyond institutional accounts that explore encounters in schools, universities and community centres (Askins 2016; Hopkins 2011; Thomas 2011; Wilson 2013a 2013b) by considering everyday mobility and space.

A further contribution is the inter-corporeal focus on racialised bodies, emotions and their affects. Too often the body and emotions are ignored, erased and written out of geographical research (Nash 2000; Thien 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006). Hage's (1998) valuable study of multicultural Australia says surprisingly little about Indigenous communities and their embodied experience of managing whiteness. Amin's (2012) *Land of strangers* has been described as 'curiously disembodied' (Hopkins 2014, 1575), Swanton's (2008 2010) street observations on the outskirts of Bradford focuses more on objects than people, for Jackson forming 'a substitute for more systematic analysis' (2008, 302), and Thrift's (2004, 60) reification of affect in preference to emotion has been described as 'masculinist, technocratic and distancing' (Thien 2005, 452).

The corporeal engagement offered in this paper is richly influenced by feminist, postcolonial and critical race scholars. Tolia-Kelly (2006) reflects how certain work on non-representational theory and affect through their universalism may invoke a type of 'ethnocentric encounter', with little acknowledgement of the unequal distribution of power that enables some bodies to move freely while other bodies, such as those in this study, are marked and held in place by past histories and geographies. The centrality of emotions is seen where the idea of race is sustained through feelings, affects and emotional dispositions, often with stark geo-political consequences (Nayak 2011; Pain 2009). Feeling is inscribed in the symbolic construction of the nation state (Anderson 1991). It is alive in nationalism, civic belonging and community cohesion, as well as the felt attachments Ho (2009) identifies as 'emotional citizenship'. In working with embodied feelings and actions, I disclose the psycho-social connections between local encounters, national belonging and global concerns where fear, risk, suspicion, loss and insecurity are just some of the emotive ways in which the live wires of race are charged.

Researching Bangladeshi youth

Undertaken in the city of Sunderland, the study is in dialogue with multiple projects, including current research with Bangladeshi Muslim youth in a peripheral seaside town, a recent study on multiculturalism with black and minority ethnic and faith voluntary organisations (Nayak 2012) and longstanding work on whiteness and young people's geographies of racism and anti-racism (Nayak 2003). Within Sunderland, the British Bangladeshi population is predominantly concentrated in three main wards, two of which are in Sunderland East, the other in Sunderland West. The small but compact neighbourhoods of Bangladeshi settlement have been described as 'inter-related, closely knit and interdependent' (Crozier and Davies 2007, 298), leading some scholars to depict British Bangladeshis as an 'encapsulated community' (Eade *et al.* 1996). These locales, along with a series of social sites and micro-publics, form the base of the study. A total of 71 semi-structured interviews were conducted with British Bangladeshi young Muslims in the North East region of England. The interviews took place in schools, colleges, youth clubs, community groups, cafés and libraries. Different recruitment techniques were used, such as formal letters to institutions with follow-up messages, planned visits to community centres and local areas, as well as 'snowballing' through social network sites and friendship groups. All interviews were conducted by the research team comprising two British South Asian Muslim women researchers (one who is of Bangladeshi heritage, the other Pakistani) and me, a British South

Asian Indian male. To this extent our own identities, often subsumed as 'Asian', were marked by similarities and difference, extending from ourselves to our respondents. Of the 42 interviews conducted in Sunderland, I focus on a sample of 20 with young women. The reasons for this concern gender, locality, generation and ethnicity, as will be explained.

During research it became apparent that Bangladeshis in the North East are a diverse population, often speaking different languages and holding different values to one another. This is in part due to the forms of chain migration, where a number of Bangladeshis in Sunderland herald from one or two villages. In accounting for these differences, the British Bangladeshi Muslim community – such as it is – needs to be considered in ways that are intersectional and inter-generational in order to offer more diverse insights into their needs and opinions (Alexander 2008). As Dwyer fittingly reminds us, such 'communities are imagined contingently, are constructed through debate and dialogue, and are fluid and changing' (1999, 65). A focus on youth is especially important, for as Cameron and Field (2000) observed in their study of over 300 Bangladeshi households in the neighbouring city of Newcastle, nearly three quarters of the community are under the age of 30. This portrait is in keeping with the national picture, where 40 per cent of the Bangladeshi population are under the age of 16 with a median age of 18, compared with the white population at 37. Advanced literature surveys and policy reports corroborate the youthful dimension of this cohort (Alexander *et al.* 2010; Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2005), although a media focus on 'Asian gangs' (Alexander 2000) and Islamic terrorists (Archer 2003) has placed an acute focus on young Muslim men (Nayak and Kehily 2013). This emphasis has led to calls for 'Detailed research into the experiences, needs and aspirations of young Bangladeshi women' (Change Institute 2009, 11), who remain marginalised. Moreover, Bangladeshi Muslim groups in the voluntary sector tend to be headed by a male elder, meaning local government forms of consultation frequently represent those voices to the exclusion of others. By exploring the first-hand testimonies of young women, I seek to enable their voices and gendered experiences to be heard and felt in order to further contribute to the relational, embodied and emotional accounts recently called for.

Eliciting the biographical testimonies of Bangladeshi girls and young women is an important step in bringing these marginalised experiences to light and engaging an under-represented youth cohort (Alexander *et al.* 2010). The girls and young women that figure in the study are aged 11–24 years, so fit within the socially constituted category of 'youth'. The biographical interviews are semi-structured in format, focusing on young

people's attitudes to the locality, friendships, family, education and leisure. Young people were encouraged to draw on their own experiences and informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the issues being addressed. Throughout the process the emphasis was on enabling respondents to feel comfortable in a relaxed setting and free to express their opinions openly. Participants were informed that they did not have to take part in the interview and pseudonyms were given to preserve anonymity. At the outset, the study was not explicitly focused on encounters with difference, but it was evident that the prosaic negotiation of their perceived 'Otherness' was critical to the lives of British Bangladeshi Muslim girls and young women, what they did and who they were. Coding, close reading and a fine-grain interpretation of the transcripts soon made it clear that small encounters have big effects. The narratives of young people challenge the easy conviviality signalled in previous metropolitan research, through an explicit engagement with the politics of racism and nationalism. It is these encounters that are discussed here in order to do justice to the feelings, emotions and viewpoints expressed by young people.

Placing the study

Located in the North East of England, Sunderland is a city with a strong industrial past in ship-building, coal-mining and industrial glass-making. Along with Wales, the 2011 Census reveals the North East region to have the highest number of people classified as 'White British', recorded at just over 92 per cent. It indicates there are 436 514 British Bangladeshis living in England, of which 10 972 reside in the North East. After the South West of England, this is the lowest figure for Bangladeshi population settlement, standing as it does at around 2.5 per cent. The city of Sunderland has a population of 275 506 residents and it is estimated that there are 2075 British Bangladeshis located in the city (KS201, ONS 2011), meaning they represent around 0.8 per cent of the urban population. Nevertheless, they remain the largest of all South Asian groups in the city, though it should be noted that figures do not include those who identify as 'Mixed/multiple ethnic group', or simply prefer to tick 'Other ethnic group'.

In keeping with the demography of the region, Sunderland remains a predominantly white locality with around 95 per cent of people identifying as 'White British'. The ethnic composition of the city and its surrounding areas has attracted far-Right organisations, including the British National Party, Britain First, the National Front and the English Defence League, who regard Sunderland as a potential site of recruitment. In the recent European Union referendum, 61 per cent of Sunderland voters elected to leave, compared with the national inclusive average of 52 per cent. Within this turbulent context, Bangladeshi youth are

forging notions of civic identity as well as a transnational sense of belonging. Throughout they speak of encounters on public transport, in parks, shops, civic spaces, leisure zones and other social sites. Here, I focus on two contact zones, educational spaces and home spaces. The former includes institutions such as schools and colleges, while the latter incorporates home and the surrounding neighbourhood. I argue that the bringing-into-being of race in these encounters signals the management of white space and delineates the borders of citizenship and belonging. In doing so, an idea of the white nation is produced through the conjoining of racism, nationalism and whiteness.

Encountering difference, producing the nation: race, space and education

One of the sites where regular intermingling between young people occurs is in the educational arena, namely nurseries, schools, colleges, training centres and universities. In some cases these institutions offer opportunities for encounters that would otherwise be less available in more divided neighbourhoods (Amin 2012). In Parks' (2015) study of pre-school children's centres in North East England, new migrant parents saw value in these institutions as sites for improving their language skills, but also for facilitating more predictable encounters with the local community. In exploring multicultural relations in a parents' group and school playground in Birmingham, UK, Wilson (2013a 2013b) discovered parents could enforce separation through establishing well-worn habits and routines such as standing next to, or speaking with, the same people. These patterns could occasionally be disrupted by children who ran between groups and also formed diverse friendships, networks and activities. Similarly, in this study Dinia and Mina each spoke of the spatially different network of friends that existed in their locality and at school, suggesting the potential for parents groups, school events and interactions outside the school gate to bring people together. However, living arrangements structured by 'white flight', ethnicity and social class are not easily overcome.

[11 years]

Where do you usually hang around?

Dinia: In Albury. The park.

Mina: We visit our cousins' house.

Who do you usually hang around with?

Dinia: My friends.

Mina: My friends and my sisters. Sometimes I play outside as well.

Are all your friends Asian?

Both: Yes.

Have you any white friends?

Mina: I've got white friends at school. Cos there's no white friends near Albury, all the Asian peoples live here.

It is noticeable that for many respondents the immediate family and extended kinship network are the most frequent resource girls and young women draw on when it comes to who they spend their leisure time with. A number spoke of watching films and television, listening to music, playing games, talking and undertaking leisure activities within these networks. In this excerpt it is also evident that schools can perform as primary contact zones for encounters, a space where friendships and alliances may be formed. In neighbourhoods where 'all the Asian people live' (Mina) and there are relatively few opportunities for mixing, the school functions as a microcosm for multicultural interaction and lively encounters.

The split between home life and education also featured in other accounts. Zinia, Syeda and Bilkis were teenage college students and made a distinction between the explicit hostility they experienced on the school playground and the more liberal attitude in college, where, it was remarked, 'People are more mature' (Zinia). When asked if she had ever experienced racist violence, Syeda declared, 'Yeah, everywhere – school, everywhere except from college'. These comments echo findings in Hopkins' (2011) study of Muslim university students who predominantly viewed the campus as a tolerant space, despite recognising some markers of social exclusion and surveillance. Young women in Sunderland claimed that most of their friends were Bangladeshi Muslims, intimating that multicultural encounters did not necessarily lead to the permanence of longstanding friendships.

[16–17 years]

Have you got any white friends?

Shabib: In college, yeah.

You don't hang around with them after college?

Zinia: No.

Why is that?

Shabib: We feel more comfortable ...

Zinia: Around our own race.

These remarks indicate that multicultural interaction is a precarious and spatially bounded practice restricted to particular sites and spaces. This 'precarious multiculturalism' may see contingent bonds of friendship formed with white peers on the college campus, but a lack of confidence may hinder the transference of tolerance into other spaces. Here the

pull of race, based on notions of assumed 'sameness', could be used to mute multiculturalism. 'Feeling comfortable' around particular young people – and presumably feeling wary and suspicious of others – was cited as a reason for maintaining and reinforcing ethnic ties in the neighbourhood. The idea of 'feeling comfortable' in public space is an affective quality that white citizens habitually take for granted to the extent that when one does experience discomfort – on a rowdy late-night bus, moving through a subway underpass or entering an area where drug use and crime are high, subjects are aware of being out of their 'comfort zone'. For many minorities and migrant youth, discomfort, unease and a need to be seen to 'fit in' are commonly expressed (Noble 2005). To this extent, the affective capacities of comfort are unevenly distributed, making them feel illegitimate subjects.

A reason why minority ethnic youth do not share the same levels of comfort as their white counterparts is in large part due to the past experience and ongoing continuum of racism they are confronted with. While the intimacy of schooling and college may afford opportunities for some convivial encounters, the majority of Bangladeshi girls and young women felt their school lives were deeply marked by racist hostility and conflict. The most commonplace and explicit expressions of this were name-calling and bullying.

[12 years]

Do you get along with all the children at school?

Aeishya: No. They are racist. Call names, 'black bitch' ... feel embarrassed. [...]

[16–17 years]

Syeda: You know what they're like, swearing.

Zinia: Calling you names ... Pakis.

Dinia: Sometimes people call us names, bad names. Black cunts.

Shabib: [We] just put up with it and try to call them back. [...]

Is there anything you don't like about Sunderland?

Nazia: School. Bullies.

Who bullies you?

Nazia: The English people, they swear. Black stuffs and that.

The responses reveal the visceral qualities of race hatred, how it is registered through sexual and animalistic metaphors, and comes to be lived through the body. The intersections of racist and sexist rhetoric crudely depict the young women as sub-human, 'black bitches' and 'black cunts'. This discursive iteration brings these identities into being, drawing up boundaries across the imaginary fault-line of race. Here the

idea of race is made reducible to colour as difference becomes ascribed to the abject bodies of Bangladeshi girls. 'Racism', as Shabib (16 years) went on to remark, 'tends to happen to kids more than elders, because they find them more softer, easier, and call them and everything', adding, 'it doesn't happen to strong people'. Her statement points to physicality, age and embodied vulnerabilities in young people's coming-of-age. Bodily physique and being perceived as 'softer' rather than 'strong', meant young Bangladeshis were regarded as easy targets for racism. As this extract reveals, schools and surrounding areas can be manufactured as 'white space', in which British Bangladeshi Muslims are deemed not to belong. The misaligned geography that presents them as 'pakis' only serves to reinforce this sense of displacement and the idea that brown-skinned people 'are all the same'. Correspondingly, Englishness is predicated on whiteness, exiting as an identity that cannot be easily be occupied by Bangladeshi Muslims. However, as we will go on to see, claims to 'Britishness' by respondents worked to close the space between self and other.

Nationhood, nationalism and the scaling up of emotions

Interviews with young people suggested that some of the most risk-laden movements involved the journey to and from school, where teachers and adults were absent. Recent research indicates that when bodies are pushed together in the urban transport network, frustrated or fatigued, volatile race altercations may erupt (Gilroy 2012; Lobo 2014; Wilson 2011). For Bangladeshi girls moving between spaces is also fraught activity that can entail slowing down a journey by circumnavigating particular places, not going out alone or avoiding stopping to break the journey.

[16 years]

Shabib: The boys from Trafalgar, particularly the Eastern side call you names. Throw eggs at you, spit at you. They say, 'Go back to your own country', 'get back to the jungle' and everything. From coming back from school to going to school when the teacher's not there.

Furthermore, this geometry of power is often executed in transient spaces and not just schools, colleges and community centres, which are a familiar focal point for institutional approaches to encounters.

[23 years]

Maryam: One of my friends got physically abused. What happened was she called back at an English girl. And the English girl told all her friends and got the whole school after us. There were five of us and everywhere we went it was blocked, blocking our way. So we just said, 'What the heck', we just walked straight down. Suddenly they were pulling our hair and you don't wanna know what happened.

[...] The Head said, 'I can't do nothing about it', cos it was after school. It wasn't in school and they can't do anything about it, but we said, 'It was the journey from school to home'.

In her study of multicultural girlhood in Los Angeles, Thomas (2011) found many girls superficially subscribed to an idea of race equality, but in practice adhered to a rigid logic of spatial segregation when it came to their movements and friendships in school and the surrounding metropolis. The experiences of Shabib and Maryam further inform us of the racially structured lives young people live and the way in which this impinges on their daily mobility. In each of the cases, racist incidents occur after school and out of sight of adult supervision. A geography of racism is enacted that locates participants as beyond the nation state when they are told to 'Go back to your own country', coming to exist in a pre-modern environment that displaces them, in the words of Shabib, 'back to the jungle'.

These encounters then evoke acts of splitting, coming to enact a ritual of purification; a micro-scale act of ethnic cleansing used to distil the white nation. The purge takes place through the throwing of eggs, spitting, blocking tactics and name-calling, where it is brought to bear on young people's lives to grave effect. The geographies of racism are acute when Maryam and her friends are subjected to a form of social segregation, where their daily routes and pathways are blocked. What begins as an individual racist encounter and a response to racism takes structural proportions as Maryam and her friends collectively become seen as Other. This process of racialisation allows the 'floating signifier' of race to settle on the bodies of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women while simultaneously amplifying its effect. Amplification can act to 'scale up' individual encounters, transforming them into routine patterns for collective behaviour. This further serves to shift the struggle for local civic belonging to a national scale. In this way, impeding mobility through 'blocking' is not just a micro-encounter, but simultaneously occurs at intersecting scales: on the street in police stop and search acts, at passport control in the policing of national borders or where asylum-seekers arriving in overcrowded boats and suffocating lorry containers are detained or deported. The multi-scalar elements of these acts connect to national forms of political governance, the spatial management of the nation and the production of whiteness.

Importantly these encounters are thoroughly embodied, where 'To be stopped is to be blocked in one's freedom of movement [...] It is a mode of power but it is also an address to the body, to a body that cannot be recruited, that is "out of place"' (Simonsen

and Koefoed 2015, 531). Moreover, these corporeal histories of exclusion are seared into the flesh, leaving lasting scar tissue on the memories of minorities.

[16–17 years]

What kind of experiences did you have in school?

Syeda: Burn your hair.

What did the school do about it?

Zinia: I think they didn't do anything.

Syeda: He [the perpetrator] got a supervision for it, that's it.

In considering the atonal infractions, scratches and skirmishes that interrupt the melody of multicultural conviviality, respondents had no choice but to live with a degree of 'white noise'. Speaking out about racism invariably means it is victims who are seen disrupt the serenity of convivial relations, who fail to assimilate and risk becoming focus for remedial community cohesion. As Shabib explained, 'It feels crap but then again we have to put up with it'. Participants were aware that when racism occurs, often little gets done. Maryam continued, '[We] just shout back. The worst bit was when they were spitting at you, I used to hate that. I used to feel disgusted'. The burning of hair, spitting and other hostile activities are an inter-corporeal means of purging the nation and cleansing the national body politic. Through such visceral acts, Bangladeshi Muslim youth are marked as 'out of place' and subjected to a form of spatial apartheid that is violently maintained if not adhered to. These embodied articulations intersect with a global geo-politics that continues to present Muslim youth as outsiders in the post-9/11 era and a potential source of 'moral panic' that must be expunged from the nation state (Nayak and Kehily 2013; Salgado-Pottier 2008). As Ahmed fittingly reminds us, 'it is here, on the skin surface, that histories are made' (2004, 39).

Seeing race relations less as objects of analysis and more as a series of events, happenings or encounters can enable us to understand the temporal workings of what might be seen as a precarious multiculturalism and contingent conviviality. Maryam describes the unpredictable unfolding of multicultural relations when she reflects on her secondary school days. Her experiences began with being bullied, but ended up with her developing a number of formative friendships that crossed ethnic and religious lines. For three years Maryam had a very low school attendance rate, but as she became more integrated into multi-ethnic friendship circles, her experience of education and sense of well-being altered.

[23 years]

Maryam Especially at school, we don't mix. We have our own groups – the Asian group sit at that end, the English group sit at that end. We don't talk, it's a bad thing; we should mix

in. When I used to be in class the people used to be afraid of asking me questions but when they did we became friends. First three of my years was awful, but the last two years was excellent! I got mixed in, I was talking, and if anyone bullied me I just talked [answered] back.

This section has shown how nationalism is performed through everyday acts of belonging and exclusion, where racist violence serves to "purify" and rehomogenize [*sic*] the nation' (Gilroy 2004, 111). In responding to the need for relational, embodied and emotional interpretations, I have demonstrated how past encounters bleed into future experiences, how such encounters are lived on the body and the way in which they generate affects such as fear, risk, suspicion and discomfort. By offering an intimate and grounded account of multicultural encounters, I have disclosed how the type of meaningful contact Valentine (2008) agitates for, which may result in social change, is of a very different order to the casual passing encounters more frequently theorised in geographical research. The seemingly implacable binary that distinguishes 'the Asian group' from 'the English', above, can only be disrupted over time. The emerging conviviality signalled towards the end of this section is the product of contingent multicultural relations that are in process, being worked through and worked out in prosaic and precarious ways. Conviviality is not a given, but the result of a constellation of inter-subjective articulations and political struggles. To further develop these arguments, I will now turn to a second contact zone, focusing on home spaces, locality and neighbourhoods.

Encountering difference, producing the nation: home spaces, locality and neighbourhoods

It is widely recognised that British South Asians do not necessarily 'choose' to live together, but residential clustering is a consequence of poverty, racism and 'white flight' from particular urban areas, and the availability of public housing stock (Cameron and Field 2000; Dench *et al.* 2006; Phillips D 2006 2009). In her research in Bradford, Phillips (2006) found many residents operated with fixed notions of 'Asian' and 'White' space. A number of young British Muslim respondents claimed to avoid 'all white' public housing areas and were wary of the large, predominantly white working-class estates in the locality. These areas were understood to be 'white territory, explicitly articulating the belief that they were "not for Asians"' (2006, 32), a sentiment found in the suburban outer-ring of Birmingham (Nayak 2010), parts of Newcastle (Cameron and Field 2000) and particular London estates such as Greenwich, where the black teenager Stephen Lawrence was murdered (Hewitt 1996).

When it came to understanding their neighbourhoods and the surrounding locality, a number of British Bangladeshi Muslim respondents mapped the city through a type of racialised cartography. For example, Zinia (17 years), Maryam (23 years) and Syeda (16 years) each mentioned avoiding a particular street following a severe racist attack on a Bangladeshi young male that saw him hospitalised and the subject of local media news reportage. Maryam, who was confident and outspoken, previously said she 'would go anywhere', but at a later point added, 'Except the East End. I wouldn't go down the East End, I still don't feel safe round there', mentioning the road the attack occurred on. That a number of respondents referred to this event separately shows how fear of crime can be amplified through particular publicised incidents, coming to regulate behaviour and monitor movement. It also reveals how for minority ethnic populations fear of mixing and distrust of others may have its roots in personal events, collective experiences and counter-memories formative of this racialised cartography (Ahmed 2004; hooks 1992; Tolia-Kelly 2004).

Recently, scholars exploring super-diversity have shown how local urban parks are animators of social interactions, working as sites for routine encounters, mixing and belonging. Neal *et al.* (2015a) demonstrate how through regular encounters recognition, familiarity and conviviality help form attachments to public green space. Without wishing to understate the value of convivial encounters, respondents in this study were less celebratory of this potential. For example, Kanta expressed how racist harassment occurs, 'All over Sunderland, like school, parks, the city centre', suggesting that we cannot assume green space is necessarily an instigator of convivial harmony. These views were supported by other youth, when asked if there were any particular places they would avoid.

[11 years]

Dinia: The park. Some baddies came and they chased us with their dog and we got lost. They were white, five older boys.

Despite these remarks, many young people would still visit parks, though they remained wary of racist harassment. For young respondents, public green space was not necessarily a site of safety and communal sociality, but an ambivalent space where pleasure and danger collide.

Nationalism in the neighbourhood: from the banal to the blatant

While home spaces can perform as a site of comfort that offers respite from racism (hooks 1992; Phillips D 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2004), feelings of security are never complete.

[11 years]

Mina: Sometimes like white people and boys knock on our house and throw stones and sometimes they are drunk and knock on our doors.

This intrusion into the neighbourhood and home form part of a broader process of social ordering that deems Bangladeshi Muslims as 'out of place'. Instead, a number of respondents described the ritual harassment that occurred in the contact zone of home, locality and neighbourhood.

[23 years; 16–17 years]

Maryam: It was especially Christmas time, or Halloween, or Bonfire night. We used to be scared. We used to cello-tape our letterboxes.

Syeda: They did used to, you know. My cousin who just lives down the road here, they used to throw fire through their letter boxes!

Shabib: They try to hit us with stones and everything. But I never got hurt properly.

Maryam: My dad [has]. When he was in the take away. Cos they had fights there when English guys came in and broke the windows. But my mum she stays at home.

Throughout this study we have seen the intimate way in which racism is pressed on the bodies of Others, to the extent that it comes to regulate their mobility, displace them 'back to the jungle' and in doing so purge the nation from migrant belonging. The making of a white nation becomes more apparent during rituals of shared commemoration, including Western festivities such as Christmas, Halloween and Bonfire night. The staging of national events, and the carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding them, enables certain activities to be made more permissible, part of the 'banal nationalism' Billig (2010) theorises. It is during national and religious celebrations that Muslims are likely to stand out through their lack of participation, an absence that silently marks out and accentuates their difference. At these points, 'English' identity is made uninhabitable to minorities as local, national and transnational geographies differently intertwine. Stoning, fire-bombing and smashing windows are frenzied performances, detoxifying that which is thought to have infiltrated and defiled the nation state. In these emotive examples '*hate ... works to stick or to bind the imagined white subject and nation together*' (Ahmed 2004, 26; original emphasis).

The relationship between global events, national sentiment and local feeling was apparent in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the later London bombings of 7 July 2005, where many South Asian families experienced an escalating 'emotional geopolitics' (Pain 2009) and rise in racial intolerance. In a leading story of the time, the local press reported, 'Education bosses fear the 7/7 terror attacks on London

could have stoked racial violence in Wearside schools' (*Sunderland Echo* 7 November 2005), going on to cite a series of violent assaults in the locality. These attacks were particularly pronounced among young people, where local schools also reported increased levels of racism. Rupa explained her experience growing up in the aftermath of the London attacks.

[22 years]

Rupa: We suffered from numerous racial attacks while living at Trafalgar. This was from eggs being thrown ... washing being burnt, windows smashed numerous times ... vehicles vandalised, verbal abuse on numerous occasions.

The harassment described resulted in Rupa and her family vacating the predominantly white neighbourhood as forms of territoriality were exerted. Though racism is a thoroughly embodied act, material objects such as clothes, windows and cars can operate as surfaces on which the doing of race hatred is enacted. Through such acts these wordless objects are animated, and can come to stand in for Muslims themselves, communicating that they do not belong and legitimately can be 'egged', 'burnt', 'smashed' and 'abused', in the scouring of the nation.

However, this rudimentary purging was not as complete as it might appear. On several occasions Bangladeshi Muslims showed a steely resilience in responding to neighbourhood harassment and a spatial apartheid that seeks to confine them to particular wards and home spaces. For example, Rupa's family only relocated after five years of intimidation and abuse. Young people also demonstrated agency and resistance when it came to being expunged from the local landscape.

[23 years; 16–17 years]

Maryam: Once I asked a boy, 'Why are you chasing me? Why are you bullying me?' He said, 'Are you not gonna run?' I said 'No. I just want to know why you are doing it'. He said, 'It's because you're taking over our country'. I said, 'We're not'.

Syeda: They'd say go back to your own country.

Maryam: I told him that I was born in this country and he was shocked.

In this encounter, the attempt to purge the nation is a bodily act that involves chasing, bullying and physically intimidating others. It is articulated at a national scale – 'go back to your own country' – where claims to a new civic belonging are erased through a fixation with national heritage. The mere presence of minorities is enough to lead to the charge of 'taking over', invoking a powerful sense of loss. The claim, 'you're taking over *our* country', reveals how white proprietorship of the nation becomes a prerequisite for belonging. These statements, and their accompanying

actions, seek to bleach-out participants from both the urban landscape and the nation state. They are a form of national 'white washing'. For Hage references to 'too many', or in this case 'taking over', primarily operate as 'categories of spatial management' (1998, 38). What transpires is a paranoid nationalism bordering on hysteria, when we consider that less than 1 per cent of the population in Sunderland identify as Bangladeshi Muslims. What statistically should appear a utopian white space, to even the most ardent nationalists, is sullied by their *own* impossible fantasies of a white nation; forever underscored by a sense of incompleteness, a 'lack'. There is then an unarticulated sense of loss, akin to the 'postcolonial melancholia' Gilroy (2004) depicts, felt in the 'shocked' response when what is assumed to be an indecipherable 'foreign body' is made legible as 'British born'. This indicates that Britain is still some way off from being a nation without nationalism (Uberoi 2015), or a 'post-nation' reimagined 'in a multicultural way' (Parekh 2000, 36). Instead, the 'white heart' of national policy (Back *et al.* 2002) beats on, connected as it is to imperial arteries through which ideas of race and ethnic superiority continue to flow.

While I have deployed psycho-social analyses of whiteness and nationalism throughout the interpretive field of this encounter, it is important not to overlook markers of resistance. It is apparent that second and third generation British Bangladeshi youth are making new claims to belonging that no longer configure them as outside the nation state. In Bradford, Phillips (2015) has shown how British Muslims have 'claimed space', creating a sense of home in the city. However, she indicates 'Conflict tends to be greatest in areas with little history of immigration, in more deprived neighbourhoods and in areas where there is a strong sense of ownership of the place by long-established groups' (2015, 64–5). In predominantly white spaces such as Sunderland, multicultural claims to belonging and the practice of home-making are not easy to forge. Brah describes how the home-making practices of a new generation of young British Asian descendants might redraw the cartographies of diaspora:

They lay claim to the localities in which they live as their 'home'. And, however much they may be constructed as 'outsiders', they contest these psychological and geographical spaces from the position of 'insiders'. Even when they describe themselves as 'Asian', this is not a reaching back to some 'primordial Asian' identity. What they are speaking of is a modality of 'British Asian-ness'. These homegrown Asian-British identities inaugurate a fundamental *generational* change. (1996, 47)

The complex diasporic dialogues Brah alludes to are evident when Bangladeshi youth appeal to citizenship, civic belonging and rights to the city. These claims are emblematic of what Askins (2008, 243) terms a

'transformative geopolitics of encounter'. The biographical approach adopted in this study enabled young people to reflect on the potential of such everyday geopolitical transformations.

[23 years; 16–17 years]

Maryam: It's better now. After nine o'clock we didn't walk on the streets, but now you can see people are walking.

So ... racism doesn't impact on where you would go?

Maryam: No.

Syeda: No. It's cos we've left school now. Even now we meet the same people in town who used to pick on us but now they're more mature.

[...]

Maryam: Now I think they're used to it. The [Bangladeshi Muslim] population has been increasing. I think they're used to it.

The new urban citizenship Maryam espouses allows her to identify the locality as home, assert rights to the city and, as seen in the previous extract, participate in a wider national belonging signalled through birth rights – 'I was born in this country'.

This vignette signals some of these local and national transformations where young Bangladeshi Muslims have a growing visibility, an emerging night-time presence and greater mobility. The affective qualities of comfort, security and a reduced fear of harassment can enable national participation and belonging. In short, conviviality is not a given, but the consequence of a hard won, slow-burn multiculturalism.

Burning acts . . .

I began this paper with what turned out to be a relatively innocuous encounter. Revisiting this episode it is apparent that it cannot be read outside of its immediate geo-political context. Here global events – conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, post-9/11 fears on securitisation, the hunt for Osama Bin Laden – stick together and become charged with an affective quality as they come to thrum and resonate at national and local scales. There is an intensity of feeling that bubbles over, spilling into words and action. Such 'speech acts' are performative (Butler 1996), to the extent that they work to refigure national belonging outside of birth rights, citizenship and multiple attachments to place. If we consider Butler's insights on 'injurious speech', and the links she makes between wording and wounding, we might also argue that the type of racist and nationalist rhetoric discussed are examples of what she terms 'burning acts'. The racism witnessed against British Bangladeshi Muslims is inflammatory, scorching the skin as it seeks to extinguish the Other.

Recent studies of everyday multiculturalism, conviviality and superdiversity have been located in large multi-ethnic urban areas. Extending this debate into mainly hite, post-industrial, preserves sharply reveals how topographies of power and inequality are woven through many routine interactions. Disclosing the multiple forms of oppression many British Bangladeshi Muslims negotiate, offers a geopolitically situated account, appreciative of the asymmetrical aspects of living with difference in the 'colonial present' (Gregory 2004). The intensity of these inter-scaler relations is felt in the wounded aftermath of terrorism, during heightened national events and the recent 'Brexit' result that has seen an escalation in national hate crime. Such events not only mark bodies out in different ways, but they impinge and impress on them, pushing them out of some places and forcing them into others.

Through exploring the combustible sequence of race encounters in the lives of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women, the research contributes to the relational, embodied and emotional accounts signalled in a range of contemporary literature (Askins 2016; Hopkins 2014; Nayak 2010 2011; Noble and Poynting 2010). The encounters discussed are relational to the extent that they come to define self and other, but in ways that serve to amplify difference, fixing bodies through a visual register. For young women, racism was a thoroughly embodied affair intrinsically tied to how they dressed and – at the most intimate scale of the body – the colour of their skin. Many encounters involved bodies being chased, chastised, spat at, blocked, beaten, bullied and, at its most extreme, the burning of hair. As we have seen, emotions are central to the purge where fear, suspicion, hatred, grievance and loss can result in violent encounters. Ahmed explains how such negative feelings are not to be found in a figure, 'Rather, hate works to create the very outline of different figures, which aligns those figures together, and constitutes them as a "common" threat' (2004, 26). In these psycho-social exorcisms, Muslims and minorities are erased from the local vicinity and cast out of the nation state. Through the symbolic act of 'ethnic cleansing', a fantasy of the white nation (Hage 1998) is produced, but it is one that needs to be sustained through ritual acts of purging, a means of detoxifying the national body politic.

Multicultural encounters are imbued with bumps, scratches and discordant white noise. At the same time, they have the potential to cultivate a contingent conviviality. What is clear is the deep emotional labour required to transform routine encounters into meaningful contact generative of change (Askins and Pain 2011; Valentine 2008). Nevertheless, a 'transformative geo-politics of encounter' (Askins 2008) is evident in routine exchanges in classroom spaces, neighbourhoods and city centre locations that might fold into a liveable notion of tolerance. Of course, tolerance is an unequal

property bestowed by white majorities onto others in self-affirming acts of white power. Hage, one of a number of critics, is suitably dismissive, 'To tolerate is not just to accept, it is to accept and position the other within specific limits and boundaries' (1998, 89). Nevertheless, the encounters in this study intimate that tolerance can be a salve on the 'hot racism' young Muslims experience, offering a baseline for some kind of rubbing along together. In a detailed interrogation, Wilson responds to the challenge that tolerance is a depoliticised category, arguing 'tolerance can be central to intercultural dialogue and incremental transformation' (2014, 858). This study of Bangladeshi Muslim youth indicates that in the context of racist violence, a polite politics of tolerance is more than a gesture; it offers recognition, respite and forms a space from which other interactions might grow. These small but significant transformations carve out 'spaces of hope' for Muslims and other minorities (see Phillips R 2009), even if tolerance remains structurally unequal. The agency of British Bangladeshi youth is exemplified in appeals to a new urban citizenship, signalled through birth-rights, shared schooling experiences, rights to the city and multicultural forms of Britishness deployed to recalibrate nationhood and belonging. These multiple attachments to place serve to hollow out and corrode the fantasy of the white nation, from the inside out. They are able to do so as this fantasy is unachievable, designed as it is around empty signifiers, fictive and 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991).

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