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Abstract:

This article examines how new forms of multicultural intimacy are imagined in contemporary Britain, and how they are invested with particular ideals of mixing, loving thy neighbour, and feelings for the nation. The author traces these discursive themes in a myriad of social locations and forms – a television documentary titled *The Last White Kids*, reviews of the film in the press, and government policies on community cohesion. A key point of this essay is that racial, ethnic and cultural relations are not only negotiated and 'managed' in literal spatial locations, but these relations are imagined through specific emotional and ethical injunctions, such as 'embracing the other' and loving thy neighbour. Moreover, these injunctions are imagined in the ambivalent spatial terms of obligations to, and dangers of, proximity – an ambivalence that is inflected with articulations of 'race', class, and gender. The analysis thus explores how the imperative of neighbourly love refers to both the desires for, and anxieties about, what the intimacy stems from and fosters. Who gets close to whom and under what circumstances, is not left to chance.

Too close for comfort: loving thy neighbour and the management of multicultural intimacies

> It is unfashionable to speak of loving one's neighbour, but unless our society can move at least to a position where we can respect our neighbours as fellow human beings, we shall fail in our attempts to create a harmonious society in which conditions have changed so radically in the last 40 years. (Home Office, 2001a: 20)

In October 2003, a documentary on Channel 4 raised some concern in the British press about the future of white Britain. *The Last White Kids*, directed by Shona Thompson (Thompson, 2003), is a documentary about the Gallagher family who lives in Manningham, an area in Bradford, West Yorkshire (Northern England), and who is 'the only white family' remaining in a street with a predominance of Muslim Asian[1]

[1] I suggest the term 'Muslim Asian' to capture the conflation that occurs on the public domain between Islam and South Asian, while at the same time the phrase seeks to act as a reminder that Islamophobia is at the heart of the issue. If the 1980s/90s saw a shift from 'immigrant' to 'ethnic minorities', today we are moving into a multicultural taxonomy that slides the focus away from 'ethnic minorities' to 'minority faith communities'. However, the term 'Muslim Asian' might be another generalisation insofar as Pakistanis are often specifically targeted in racist attacks and verbal abuse. In turn, 'Paki' has come to be used as a generic derogative term for all South Asians. I apologise in advance to readers who might feel vexed by my use of this phrase and can only hope that we can open a discussion about what constitutes appropriate terminology that captures the points of convergence between groups without loosing sight of the specificity of their historicity and locatedness.

residents. With its title clearly echoing Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood Speech'[2], the film is set up to suggest the disappearance of white Britain in the face of the threats posed by invasive multiculture.

Filmed during the summer of 2003, the documentary opens with a shot of a sea of schoolchildren spilling out of a schoolyard, the majority of whom are wearing headscarves. After a few silent minutes, the voice-over informs us that 'this is a story about white children growing up in a world where nearly everyone else is a different colour from them.' This comment sutures the meaning of the image on the screen where headscarves, not skin colour, are the dominating feature. By conflating colour with faith, the film immediately marks religion a racial issue. The headscarf is the new black.

It is in this frame that we are introduced to Sharon Gallagher and her three children and invited to consider how 'such intense exposure to a different culture has affected each child differently', as one commentator put it (*Guardian* 30 October 2003). Sharon Gallagher's two daughters, Amie, nine, and Ashlene, twelve, are drawn to Islam – 'intoxicated' according to another reviewer (*Guardian* 31 October 2003). They attend the local mosque, wear headscarves and wish to convert to Islam. Their eight-year old cousin Lauren also occasionally wears headscarves to school. In stark contrast, the girls' brothers, Jake Gallagher, eleven, and his cousins John, nine, and

[2] A Tory MP at the Enoch Powell gave his 'Rivers of Blood Speech' in Birmingham in 1968. In the speech, he suggests that black crime is at the centre of a range of 'problems' caused by immigration. Powell used the example of a terrified elderly widow, the last white resident in her street, being taunted by young Caribbean boys, to illustrate the threats posed by immigration (see Smithies and Fiddick, 1969: 41-42). Though Powell's 1960s Birmingham is not today's Bradford, the legacies of Powellism ring through the trope of the last white household surrounded by 'foreigners'. Note that both households are without a patriarchal 'head' (Sharon Gallagher is a single mother).

Devlin (age undisclosed[3]) reject Islam – as well as Christianity, it should be noted – because they claim to be bullied and picked on by Asian boys in school. Jake is so unhappy, we are told, that he chooses to move to another 'more balanced' (*Daily Mail* 31 October 2003) mixed school much further away than his present one; a school where there is greater diversity in the ethnic mix of pupils, and where the proportion of white kids is higher.[4]

This story presents an apposite example of the ways in which the local and personal are mobilised in debates over definitions of national identity and national culture. The documentary was filmed in Bradford which, as one commentator notes, 'has come to symbolise the bruised state of race relations in this country' (*Guardian* 30 October 2003). Amongst other events[5], Bradford was one of three northern English towns where, in the summer of 2001, violent street disturbances shook the nation and led to public debates about the promises and failures of multiculturalism.

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[3] When we are introduced to the cousins, Devlin is the only one whose age is undisclosed; instead, we are informed that his 'dad is Jamaican'. Devlin is immediately positioned as 'mixed race', a point I return to later.

[4] Only at the end of the documentary does it emerge that Jake is actually in his final year of secondary education and that he would have changed schools anyway. Though the basis of his choice of school remains telling, the film does mislead us into thinking that Jake's discomfort was so high that he was willing to change schools during his secondary education.

[5] In 1984, a local headmaster, Ray Honeyford, was forced out of his job for having suggested that white children were 'slowed down' in schools with a large Asian intake, prompting a white flight from frightened parents; in 1989, angry Muslim residents in Bradford staged book burnings of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*; in 1995, young Pakistani men took to the streets and engaged in three days of public disorder that came to be known as 'The Bradford Riots'; these followed other disturbances that took place earlier in 1995 during the local election campaign that opposed two Muslim candidates from rival clans, and further disturbances during an anti-prostitution campaign. See Mary Macey (1999) for a look at the changes from orderly to disorderly and violent public protest among Pakistani men in Bradford.

What interests me here is how the film was taken up in the press as a symptom of the 'bruised state' of the nation. It is worth noting that the myth surrounding the documentary form is that it makes truth claims that other audio-visual forms, such as the soap opera for example, do not. To be sure, soaps blur the distinction between fiction and 'the real' and thus also make truth claims about the state of the 'real' world. What is specific to the documentary, however, is that it interpellates viewers to witness an *already given* reality (this is how it *is*), represented through a non-fictively performed narrative. In the case discussed here, the film claims to reveal what is likely to happen if 'multiculture' is not properly managed and taps into the national fantasy of who 'we' might become. The personal and local forms of intimacy viewers were called upon to witness were making national culture a local affair, raising deep anxieties over the future of Britain's children, but also of all Britons, in the portrayal of the gradual islamicisation of the nation's daughters. In other words, a national drama was played out through the immediate experience of intimate community. By evoking complex affective reactions to children's quest for belonging and friendship, *The Last White Kids* called upon its viewers to think about the limits of national toleration and the future of the 'civil nation' (see Povinelli, 2002). As a fable of present-day multicultural Britain, the documentary was seen by the press as sounding a resounding warning bell against the 'intense exposure' of white working class children 'to a different culture' (*Guardian* 30 October 2003) and forces questions about which forms of multicultural intimacy are acceptable.

This article examines how new forms of 'multicultural intimacy' are imagined in contemporary Britain. It thus inserts itself within debates about intimacy in the public and political spheres. It has been widely established that the definition and politics of nation are intimately linked to the definition and politics of the 'family

romance' and heterosexual love (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Berezin, 2002; Berlant, 1997; Hunt, 1992; McClintock, 1995; Sommer, 1991). More broadly, several theorists have explored how states appropriate idioms of intimacy for their own purposes of commanding loyalty and allegiance (Berlant, 1991, 1997, 2000; Herzfeld 1997; Nolan, 1998).[6] Indeed, the move to the register of intimacy and emotions have been noted, namely in the United States, as a shift towards a 'therapeutic state' (Nolan, 1998), where an 'emotivist' and intimate ethos has now become integral to technologies of governance (Thrift, 2004: 66). In Britain, and in Europe, strategies for fostering social cohesion are one example where the state seeks to engineer modes of living together and affective relations that draw on injunctions of intimacy through which the limits of the civil nation are drawn. With regards to my immediate concerns, the question I attend to here is: What kinds of intimacies between

[6] Others have considered the possibilities of intimacy for the development of 'an ethical framework for a democratic order' (Giddens, 1992: 188), or how 'personal narrative stories of living together' (Plummer, 1995: 153) can be used to rethink new forms of community relations and citizenship. Other grammars of democracy also circulate that draw on models of closeness and 'national love' that are not reducible to familial or erotic love – such as 'comradeship' (Anderson, 1991) or 'friendship' (Derrida, 1997). Yet as David Bell and Jon Binnie suggest following Derrida, if 'western democracy has always been modelled on a certain conception of friendship; new models of friendship therefore could hold the promise of new models of democracy' (2000: 134), we need to ask when and how 'new models of friendship' are imagined, articulated and mobilised in the national rhetoric. To be sure, there is a need to identify and explore models of intimacy that offer a politics of hope through new models of democracy, for example ones based on interconnectivity and 'functional disunity' (Thrift, 2004: 75). But this is not the objective here. Rather, my attention centres on the move to the register of intimacy in political discourses, and to the exploration of how 'new models of friendship', or intimacy, are taken up by the state, and how this comes with normative injunctions that do not quite fit with the 'lived experience' of intimacy. At what time does a 'new model' become imperative? What are the terms of this friendship, indeed, what *counts* as legitimate friendship? Which friendships are allowed to grow into erotic love, and which are not?

inhabitants in a multicultural nation are promoted, on what grounds, and how do they relate to (new) forms of othering?

A key point of this essay is that racial, ethnic and cultural relations are not only negotiated and 'managed' in literal spatial form (various racial and ethnic groups occupying certain areas of the city or crossing various internal or external borders, various government 'capacity building' strategies to 'regenerate' multiethnic neighbourhoods, etc), but *these relations are imagined through specific emotional and ethical injunctions*, such as 'embracing the other' and loving thy neighbour. Moreover, these injunctions are imagined in the ambivalent spatial terms of *obligations to* and *dangers of* proximity. In this sense, the management of multicultural intimacy is both about physical relations in geographically bounded areas, as well as it is about the conception of non-physical relationships in terms of a spatial social imaginary. This is exemplified in the decidedly localised understanding of 'community cohesion' found in policy discourse, which presupposes that interethnic mixing cannot occur without spatial and (non-erotic) physical proximity, or in New Labour's investment in neighbourhoods as the ideal sites for activating engaged citizenship and a sense of identity and belonging for local residents (e.g. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005).

In what follows, I examine how new forms of multicultural intimacy are invested with particular ideals of mixing, loving thy neighbour, and feelings for the nation, and I trace these discursive themes in a myriad of social locations and forms. By counter posing *The Last White Kids* against government policy or strategy documents, as well as reviews of the film in the press, I attend to the varying relationship between, on the one hand, the *form* of multicultural intimacy – for example how it is crystallised in the rhetoric of the national embrace, discussed in the

first section – and the *content* of multicultural intimacy – how it is localised, personalised, and conceived in terms of how people have to make decisions and choices around the control over their feelings and their relationships, and about their identities/identifications (Plummer, 1995: 151). As Michael Herzfeld argues, collective representations of national intimacy draw on local communities as 'national-character models' (1997: 7), as those face-to-face communities where the effects of government policies are lived (for example the Gallagher family's move to a council house in Mannigham is directly related to local housing policies). But the 'content' also includes how people 'do' intimacy, and in the second section I offer my own reading of *The Last White Kids* as a counterpoint to public imaginings of, and anxieties about, multicultural intimacy. *The Last White Kids* could be seen as a site for multiple displacements and translations that the programmatic structure of good neighbourliness cannot (or refuses to) accommodate.

The promising embrace

It is in the wake of disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the summer of 2001 that a new politics of multicultural intimacy became imperative – one which emphasised interethnic proximity and mixing as the pathway to integration. Widely reported as 'race riots', the disturbances shook the nation into self-examination about its track record in multicultural management.[7] In seeking to ensure national domestic happiness for the 'New Britain' of the 21st century, New Labour pursued its search for

[7] The riots involved large numbers of people from different backgrounds – especially young men – and resulted in the destruction of property and attacks on individuals. Though as Arun Kundnani points out (2001: 105), the confrontations were largely between Asian youths and the police, and were 'prompted by racist groups attacking Asian communities and the failure of the police to provide protection from this threat'.

new grammars that would prescribe forms of being together that would combine 'integration with diversity' (Home Office, 2001c). Conditional to the 'vision of a successful integrated society' is 'a sense of people belonging to Britain *and to each other'* (Home Office, 2004: 1; emphasis added). As former Home Secretary David Blunkett wrote in December 2001, 'To enable integration to take place, and to value the diversity it brings, we need to be secure in our sense of belonging and identity and therefore to be able to *reach out and to embrace* those who come to the UK.' (Blunkett, 2001: 1; emphasis added) Of utmost concern is the maintenance of a strong national identity, which would be sustained by the promise of the 'nationalizing embrace' (Sommer, 1991) as a path towards the harmonious integration of the nation's varied cultural communities. The issue is not only how do 'we' live peacefully side-by-side, but how do 'we' 'reach out to' and 'embrace' each/the other? The encounter is represented as a movement of closeness, as an encounter between the secure national self and the arriving other. It is one where the national 'we' moves towards the ethnic-migrant other, and where the nation will be enriched by the encounter. However, two tensions arise within the national fantasy of multiculture: first, between a rhetoric of loving thy neighbour *as* different, on the one hand, and on the other, the utopian moment of abstraction, where the nation is an assumed bond of shared allegiance where 'differences' are obliterated under a veneer of universal diversity – 'we are all different', 'we are all ethnics', 'we are all migrants', hence 'we' are all the same. Second, the national embrace is in tension with a moral racist politics that underpins the neo-liberalist turn toward tolerance, integration, and diversity in which the rhetoric of the national bond emphasises the 'glue of values' rather than the 'glue of ethnicity' (Goodhart, 2004). Within this moral politics, the problem of living together becomes a problem of 'them' adjusting to 'our' values, 'being gracious

guests in "our home".' (Sandercock, 2003: 91) These 'incommensurable impulses' (Back et al., 2002) are at the heart of the ambivalence of New Labour's project: embracing the other 'as other' in the name of multiculturalism, while pushing her away as never fully 'integrated' unless she embraces 'our' values.[8]

As several authors have argued, concealed within the narrative of integration is an assimilationist strategy (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Back et al., 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Rattansi, 2004; Sandercock, 2003). One issue at stake in this process (which much of the discussion on assimilation falls short of exploring more fully) is the preservation of national self-love. The British nationalising embrace transforms the nation into something different by making its own what was 'external' to it. This gesture symbolically feeds into the 'national vanity' (Berlant, 1997: 196) – where the nation can flatter itself as tolerant, accepting, because of its capacity to absorb difference. The promise of the national embrace is to *re-write the national same so that 'we' could love ourselves as different.* This promise is offered within a society plagued with a postcolonial melancholia, as Paul Gilroy recently argues. That is, a society marked by an ambivalent relationship with its imperial past characterised by the 'deeply disturbing realization' (Gilroy, 2004: 102) of its bloody and violent streak. In this respect, the re-writing of the national same is part a management strategy that seeks to subsume that dreadful realisation into a revision of the national story as one that is and *always has been* multicultural, tolerant, welcoming and enriched by embracing the other (Fortier 2005). Moreover, the promise of the nationalising embrace is also offered within a society haunted by colonial fears about

[8] And still, her integration is never complete, for she is repeatedly called upon to display her allegiance to the nation and her adoption of the nation's values (Fortier, 2005).

miscegenation, which seem to reverberate in the anxieties about the Gallagher girls' receptivity to the Muslim community in which they live. Such concerns echo historical anxieties about miscegenation and the preservation of white femininity as the marker of the boundaries of the nation and the empire (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; McClintock, 1995; Young, 1995). What interests me here is the historical specificity of the anxiety as it is projected onto the Muslim woman living in Northwest England, and the implications of this in relation to the changing British multicultural landscape, namely with respect to the consolidation of religion as the privileged marker of radical and absolute difference since 11 September 2001.

Concerns about the seductiveness of Islam were heightened and have acquired a special significance in the war on terror waged in the name of civilization. This comes with a shift in the landscape of contemporary multicultural Britain where minorities have moved to slightly different places – with the Muslim Asian now the 'other' to be reckoned with, while 'blacks' (namely the Caribbean) are a minority that is widely seen as appropriately assimilated or assimilable, as long as they 'act white' (King, 2004). The taxonomic shift from 'ethnic minorities' to 'minority faith communities' is also fundamentally related to the new moral politics mentioned above, producing a new inflection of cultural racism (Balibar, 1991) or ethnic absolutism (Gilroy, 1987) in which values and morals are the primary site for the marking of absolute difference, rather than 'cultural practices' such as customs and traditions.[9]

[9] To be sure, the difference between 'traditions' and 'values' is thin and slippery, and the distinction I offer between 'cultural racism' and 'moral racism' is analytical rather than intended to reflect a clear-cut distinction. Nonetheless, we can surmise that this moral racist politics is at the basis of New Labour's multiculturalist politics of recognition which offers a politics of preservation to Muslim Asians along the lines of identity and dignity (the

Hence within the generalised 'inter-ethnicness' where all types of proximity are celebrated or feared, there is an implicit distinction between sexual and cultural reproduction, as well as an implicit fusion of the 'interracial' into the 'interethnic'. Within popular and policy discourses, different versions of multiculturalism co-exist that assume different types of intimacy – some assimilationist, some differentialist, some sexual, some platonic. Devlin, the Gallagher children's 'mixed-race' cousin embodies a version of multicultural intimacy that is about sexual reproduction and assimilation of black Caribbeanness into white Britain. A version that is taken-for-granted in contrast to the question of mixing as it is raised in the film, as well as in policy and popular discourses more generally when it comes to Islam and by association, Asians: this version positions intimacy as an issue of (cultural) values. The closeness with Muslim Asians is perceived as threatening because of a different kind of assimilation – one where Islam is seen as potentially annihilating white English daughters.

Thus the national embrace is selective not only about what it embraces, but also about who embraces whom, that is, about which national subjects are legitimate agents of the embrace. Central to the promotion of national intimacy is what Elizabeth Povinelli calls the 'passions of recognition', where the collective mutual embrace remains 'inflected by the conditional': as long as citizens 'are not repugnant; that is, as long as they are not, *at heart*, not-us' (Povinelli, 2002: 17; emphasis added); as

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right to be recognised in one's 'core' beliefs), while it 'disrecognises' black belonging (Gilroy, 2001). Put differently, the terms of racism have shifted into a new arrangement – emphasis on values and its impact on different degrees of differences attributed to different groups – while the focus remains the same – ethnic minorities and the maintenance of white British hegemony, the form of which is changing in relation to the particular historical conditions that impact on its definition.

long as they adopt the nation and are available for adoption by the nation; as long as they *mix well*. Far from condoning all forms of interethnic intimacy, 'mixing' is framed within a tight policing of community and family relations, consensual reproduction, and the choice of appropriate partners (friends, neighbours, or lovers). In this sense, the imperative of the national embrace refers to both the desires for, and anxieties about, what the 'embrace' stems from and fosters. *Who mixes with whom and under what circumstances, is not left to chance.*

Haunted by its potential failure to stabilise desirable forms of closeness, the management of multicultural intimacy seeks to build worlds, to create physical and emotional spaces by annexing and diverting unwanted kinds of relations, or by containing or subverting forms of neighbourliness that exceed the organised and predictable forms that circulate in the public domain. Framed within a rhetoric of mutual understanding and respect, the fantasy of multicultural intimacy is integral to the emergence of a British national formation of toleration that is founded on the proclamation of the equal worth of all cultures while declaring the need for overriding national values. These values set the limits of multicultural intimacy, and produce, as Povinelli (2002: 27) argues, a 'civil nation' from this limit by referring to universal principles (good neighbourliness) that some practices violate – such as genial indifference between neighbours, the islamicisation of white English girls, working class male street violence, or 'outside belongings' (Probyn, 1996). Such a scenario was decidedly at the centre of *The Last White Kids*.

(The) becoming neighbour

The Last White Kids portrays a multicultural nightmare signalled by different combinations of excesses and failures To begin with, Sharon Gallagher and her

neighbours are living in a relationship of genial indifference, which is fragile and at times grudging. In the only neighbourly interaction shown in the film, we see Sharon Gallagher holding a neighbour's newborn baby, doting over her, trying in vein to pronounce her name. In another scene, she mechanically lists her neighbours by ethnic background (describing one as 'Asian but she speaks like me'), while in a third scene she expresses her disapproval at hearing an imam calling her daughter Aisha rather than Ashlene. Sharon Gallagher's prosaic negotiations with her neighbours reveal the multifaceted nature of living with difference, where desire, tolerance, discomfort and violence intermingle. All in all, however, Sharon Gallagher is portrayed as having accommodated to her neighbourhood but with inappropriate apathy.

Living side-by-side, rather than face-to-face, Sharon Gallagher and her neighbours engage in what could be read as an ethical relation of indifference (Sandercock, 2003; Tonkiss, 2003), one where there is no attempt to cross the neighbour's threshold and have the 'meaningful interchanges' prescribed by the Home Office (Home Office, 2001a: 9). Sharon Gallagher's outlook resembles the blasé attitude to difference: an attitude usually attributed to city-life, indeed seen as an inherent factor of living among strangers in the metropolis (Donald, 1999; Sandercock, 2003; Sennett, 1994; Simmel, 1997). Though Bradford is not a 'world city', it has grown to become emblematic of the 'state of race relations in this country' (*Guardian* 30 October 2003), as explained above. To be sure, the propinquity of Asianness and Englishness in Bradford exists under different conditions to that of Asians and English in London or Manchester, and creates variations on the structures of feeling than encourage neighbourly love. Bradford is one of several deprived towns and areas that have become the targets for strategies of capacity building, community

cohesion, active citizenship and multicultural management. It is an area where residents struggle for material recognition and resources – Sharon Gallagher waited eighteen months for her council home – and where anti-Asian antagonism is in part grounded on perceptions of Asians' luxurious lifestyles as proof of preferential treatment (Gilroy, 2004); a racism based on consumer rather than ethnic culture. But the point is that a politics of intimacy is elevated as the universal antidote to the political and moral crisis over the future of national multicultural solidarity – a crisis seen by some as waiting to erupt if we do not attend to indifference and to communities merely living side-by-side.[10] The expectation is that Sharon Gallagher should *know* her neighbours and engage in 'meaningful interchanges' with them, fulfilling the promise of multicultural intimacy to 'foster understanding and respect' (Home Office, 2001a: 11), which are at the basis of the tolerant society that Britain aspires to be.

This way of posing 'multiculture' indicates that 'mixing' is about holding cultural boundaries tight, locked, and *then* talking across them – a 'dialogical mosaic' (Hesse, 2000: 8). 'Mixing', here, is about 'understanding' the other as the antidote to ignorance that is seen as the root-cause of racism; being able to describe her, to 'know' her, but where her identity is reduced to her lifestyle which is then elevated as a sign of her 'culture' as a whole: her values, her rituals, the foods she eats, the clothes and apparel she wears. Framed within a politics of toleration, the key aim of this version of multiculturalism is 'to promote racial harmony *between* communities,

[10] In a recent Guardian article, Leo Benedictus (2005) celebrates London as 'the most cosmopolitan city on earth', and expresses uncertainty about the relations of indifference he says characterise present-day London which, he bemoans, fall short of understanding the meanings of cultural differences.

[while] it fails to deal with problems *within* communities'[11] (such as forced marriage; Southall Black Sisters in Razack, 2004: 166; emphasis original). This version of multiculturalism does not go 'beyond the wall of language' (Žižek, 1998: 168) and keeps the other at a distance, enclosed within her culture – the Muslim-Asian other, that is, for this version of mixing is different to those of the younger generation 'Caribbeans', such as Devlin, who are mixing/mixed in a different sense.

Within these prescriptions of multicultural intimacy, 'love rather than genial indifference sets the standard and it is, after all, only the neighbor and not the more demanding figures of the enemy or the stranger, who is being brought within the sphere of this impossible request for tolerance with intimacy.' (Gilroy, 2004: 72) The request for tolerance with intimacy is impossible because it sets up injunctions of love and understanding that neglect the relations of distance, power and conflict that living with difference is embedded in. The illusion of tolerance with multicultural intimacy is that power relations and conflicts will be somehow suspended through dialogue and intimacy, and that the distance and hierarchy between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated will dissolve.

Furthermore, the enemy or stranger is not necessarily as distinct from the neighbour as Gilroy suggests. The sophistication and detailed guidelines of how community cohesion can be attained suggests that 'the neighbour' itself is an achieved

[11] In a consultation document circulated in May 2004, the Home Office writes of the importance of addressing the common problems between groups constituting a 'community', while neglecting to consider internal problems within groups. '[I]t is important that we foster mutual understanding and respect between people from different backgrounds and cultures. Communities are better equipped to organise themselves and tackle problems if they are not divided by mutual suspicion and misunderstanding of diverse cultures and faiths. We need to understand better why segregation persists in some of our communities – so we can ensure people do not feel forced into it, while respecting their right to retain their culture and tradition.' (Home Office, 2004: 16-17)

rather than a given status. ‘What makes for good neighbours’ was a topic of study in the Home Office’s proposed training programme for applicants for British naturalisation (Home Office, 2003: 3.5(vi), p. 10), and is implicit throughout a more recent document on *Why Neighbourhoods Matter* (Cabinet Office, 2005). The belief in the benefits of neighbourly love comes with the acknowledgment that ‘thy neighbour’ must *gain* ‘thy love’ through appropriate behaviour: Susie, the Gallagher children’s aunt, confirms concerns about Muslim Asian self-segregation when she declares that her neighbours do not deserve the title because ‘neighbours are nice people’, that is, people who would talk to her. The becoming neighbour is one who should ‘care back’ and talk across the garden fence.

The resounding silence and absence of Muslim Asians in the streets where the Gallagher children roam epitomises the image of the absent-present immigrant. The one whose transnational liaisons – the presence of which are made visible and audible in the local mosque – take her outside of the locality into a transnational diasporic space of belonging. The Muslim Asian is disproportionately out-of-place because she is not here *though she should be*. She is eerily invisible and unavailable for participating in neighbourly ‘meaningful interchanges’ and for loosing herself into ‘us’. Indeed, the becoming neighbour is one who should show appropriate forms of attachment to place – ‘real’ and symbolic. Crucial to community cohesion is the ‘intertwining of personal and place identity’ (Home Office, 2001a: 13), but where the ‘place’ of identity is *here* not ‘there’. The ideal of local cohesive community is grounded in the attempt to shift cultural identities, identifications and practices of local residents, especially those of minorities who must break away from their ‘self-segregated’ communities (Kundnani, 2001: 107). Indeed, some versions of community cohesion are deemed dysfunctional: ‘ethnic’ (read Asian) self-love is

dismissed as a form of schizophrenic self-ostracism,[12] a kind of make believe world where children of ethnic minorities are 'being raised and schooled in an environment where they can forget that in the world outside Manningham it is they who are the real ethnic minority', as one reviewer of *The Last White Kids* stated (*Guardian* 30 October 2003). Love of the same is pathologised, while mixing promises to breed love of the other in a collective embrace of mutual recognition. While she is kept at a distance, the Muslim Asian other is also expected to 'care back' in the relationship of neighbourly love. Cohesive communities are 'caring communities' which are scrutinised in relation to the injunctions of caring citizenship that come with them – that is the expectation that citizens should '"care back" through their active and affective participation in the nation (Hage, 2003: 30). Viewed in this light, can the 'problem' of Muslim Asian self-segregation be the problem of their refusal of the love and embrace offered by the nation; of their refusal to 'care back'? *Love of the same is undesirable when it is not about 'us'*. This gives a different twist to the politics of recognition discussed by Charles Taylor (1994), which seeks to redress the injuries of misrecognition suffered by minorities. Here, the injured is the wider local/national community whose offer of friendship, respect, and tolerance with intimacy is rebuffed by an un-neighbourly ethnic minority.

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[12] The accepted understanding is that *all* ethnic minorities retreat 'into "comfort zones" made up of people like themselves' (Ouseley, 2001: 16) and this 'is something which successive groups of *immigrants* have done for centuries' (Home Office, 2001b: 12; emphasis added). The generalisation of 'ethnics' and 'immigrants' produces a significant erasure of the different conditions under which peoples migrate and settle. Can the experience of South Asians and Caribbeans be aligned to those of Jews or Irish? How is whiteness at play in these statements? These questions reach far beyond the scope of this article, but the point is that the erasure of 'Asians' in this statement (as the main ethnic minority group concerned here) raises several questions about what is denied or made visible regarding their integration strategies.

Of central concern are outer-local attachments that diasporic communities might foster.

> Britain, like almost all countries, has been affected by globalisation and is now host to communities for whom concerns about their country of origin can be refreshed daily. In these circumstances, strategies for making them feel at home, rather than as reluctant exiles, need to be established. (Home Office, 2001a: 18)

How can the promise of a nationalizing embrace be sustained at a time when peaceful cohabitation is perceived as increasingly threatened by 'outsiders' and 'outside belongings' (Probyn, 1996)? National feeling is seen as hindered by transnational/monocultural attachments and the project is to re-align personal feelings, feelings for the community, and feelings for the (multicultural) nation on the same continuum (Nash, 2003: 514). Migrants' detachment from roots is seen as a necessary condition to the process of establishing strong local ties: 'cling[ing] to some past life' (Home Office, 2001a: 18) or 'the burden of "back home" politics' (Home Office, 2001a: 20) are discouraged as counter productive to community cohesion.

At the same time, *The Last White Kids* confronts its viewers with the excessive *presence* of the other. Muslim Asians are too many and too close, constituted as out-of-place because disproportionately 'here', in the fullness of their existence which exceeds representations – for example of what constitutes 'balanced' mixing, as illustrated in the narrative about Jake's choice of a new school.[13] More broadly, the film is taken as emblematic of the multicultural nightmare, where disproportionate

[13] The Cantle Report suggests that faith-based schools 'should offer, at least 25%, of places to reflect the other cultures or ethnicities within the local area.' (Home Office, 2001a: 33)

diversity undermines social solidarity and, crucially, takes 'us' away from ourselves. It is this framing of the national 'we' that *The Last White Kids* disrupts, as viewers are asked to witness the loss of social cohesion within the community as the girls are being pulled away from a version of the national that is about loving *ourselves* as different, without becoming (too) different. Tolerance and intimacy, in this context, are pathologised rather than praised.[14]

Consider two reviewers' despair at Amy's explanation that she wears the black hijab because '[i]f you are white, no one can see your face, so they think you are Muslim.' 'The image of any child', write the reviewers in the *Daily Mail* (30 October 2003), 'feeling her natural looks are somehow inferior is especially poignant.' The reviewers are not interested in the ways in which Amy and her sister are enacting different versions of femininity, nor can they see in Amy's remark a strategic play with the signifiers of inalterable difference. Rather, her explanation is taken up as a sign of the dangers of too much mixing of whites with otherness. In contrast to their mother, the problem with the Gallagher girls is that they haven't domesticated otherness enough. In *The Last White Kids*, the Gallagher girls are seen as having lost a love of themselves *as white*; of having lost the very symbolic consistency of their being because they got too close to the 'real' other.

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[14] In a recent controversial article, the conservative-liberal editor of *Prospect* magazine David Goodhart stated tolerance is a symptom that 'we' [the UK] don't care enough about each other to resent the arrival of the other' (2004: 25). Goodhart turns tolerance into an affront to the nation's narcissistic love: we should resent the other for he/she pulls us away from ourselves. Goodhart is mourning the loss of ourselves as the objects of mutual care and love. By extension, he is mourning the loss of the nation – as a community of people who look, act and behave alike – as *the* object/site of attachment.

For the reviewers, the scene presents, in Anne Anlin Cheng's words (2001: 40), 'the real horror of an identificatory assimilation that has taken place *on the white body*' (emphasis original) and express a 'usually unarticulated anxiety of the white self to remain unaffected' by its use of the iconic marker of otherness, the veil. But Amy's remark says nothing of a feeling of inferiority. Her beaming face suggests more pride at her smart thinking, more self-possession than self-denial. Amy is fully aware of her being white, and of how white and Muslim don't quite add up in the world she lives in, and she is fully in control of what she does about her whiteness. The veil, here, simultaneously masks and confirms whiteness – Amy's whiteness is not under threat and she knows that she will always remain white. The veil is like a second skin that marks her as racialised other, but it is one that she can put on or remove at will.

If Amy uses the veil as a prop to pass as a Muslim girl, it is as a sign of authenticity that is also a disciplining technology – as Ashlene, having reached the age of puberty, is made all too aware of when she returns to the mosque after a long absence only to be told to wait another month for a female teacher. Having crossed a generational threshold, Ashlene's movement across cultural borders is mediated by her gendered position. Now Ashlene has to be a different kind of girl – one whose burgeoning 'womanhood' positions her within a wider sex/gender system of inequalities that exist across 'ethnic' borders and that are at the basis of cross-ethnic complicities.[15] Indeed, the elevation of the veil as *the* sign of oppressive gender orders

[15] In Bradford, for example, national authorities obtained the guarantee that ethnic leaders would contain and cover up ethnic minority resistance in exchange for their withdrawal from 'internal affairs', namely the highly contentious issue of forced marriages (Amin, 2002; Kundnani, 2001; Macey, 1999; Sahgal, 2002). This kind of

airbrushes the ways in which technologies of gender and gender inequalities take on a myriad of forms and are not exclusive to Islam. Sex/gender systems constitute the barometer for the assessment of European civilisation and set the limits of the civil nation (Lewis, 2005). In this sense, the kind of femininity and womanhood that the veil signifies in Britain is one that affronts an idealised view of the 'liberated' western woman. The veil is the sign of an inferior sex/gender system and by the same token, confirms the superiority of the British (and European) 'more equal' sex/gender systems (Lewis, 2005; Razack, 2004). Thus the portrayal of white British girls crossing the threshold of acceptable to unacceptable femininity becomes the sign of the crumbling of the nation's moral values. 'When will Britain convert to Islam?' shrieked a *Mail on Sunday* headline (2 November 2003) following the broadcast of *The Last White Kids*, where the journalist expressed a deep concern about a younger generation bereft of proper patriarchal guidance as a result of 'the crumbling of two-parent families' (Sharon Gallagher is a single mother) and the waning leadership of white Christian churches – thus clearing a space for imams to step in as patriarchal figures. The girls' interest in Islam becomes symbolic of that which is under threat by Islam, by the *possibility* of Islam[16], a possibility which is associated by the *Mail on Sunday* to secularisation and the decline of patriarchal authority. Racism and ethnic absolutism hide behind expressions of the Christian patriarchy and 'the family' as being under siege, both of which are elevated as cornerstones of the morality of Britishness.

'integration' sustains systems of inequalities *within* as well as between communities, in the name of cultural preservation.

[16] See Ahmed 2004 chapter 3 on the work of fear in generating narratives of possible threats to the individual/nation.

Furthermore, the very location in which the islamicisation of white Britain is set is not innocent: this is a working class neighbourhood in a northern English town – where the white English working class poor are imagined as hopeless monoculturalists and racists (Haylett, 2001; Skeggs, 2004). With the scrutinising lens cast on them, the Gallagher girls show the adaptability and flexibility of working class white children who are performing acts of seamless syncretism usually associated with white middle-class civility and educated knowledge and/or with the ordinary cosmopolitanism of big urban centres. In doing so, the girls are breaking out of fixed notions of working class culture and more broadly, of northern working class towns and neighbourhoods. What *The Last White Kids* reveals, as Ash Amin suggests, is that the neighbourhood is a space of cultural displacement, where the girls disrupt 'easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and [initiate] new attachments … and through this, learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction.' (Amin, 2002: 970). For example, when asked by the filmmaker what religion she is, Lauren answers that she is 'in the middle'. 'You're not half Paki', retorts her brother John. 'I'm in the middle', insists Lauren with the only answer she can give within the rigid discursive system that is available to her; one that conflates 'ethnicity' and 'race' with religion, and that forces her to be *either* English-Christian *or* Pakistani-Muslim. Lauren exposes the limits of these categories, as it does not provide her with a satisfying way to express her own positioning within the multicultural landscape she inhabits. In this respect, the Gallagher girls offer some hope for the future by articulating a version of belonging that is not based on a foundational identity.

In stark contrast, the Gallagher boys insist on the fixity of categories and on the impossibility to greet their Asian peers with anything else than the same violence and aggression they say they are subjected to. The boys' response is construed in the

film as a result of the excessive presence of Muslim Asians, whose boys are bullying the now victimised white kids. Their aggressive refusal to 'mix' is portrayed as caused not only by the other's violence, but by the (excessive) presence of the other in the first place. Assuming that bullying might very well be going on, the boys' attitude should rather be read as part of wider 'patterns of embodied masculine culture that they share with their [Asian] peers' (Desai in Back et al., 2002: 5.4). *Both* Asian and white boys of Manningham are 'all too well assimilated into a society divided by racism and discrimination' (Back et al., 2002: 5.4). But rather than situating the boys' violence within a historical and social understanding of racism – as fundamentally tied to Britain's colonial past and to its 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy, 2004) – racism here is reduced to a question of individual 'bad faith' and 'bad practice'. As I argue elsewhere (2005), the darker side of history is evacuated by ascribing the origins and sources of racism and intolerance to individual acts, singular bodies, or within specific localities and collectivities. The Gallagher boys and their Asian peers are all seen as failing integration because they engaged in the unacceptable working class yobbery that shames the nation and that has become the target of increased scrutiny, regulation and control.

However, if the boys' violence calls for a rethinking of racism as historical rather then merely individual, their attitude toward cultural difference also points to the very ambivalence of racial thinking. While they insist on the impermeability of ethnic categories and indeed act in defence of them, they also force a reconsideration of the black/white binary. Consider the filmmaker Shona Thompson's question to Devlin about why he fights with the Asian kids: 'But they're the same people as you, aren't they?' pointing out their similar skin colour. But Devlin adamantly rejects the connection, privileging his filial ties to his white brother John instead, and declaring

'I'm a Porkie, not a Paki'. Choosing to fight Islam and Asians rather than to relate to them as a black boy, Devlin rejects what Gayatri Spivak calls 'chromatism' (in McClintock, 1995: 52) – where skin colour is the crucial sign of otherness and belonging – and repositions himself within a neo-racist scale – one that places religion, rather than skin colour, as the primary criteria of absolute difference. Devlin might well refuse to be 'black' in the same way his Asian peers are, but he resorts to a cultural absolutist and familyist discourse of blood ties to assert his inherent 'difference' from Asians, as well as his assimilation within white England. Seen as assimilated yet violent, we could wonder if Devlin's 'half-Jamaicanness' doesn't enter in full-force, here, given that Jamaican men have long since been symbols par excellence of masculine violence and crime (the 'Yardy'). What would it mean for him to say, like his sister Lauren, that he is 'in the middle'? This raises questions that I cannot begin to answer here, but the point is that there are several different types of mixing and 'integration' that question the foundations of racial thinking.[17] Thompson's attempt to slot Devlin within a black/white divide fails in the face of the shifting grounds of racism that ostensibly place more emphasis on what you are 'at heart' than on skin colour. Within this new moral racism, the black other can become 'unmarked', his skin peeled (Fortier, 2005), when he displays what are perceived as white masculine English attitudes – even if they are the white working class violent version the shown in *The Last White Kids*.

[17] The large body of research on mixed-race children have long since explored similar questions and discussed the ways in which 'mixed race' is a form of critique, a way of discrediting racial categories and the social meanings of 'race'. For recent interventions, see Ali, 2003; Parker and Song, 2001.

In conclusion

The Gallagher family's assorted responses to their neighbourhood, as well as the way their story is interpreted in the film and in the press, are all reminders, as Gail Lewis observes, of 'just how ordinary are the complexities – and anxieties – of "race" in the modern UK . . . just how deep a part of the everyday "national" culture "race" really is.' (Lewis, 2004: 112; see also Gilroy, 2004). What the film and its reviewers fail to consider, however, is how messy, slippery, and fragile 'racial' differences actually are, how porous cultural boundaries can be, how fluid cultural practices are, and how experiences of racialised or culturalised differences are uneven across class, gender, and urban/regional divides (Lewis, 2004: 112). I argue elsewhere that, in contrast to theories of liberal citizenship that assume that the legitimate subject-citizen is a disembodied subject, multicultural citizenship requires a process of ascription of differential identities, and of differential bodies, to its citizens. Multicultural citizenship oscillates between conceptions founded on the *embodied* multicultural – where people in their ordinariness are the referent – and the *disembodied* citizen or community – the utopian moment of abstraction, where the nation is an assumed bond, an imagined community of shared allegiance where 'differences' are transcended. This article further explores this oscillation as it manifests itself in the very imagining of the glue of the national bond – one that draws on an emotivist and intimate ethos through which the limits of the civil nation are drawn.

The promise of the national embrace and of neighbourly love is to be viewed as part of a technology of governance aimed at engineering affect through the management of multicultural intimacy. Such strategies not only concern, as Nigel Thrift (2004: 67) suggests, 'the careful design of urban space to produce political response' and action – such as the 'linking project' in Bradford that busses children

from all-Asian schools to all-white schools, and vice versa (Malik, 2003). The engineering of intimacy also informs the national structure of feeling – one that seeks to align feelings for community with feelings for the nation. Multicultural intimacy is not only managed in literal spatial forms, but it is also constructed through specific emotional and ethical injunctions that are imagined in the ambivalent spatial terms of obligations to and dangers of proximity.

The ambivalence underpinning the instruction to love thy neighbour is refracted through articulations of 'race', class, and gender. In *The Last White Kids*, interethnic propinquity is staged as a problem, a source of concern, as we are invited to witness the islamicisation of the nation's unprotected daughters who roam the empty streets at prayer time. Streets that are plagued with the excessive presence and absence of the Muslim other. Likewise, the masculine yobbery exhibited by the Gallagher boys adds to the fears that unmanaged proximity can fuel violent animosity. Whether in separation or in closeness, the Gallagher kids' answers to interethnic propinquity are pathologised and delegitimised as uneducated, unruly, haphazard, and in need of appropriate patriarchal guidance. More broadly, government strategies to redress the negative effects of interethnic propinquity are decidedly located within working class areas, which are the primary targets of corrective measures for instigating community cohesion and good neighbourliness.[18] In this sense, the politics of mixing are about preventing working class excesses and failures – in love, loathing, and indifference – and instilling British civil neighbourliness. Within this context, we can consider the extent to which the political repositioning of ethnic minorities in the

[18] The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 is a case in point. It's section on housing, for example, explicitly targets tenants and not home-owners, and gives more powers to landlords of social housing to evict unruly tenants.

public sphere, either as angry, rioting, or self-segregating guests, or as meritorious citizens who 'care back' and 'act white', is informed by a wider reconfiguration of classificatory schemes within the national collective that distinguish between two species: the 'neighbour from hell' and the 'heavenly neighbour'.

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