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

Almost no day goes by without public discussion of these issues by politicians, journalists, experts, and stakeholders, all surrounded by a mountain of new research and existing knowledge. Although the issues are varied and complex, such is the pace and volume of opining on them that the scope for radical new insight has become limited (despite media craving for new discoveries). This could be read as a mark of maturity in our knowledge and understanding, signaling the availability of excellent research and sustained debate on some of the issues. The value of new writing thus might lie in the kind of story told and in the proposals that follow. Such is the aim of this contribution in a field of rich scholarship on race and ethnicity in Britain.

The paper concentrates on the everyday urban—the daily negotiation of ethnic difference—or rather than on the national frame of race and ethnicity in Britain. First, it emphasises local liveability, that is, the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter. The constitution of such micropublics, and the terms of engagement within them, are seen to be crucial for reconciling and overcoming ethnic cultural differences. Local negotiations of ethnicity—inflected by class practices, cultural habits,
and ingrained norms—are seen to matter in quite crucial ways. Second, the paper, in step with a perspective that takes ethnicity as a mobile and incomplete process, seeks to work with—against current stereotypes—the very real cultural dynamism of minority ethnic (and White) communities. Accordingly, it also interprets progressive interethnic relations as fragile and temporary settlements springing from the vibrant clash of an empowered and democratic public, rather than as the product of policy fixes and community cohesion or consensus.

The paper focuses on the problem of interethnic intolerance and conflict in urban contexts where mixture has failed to produce social cohesion and cultural interchange. There are many neighbourhoods in which multiethnicity has not resulted in social breakdown, so ethnic mixture itself does not offer a compelling explanation for failure (for that matter, race hatred is frequent in White deprived areas). The first part of the paper attempts to uncover the forces behind entrenched ethnic suspicion and conflicts through an analysis of the triggers and enduring factors behind the civil unrest that erupted in some areas of the northern English mill towns in mid-2001. It explores in particular the dynamics of deprivation, segregation, and changing youth cultures. Although the prime purpose of the study is not to dwell on the 2001 riots, but to use the issues raised by them as a springboard to explore what it takes to combat racism and to live with difference in a multicultural and multiethnic society, the riots inevitably cast a long shadow over the general discussion. Thus the study’s inflection towards mixed working-class areas, Muslim Asians, and youth cultures, has squeezed the space for any serious analysis of racism in nonmixed areas, the ethnic cultures and race proclivities of the White and non-White middle classes, the practices and aspirations of minority ethnic women, trends within the African-Caribbean community, the trials of mixed-race marriages, and the successes of hybrid cultures (for example, in music).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the second part of the paper provides a general outline of possibilities for urban interculturalism. It does so first by emphasising the negotiation of difference within local micropublics of everyday interaction, and second by highlighting the role of certain structural influences and national rules of citizenship and belonging that influence the ability of people to interact fruitfully as equals. The study concludes with a discussion of how action to strengthen micropublics of negotiation might be framed. It also argues that the achievement of a genuinely intercultural society requires a new language from which the strong overtones of Whiteness are removed from understandings of British citizenship and national belonging, so that citizens of different colour and culture can coexist with the same right of claim to the nation. Given that the aim of this study is to open new political ground as well as to recognise the dynamic nature of experiences of race and ethnicity, the final discussion deliberately avoids the understandable trend among policymakers and advisors in the face of serious problems such as race killings and ethnic riots to rush out fine-tuned and top-down prescriptions to legislate for urban ethnic harmony.

**Urban ethnic conflict—race matters?**

The civil unrest that erupted in Oldham, Bradford, and Burnley during the Spring and Summer of 2001 was a palpable reminder of the geography of racism and cultural intolerance in Britain. It highlighted how only too often interethnic relations are played out as a neighbourhood phenomenon, linked to particular socioeconomic conditions and cultural practices that coalesce into a local way of life. It was a reminder that the temptation to associate ‘race trouble’ with entire cities or particular types of city (for example, provincial or metropolitan) should be avoided. The research on areas of visible racial antagonism seems to identify two types of neighbourhood. The first
are old White working-class areas with successive waves of non-White immigrant settlement, characterised by continued socioeconomic deprivation and cultural or physical isolation between White residents lamenting the loss of a golden ethnically undisturbed past, and non-Whites claiming a right of place, often against each other (Alexander, 1996; Back, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1999). Their cultural dynamics are quite different from those of many other mixed neighbourhoods where greater social and physical mobility, a local history of compromises, and a supportive institutional infrastructure have come to support cohabitation of some sort. The second are ‘White flight’ suburbs and estates dominated by an aspirant working class or an inward-looking middle class repelled by what it sees as the replacement of a homely White nation by another land of foreign cultural contamination and ethnic mixture. Here, frightened families, White youths, and nationalist/fascist activists disturbed by the fear (rarely the experience) of Asian and Black contamination terrorise the few immigrants and asylum seekers who happen to settle there (Back and Nayak, 1999; Hewitt, 1996).

The latest unrest exemplifies the processes at work in the first type of neighbourhood, but also the White fear and antagonism characteristic of the second type of neighbourhood. Some of these processes are place specific, whereas others bear an uncanny resemblance to other urban ‘race riots’ in Britain since the early 1970s. The specific triggers that sparked the unrest in Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford have been extensively debated. They include the visibility and popular manipulations of the BNP, and the actions of a police force that rounded on Asian youths more vehemently than on White racism. Then, media reporting itself, which sensationalised the disturbances, sparked further anger through a highly racialised account of events as they unfolded (for example, by talking of ‘no-go areas for Whites’, ‘local authorities taken over by Asians’, ‘tradition-bound communities’, all of which pushed the disenfranchised White working class towards the BNP as the voice of a new victim community). The most significant trigger was the frustration of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi working-class men with social marginalisation, the paternalism of their so-called community elders, vilification in the media, heavy-handed or insensitive policing, and the incursion of ‘outsider’ claimants such as the BNP. As Virinder Kalra observes, their actions told the story of years of victimisation including “the racist killing of Tahair Akram in 1989; the arrests of Asian school children for defending themselves against racist attack; the expulsion of a young woman from a local school for wearing a head dress; the false accusations of ‘conspiracy to commit racist crime’ which is now routinely used by the Police against Asian young people” (Kalra, 2001, page 6).

Underlying these triggers—each of which requires specific attention—there are longer term factors that need to be grasped and tackled. These are factors which tended to escape media coverage, but are vital in explaining the long history of cultural tension and social conflict within parts of these northern English towns. The three factors that stand out from the available research, discussed in turn below, are socioeconomic deprivation, segregation, and new youth politics. All three, importantly, cut across the ethnic divide and blunt the power of ethnicity-based explanations alone.

**Deprivation**

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

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

Old divisions in labour-market outlets for Whites and Asians were swept aside by mass unemployment, intense competition for public sector or low-paid and precarious work, and economic insecurity in general. For over twenty-five years, large sections of the population in these towns have faced severe economic hardship and uncertainty, with more than a generation living with unemployment (around 50% among young Asians in Oldham). The string of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities across the Pennines that count as among Britain’s most impoverished 1% (Kundnani, 2001), have come to share with many White working-class estates acute problems of social stigmatisation, low educational achievements, unpleasant housing and urban amenities, elevated health and drug-abuse problems, and a pathology of social rejection that reinforces family and communalist bonds.

Ethnic resentment has been fuelled by socioeconomic deprivation and a sense of desperation. Economic collapse removed the workplace as a central site of integration and common fate. As Kundnani (2001, page 106) notes, the “textile industry was the common thread binding the White and Asian working class into a single social fabric. But with its collapse, each community was forced to turn inwards on to itself.” Competition for scarce local opportunities combined with economic marginalisation to fuel resentment, especially as stories grew of Whites getting better jobs and better housing estates, and of Asians receiving preferential welfare support. Social deprivation too exacerbated ethnic differences, for it removed part of the material well-being and social worth that can help in reducing jealousy and aggression towards others seen to be competing for the same resources. Much media analysis has ignored this factor in preference for cultural explanations, but the ‘violence of the violated’ on all sides of the ethnic divide cannot be grasped without an understanding of the contributing material privations.

Segregation
Both the Ouseley Report (2001) on community fragmentation in Bradford and the Home Office (2001a) report Building Cohesive Communities on the disturbances in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford have identified ethnic segregation as a major long-term cause of the disturbances. Both highlight the long drift towards self-segregation among working-class Asians and Whites, barricaded in their own neighbourhoods, socialised through enclave ethnic cultures (Muslim or White preservationist), and educated in local schools of virtually no ethnic mixture. The Ouseley Report, for example, condemns: the lack of communication between communities; a political structure bowing to community leaders and regeneration programmes forcing communities to bid against each other; a poor public image of the area and poor public services, exacerbating White and minority ethnic flight; and a segregated school system that has failed to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes and that has played a marginal role in brokering cultural shifts between family, school, and public life. These trends are said to have bred intercultural intolerance of a highly ethnicised nature, within a public realm of diminished commitment to the commons.
The dynamics of segregation, however, need to be unpacked. For example, in the public debate following these two reports rather too much has been made of Asian retreat into inner-urban wards to preserve diaspora traditions and Muslim values, while not enough has been said about White flight into the outer estates, which has been decisively ethno-cultural in character—in escaping Asian ethnic contamination and wanting to preserve White Englishness. This imbalance is unfortunate, since there is no shortage of recommendations to get Asians to step out of their cultural shell (by learning English, giving up faith schools, moving into White areas, embracing British liberalism, questioning traditional beliefs and practices), while the cultural exclusions associated with White Englishness pass without comment. In reality though, it is not clear who has wanted to be put into an ethnic cultural cage in these northern towns. The segregation of the Asians and their cultural isolation have been forced to a large degree. As Whites moved out of cramped and dilapidated houses in the inner-city areas to new housing estates with the help of discriminatory council housing policies, poor Asians had little choice other than to settle in the abandoned areas. As Kundnani (2001, page 107) explains:

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

Segregation in housing led to segregation in education and a record of poor results in both White and Asian areas because of deprivation, and because of a schooling system “mired in a culture of failure” (Kundnani, 2001, page 107) and family/community dissatisfaction. In this context, all manner of ethnic accusations and myths flourished, one of which—perhaps a self-fulfilling myth—was that Asians, now a majority, did not want to mix with the Whites, now a beleaguered minority.

Awareness of the historical link between discrimination and segregation in these northern mill towns provides a vantage point for judging the widespread opinion that, since cultural isolation lies at the heart of the disturbances, the way forward lies in greater ethnic mixing. The Home Office report has recommended that future public housing schemes should be ethnically mixed, while other policy advisors have suggested that existing council estates should be divided into mini-villages and encouraged to develop schemes to foster interaction between ethnic groups (Power, 2000). The Ouseley Report presses for social unity, by proposing citizenship education in schools, equality and fair treatment standards within the public sector, and workplace reforms to meet multicultural needs.

These are genuinely well-meaning proposals for cultural dialogue, but underlying them is a worrying assumption of cultural fixity and homogeneity within both the majority and minority ethnic communities, one that as a result perhaps makes too much of the demons of segregation. Kalra (2001) notes a number of problems with the assumption. First, cities such as Leicester, now seen as an example of progressive urban ethnicity (after many years of conflict and negotiation, it has to be said) is as ethnically segregated as Bradford. Put differently, many mixed neighbourhoods in a number of British cities are riddled with prejudice and conflict between Asian, White, and African-Caribbean residents. Second, therefore, there are other processes cutting across the spatial patterns of residence that shape cultural practices, such as the inwardness produced by deprivation and inequality, the suspicion and fear aroused by generalised racism, the experience of sustained discrimination or exclusion along racial and ethnic lines, and the stories that communities—proximate, distanciated, and virtual—end up telling of themselves and others. For Kalra (2001, page 14), the anger...
of the young men in the streets of the mill towns had to do with the “defence of their
territories from the incursion of racist groups and from police harassment”, not
cultural closure. Third, Kalra contests the assumption of cultural homogeneity and
closure within the Asian community. He notes (2001, pages 12–13):
“A young Asian Muslim born in Oldham has a deeply different structural upbring-
ing from his sister who lives with him as well as his brother in Mirpur, Azad
Kashmir. From a young age this young man will be exposed to an English language
media promoting the dominant values of the society. From the age of four
compulsory schooling formalises the process of value transmission.... Even in those
schools where the hijaab is a norm, where there is a prayer room for daily prayer,
where halal meat is served at lunch times, the history curriculum will still consist
almost entirely of European subjects and particularly of the British monarchy....
It is the case that White children know nothing of the values of other traditions but
certainly Asian Muslim young people are educated into the operative dominant
values of the wider society.”

It therefore needs to be asked who will benefit from initiatives to engineer physical
mixture, if cultural practices cannot be reduced to the ethnic composition of neigh-
bourhoods [see Back (2001) for an account of the shared masculinity between the 2001
Asian ‘rioters’ and White racists, revealed in charged Internet exchanges].

**Generational change and a new youth counterpublic**

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

There is, however, another narrative that puts their actions in 2001 in context
(without necessarily denying a social pathology that includes some of the demonic
occurrences). Once again, Kundnani (2001, page 108) succinctly explains:

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

The setting for the riots as ‘Asian gang trouble’ was in place. But, the young men
might also be seen as a counterpublic with distinctive citizenship claims that cannot
be reduced to ethnic and religious moorings nor to a passing youth masculinity.
Their action was a strong claim of ownership of particular bits of turf in these towns
of racialised space allocation—including public spaces such as streets, parks, and
neighbourhoods, no longer just private or closed spaces. It questioned the ethnic
assumptions of belonging in Britain. The Asian youths have challenged those who
want to keep them in their own minority spaces, and they have unsettled the majority
opinion that minorities should behave in a certain way in public (essentially by giving
up all but their folkloristic cultural practices). It is this disruption of the racialised coding of British civic and public culture that has made these riots so politically significant.

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

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

This connection between multiple and mobile youth ‘ethnicities’ and a new politics of turf is widespread. There is a sophisticated literature on the anthropology of young British Bengalis and Pakistanis (Alexander, 2000; Alibhai-Brown, 2000), British African Caribbeans (Alexander, 1996; Back, 1996) and British Whites (Back and Nayak, 1999; Hewitt, 1996) living in poor mixed urban neighbourhoods. Claire Alexander (2000), in a subtle and compassionate study shows that the young Bengalis she worked with in a London neighbourhood are both far more and far less than their
typecasting as violent and criminal ‘Asian gangs’. Their acts of violence are shown to
be contradictory and spontaneous, the product of racist name calling, group rivalries,
insensitive school exclusions, rejecting but also playing up to easy labelling (by the
police, by community elders, by teachers), strong friendship loyalties, and, above all,
pretty miserable socioeconomic circumstances. Such contextualisation is not meant to
diminish the significance of any acts of violence, but to puncture the reduction to ethnic
characteristics of the youths behind the acts, to grant them a multiple and evolving
identity that could take them in different directions:

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

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

To conclude this first part of the study, the analysis has emphasised the role of
three sets of factors behind the 2001 protests—deprivation, segregation, and new
generational demands. The Home Office (2001a) report, which was published as
this paper was being drafted, identified nine specific factors: (1) the lack of a strong
civic identity or shared values; (2) the fragmentation and polarisation of communities
on a scale that amounts to segregation; (3) disengagement of young people from the
local decisionmaking process, intergenerational tensions, and an increasingly terri-
torial mentality in asserting identities; (4) weak political and community leadership;
(5) inadequate provision of youth facilities; (6) high levels of unemployment; (7) activ-
ities of extremist groups; (8) weaknesses and disparity in the police response to
community issues; and (9) irresponsible coverage of race stories by sections of the
local media. Although my analysis overlaps with some of these factors, its tone and
emphasis are different, especially regarding four aspects: the implications of physical segregation; the so-called culturally homogeneity of the Asian community; the complexities of Asian youth identity; and minority citizenship seen as a struggle over rights and claims rather than as questions of civic identity or shared social values.

**Rights to the multicultural city**

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

**From mixed spaces to prosaic negotiations**

How interethnic understanding and engagement might be achieved is a matter of considerable contemporary debate. There is an emerging consensus that a crucial factor is the daily negotiation of difference in sites where people can come to terms with ethnic difference and where the voicing of racism can be muted (Allen and Cars, 2001). What is the nature of these sites, and what kind of engagement or outcome can be expected? This is where the debate is on less firm ground.

One line of thought, with roots in republican urban theory, has long looked to visibility and encounter between strangers in the open spaces of the city. The freedom to associate and mingle in cafes, parks, streets, shopping malls, and squares is linked to the development of an urban civic culture based on the freedom and pleasure to linger, the serendipity of casual encounter and mixture, and public awareness that these are shared spaces. Diversity is thought to be negotiated in the city’s public spaces. The depressing reality, however, is that in contemporary life, urban public spaces are often territorialised by particular groups (and therefore steeped in surveillance) or they are spaces of transit with very little contact between strangers (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin et al, 2000; Rosaldo, 1999). The city’s public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement.

This is not to claim the futility of action attempting to make public spaces inclusive, safe, and pleasant. It is not to diminish the significance of efforts in cities such as
Singapore, Vancouver, Leicester, or Birmingham to publicise multiculturalism by using public sites to support world cultures, minority voices, ethnic pluralism, and alternative local histories. For example, Birmingham officially supports a history of the city as one of global connections and layers of White and non-White migration. In Leicester the year “is punctuated with events that are celebrated especially by one community but enjoyed by all” (Winstone, 1996, page 39). These include council-supported celebrations for Eid, Hannuka, the Leicester Caribbean carnival, Diwali, an Asian ‘Mela’ or fair, and the City of Leicester Show, which “includes Asian and African music and food as well as traditional English pastimes such as horse racing” (Winstone, 1996, page 39). These are important signals of a shifting urban public culture. However, there is a limit to uses of public space for intercultural dialogue and understanding, for even in the most carefully designed and inclusive spaces, the marginalised and the prejudiced stay away, while many of those who participate carry the deeper imprint of personal experience that can include negative racial attitudes [see, for example, Parker’s (2000) ethnography revealing the uneven and racialised power geometry of the Chinese takeaway]. In the hands of urban planners and designers, the public domain is all too easily reduced to improvements to public spaces, with modest achievements in race and ethnic relations.

A similarly ambiguous space is mixed housing. As already discussed, housing segregation has been blamed for the legacy of ‘parallel lives’ (Home Office, 2001a) in the northern mill towns. There is now much policy interest in mixed housing, as a site where people from diverse backgrounds can engage as a community with shared interests (Power, 2000). It is worth noting, however, that many mixed estates are riddled with racism, interethnic tension, and cultural isolation. They too contain ‘parallel lives’. In addition, many neighbourhoods that are dominated by a single ethnic group are not trouble spots and do manage to maintain a fragile social pact, as Baumann (1996) has shown in the case of Southall. The colour composition of an area is a poor guide to what goes on in it. Engineering ethnic mixture through housing is problematic. Past attempts have resulted in White flight and deep resentment or violence from the older settled White community [see Wrench et al (1993) for evidence on a New Town], or in reinforcing a pathology of ‘neighbourhood nationalism’ among incomers and older residents (Allen, 2000; Back, 1996; Back and Keith, 1999). Then, a worrying political implication of the current interest in mixed housing estates is that it is the working class—the usual target of public housing schemes—that is asked to do all the mixing, while the middle class, equally implicated in racial and ethnic discrimination (see final section), escapes any such obligation and can “push off elsewhere, pretend not to be racist” (Doreen Massey, personal communication).

This is not to deny the significance of imaginative attempts to break down ethnic barriers in mixed estates. For example, in a comparative study of ‘estates on the edge’ in different European cities, Anne Power (1999) describes change in Taastrupgaard, a once unattractive and dehumanised mixed-ethnic estate on the outskirts of Copenhagen. In the mid-1980s, a redevelopment project was launched called the Environmental Project, based on “tenant involvement, local responsiveness and community development...a central focus of the initiative” (page 225). The initiative galvanised a considerable level of involvement from residents of different ethnicity in redesigning the estate, deciding on the uses of communal areas, and actual regeneration work. For example, “all the garden work was done by the tenants. On some blocks, 40 or 50 people joined in. The Turkish families, many of whom were of recent peasant origin, knew a lot more about gardening than the Danish households, who usually came from inner Copenhagen” (page 127). While Power admits that at the end of the project “formal relations continued to be strained between
ethnic communities” (page 231), she suggests that the estate has become more attractive, and possesses greater resident confidence in the estate’s viability, perhaps even as a multicultural venture.

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

The political implication is that the gains of interaction need to be worked at in local sites of everyday encounter. But there is no formula here other than perhaps the engineering of endless talk and interaction between adversaries or provision for individuals to broaden horizons, because any intervention needs to work through, and is only meaningful in, a situated social dynamic. In one youth project, for example, a tough stance against racist language and behaviour might maintain the peace, while in another one the imagination and persistence of committed youth workers to garner friendships and sociability across ethnic boundaries might yield a positive result. In one housing estate, the enforcement of strict rules on antisocial behaviour and tough action against racial harassment might be effective for some families and individuals. In another one, action on flash points of conflict such as rubbish dumping and nighttime noise might be effective, while elsewhere, carefully managed resident meetings that are able to steer discussion without stifling views (with the help of effective conflict-resolution methods) might garner understanding (Allen, 2000; Norman, 1998). Similarly, in one school, discussions of national identity, citizenship, and multiculturalism through the curriculum, or twinning with a school of different ethnic composition (as suggested by the government in the aftermath of the 2001 riots) may reach the minds and hearts of some children, while in another school, efforts to involve children from different ethnic backgrounds in common ventures might prove more effective. The anthropology of everyday interaction in a given place at a given time plays a decisive role in influencing possibilities for intercultural understanding, and for this, undermines blanket policy prescriptions.

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

Cultural transgression potentially could be worked into a new urban politics of cultural innovation, around existing sites of prosaic interaction. Moments of mobility and transition could be exploited. For example, colleges of further education, usually located out of the residential areas which dominate the lives of the young people, are a critical threshold space between the habituation of home, school, and neighbourhood on the one hand, and that of work, family, class, and cultural group, on the other hand. For a short period in the lives of the young people, the colleges constitute a relatively unstable space, bringing together people from varied backgrounds engaged in a common venture, unsure of themselves and their own capabilities, potentially more receptive to new influences and new friendships. These openings do not automatically lead to cultural exchange (especially when past friendships and acquaintances carry over to reinforce strong herd instincts), but joint projects across ethnic divisions and the sheer contrast of the sociality of this space with that of home and neighbourhood can help.

Similarly unsteady social spaces are some nighttime/weekend leisure spaces for young people. For example, sports associations and music clubs draw on a wide cross-section of the population, they are spaces of intense and passionate interaction, with success often dependent upon collaboration and group effort, their rhythms are different from those of daily habits, and they can disrupt racial and ethnic stereotypes as excellence often draws upon talents and skills that are not racially or ethnically confined. But, here too, the transformational element of interaction needs to be made explicit and worked at in efforts to make them intercultural spaces, through experiments that fit with local circumstances. They need to be made different from the many sports clubs and music clubs that are segregated on ethnic lines precisely as a means of preserving White and non-White communal traditions, often against a background of majority rejection of minority members.

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

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

But, there are also other, more radical, options explicitly designed for cultural confrontation and change through interaction. One example is legislative theatre, based on audience participation and oriented towards raising consciousness through enactment and response to difficult issues in a community (Boal, 2000). The performances, which are engaging as they are run by professional artists, can be emotionally charged as they unravel controversial local issues and deeply held prejudices within the community. The theatrical event is a means of questioning entrenched views and altering opinions through enactment. This form of theatre has been used to tackle urban racism and ethnic relations. Sophie Body-Gendrot (2000) cites the example of the Theatre-Forum in Marseilles, which puts on plays written with residents of tough mixed neighbourhoods, based on their experiences. The plays encourage “role exchanges and audience participation during the play, thus de-dramatizing daily life problems” (page 207) and encouraging interethnic and inter-generational understanding. Similarly, some organisations in South Yorkshire have become involved in a project called Race to Train, which explores issues of race and diversity within the workplace. In the project, “volunteers from the organisations work with writers and directors talk about their experiences, which are then presented to an audience of employees in a play entitled Crossing the Line” (Housing Today 22 November 2001, page 19). Then, “the audience is split into workshop groups where the issues raised in the play are investigated further through a series of mini plays, and general discussion.” The plays highlight problems in a direct and poignant way, helping not only to shake opinions and attitudes, but also to suggest solutions based on employee participation. Legislative theatre has an important role to pay in an imaginative urban policy.

The principle highlighted by legislative theatre is that prosaic cultural shifts rely upon displacement, more precisely, the practice of negotiating diversity and difference, an intercultural ethics based on ‘wisdoms’ of social engagement (Varela, 1999). There are many other examples that could be pursued through bold urban policy initiatives, including, as Body-Gendrot (2000) describes in the case of St Denis near Paris, hiring youths bent on writing graffiti to create urban murals, establishing auto-écoles (‘self-schools’) that use a loose curriculum and ad hoc methods to reintegrate youths who have dropped out of the school system, organising adolescents from around the world to come and play in an international football tournament, holding regular public debates on themes of relevance to residents, and bringing live music to a hospital to break down ethnic and cultural barriers.

The politics of community?
The discussion so far, with its emphasis on prosaic negotiations and transgressions, raises some important questions about the normative pitch of a politics of local cultural interchange. As noted earlier, in the aftermath of the 2001 riots, a consensus that has grown among politicians, policy advisors, and media commentators is that civic agreement and shared values are needed to reconcile intercultural differences. The spotlight has come to shine on local community and a shared sense of place as solutions. This is certainly the tenor of the Cantle Report (Home Office, 2001b) that led to the Home Office Report on the 2001 riots. It offers the term ‘community cohesion’ as the foundation for positive multicultural engagement:

“Community cohesion... is about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole. These divided communities would need to develop common goals and a shared vision. This would seem to imply that such groups should occupy a common sense of place as well” (Home Office, 2001b, page 70).
Cantle identifies five domains of community cohesion: (1) common values and a civic culture, based in common moral principles and codes of behaviour; (2) social networks and social capital, based on a high degree of social interaction within communities and families, voluntary and associational activity, and civic engagement; (3) place attachment and an intertwining of personal and place identity; (4) social order and social control, based in absence of general conflict, effective informal social control, tolerance, and respect for differences; and (5) social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities, based in equal access to services and welfare benefits, redistribution of public finances and opportunities, and ready acknowledgement of social obligations.

Whereas the last two domains are clearly matters of national social standards and policies, the first three can be read as an attempt to (re)engineer localities as ‘integrated communities’ and, in turn, to mobilise community bonds for social progress. The idea of a cohesive local society, that makes the most of diversity by inculcating trust, reciprocity, and collective commitments, has come to the centre of a new policy discourse supported by influential US academic literature on communitarian values or social capital rooted in local networks of interpersonal connections and ties (Putnam, 1993; 2000). But is community cohesion, thus defined, the key resource for cultural understanding and cohabitation in neighbourhoods marked by strong ethnic polarities, decades of neglect, and socioeconomic deprivation? Indeed, are community cohesion and community coherence feasible in these circumstances?

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

The examples of prosaic negotiation and transgression discussed earlier suggest a different vocabulary of local ‘accommodation’—a vocabulary of rights of presence, bridging difference, getting along. They mark places as process, as meeting places, as open ended, not as sites of single or fixed identities (Massey, 1999). What goes on in them are not achievements of community or consensus, but openings for contact and dialogue with others as equals, so that mutual fear and misunderstanding may be overcome and so that new attitudes and identities can arise from engagement. If common values, trust, or a shared sense of place emerge, they do so as accidents of engagement, not from an ethos of community.
The decisive factor is the nature of the local public sphere, more specifically the micropolitics that make up a place and determine the terms of social engagement. A progressive place politics is one that draws on an ‘agonistic’ political culture, that is, a culture that values participatory and open-ended engagement based on the “vibrant clash of democratic political positions” (Mouffe, 2000, page 104) between free and empowered citizens respectful of each other’s claims. This is a politics of emergent solutions and directions based on the process of democratic engagement. Open and critical debate, mutual awareness, and a continually altering subjectivity through engagement are the watchwords of agonistic politics, replacing the watchwords of trust, consensus, and cohesion that dominate the communitarian position. Agonism may well leave conflicts and disagreements unresolved, which is the nature of bringing distant and inimical subjects together, but its strength lies in making transparent reasons for resentment and misunderstanding as well as the pathos of the aggrieved, so that future encounters (essential in an agonistic public culture) can build on a better foundation.

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

Such a politics of active citizenship—irreducible to a politics of community—comes without guarantees, but it can flourish under certain conditions to ensure that minority interests can be advanced and to maximise the scope for new meanings through engagement. Much of this, as already argued, has to do with the practice of citizenship, but it is also intricately linked to the structures that define the terms on which people see themselves and others as citizens. The process fails—as confirmed by the 2001 riots—if the social context supports or tolerates racism or inequality along ethnic lines, because in such a context rights are perceived to be unevenly distributed and ethnically coded, bracketing people from a minority ethnic background as second-class citizens.

In this sense, the Cantle report is right to identify what it chooses to call “social order and social control”, and “social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities” as two of its five domains of community cohesion. Without effective policing of racism, without strong legal, institutional, and informal sanctions against racial and cultural hatred, without a public culture that stops bracketing minorities as ‘guests’ or worse in Britain, and without better minority ethnic representation and influence in mainstream organisations, the ethnic inequality that flows from a national culture assuming White supremacy will not be tackled. Similarly, a democracy of a universal commons (Amin and Thrift, 2002) based on more widely distributed economic prosperity (through the enlargement of opportunity, the redistribution of income, and reductions
in wealth disparities) and the guarantee of high-quality public and welfare services for all, can help to contain the politics of envy between excluded groups as well as strengthen social solidarity and loyalty to a national project based on universal rights. Reforms to the structures of citizenship and belonging that might improve racial and ethnic relations have been discussed in detail in the much publicised Parekh Report (Runnymede Trust, 2000) and in ways that can both support cultural autonomy and strengthen intercultural solidarity in a multiethnic Britain. There is little gained from repeating the recommendations here.

In a democratic multiethnic society, if community cohesion remains elusive, the key challenge is to strike a balance between cultural autonomy and social solidarity, so that the former does not lapse into separatist and essentialised identities and so that the latter does not slide into minority cultural assimilation and Western conformity. This question has come to the fore in the contemporary debate on the strengths and limitations of multiculturalism. Bhikhu Parekh (2000) has suggested that the political structure of a multicultural society based on a strong sense of unity but also ingrained respect for diversity, should draw on the two political philosophies—liberalism, with its emphasis on the rights and freedoms of the individual, and multiculturalism, with its emphasis on the rights and freedoms of group identities and cultures. Its purpose should be to inculcate a sense of belonging to a common political community:

“[the] sense of belonging cannot be ethnic or based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics, for a multicultural society is too diverse for that, but political in nature and based on a shared commitment to the political community... The commitment to a political community... does not involve sharing common substantive goals, for its members might deeply disagree about these, nor a common view of its history which they may read differently, nor a particular economic or social system about which they might entertain different views. Decocted to its barest essentials, commitment to the political community involves commitment to its continuing existence and well being” (Parekh, 2000, page 341).

Parekh proposes a binding national framework to support a multiculturalism based on political community, including: (a) a collectively agreed constitution based around fundamental rights (along the lines of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms), and backed up by a Supreme Court; (b) impartial justice by the state in policing, employment, education, public services, and the law, within a frame of equal rights and opportunities (including cultural ones) for all citizens; (c) recognition of collective or group rights (for example, the right of Sikh men to wear a turban or the right of Muslims to pray at work), but measured against the standard of contribution to human well-being; (d) realms for equal cultural interaction (for example, via measures to ensure equal interaction, provision of opportunities for groups and cultures to meet, and explicit official celebration of multiculturalism; (e) multicultural education based on a mixed and open curriculum that reflects the nation’s historical and contemporary cultural diversity and its place in the wider world, and (f) a shared national identity based on politico-institutional values (for example, human rights, universal welfare) rather than ethno-cultural ones, so that national belonging can be based on multiple identities and cultural affiliations.

In the context of urban questions, the idea of a political commons steers us away from community consensus and a unitary sense of place. For example, Steven Vertovec (1996), drawing on the experience of multiculturalism in Leicester, has suggested that a “renegotiated political culture of the public domain” can be achieved through local “facilitation of multiple modes of minority representation and local government interface” (page 66). This is a democracy based on widespread bottom-up organisation
that, in addition to supporting multicultures, yields checks, balances, and overlaps between associations and a local state, thus nourishing a common public culture. Leicester has a long history of antiracist organisation and affirmative action, self-organisation and civic activism within the minority ethnic communities, and an official policy of pride in cultural diversity and support for minority ethnic associations, harnessed to a commitment that cultural events and services should benefit all residents (Winstone, 1996). In the mid-1990s there were over 400 minority ethnic associations in Leicester, many possessing contracts with the city council to carry out particular services. This institutional structure has made local authority consultation with the associations “an essential element in the management of change”, but on the basis of “a complex mixture of organizations including separate groups of women, youth and older people” (Winstone, 1996, page 38), rather than reliance on a small group of ‘community leaders’ speaking for everybody. In turn, through public incorporation, political office, the experience of self-organisation, and frequent contact with other minority and nonminority bodies, the ethnic associations “have been able to champion also [the needs] of the majority who are disadvantaged through poverty, homelessness and low pay—problems shared by all” (Winstone, 1996, page 38). For Vertovec (1996), such a model of multiculturalism, involving “a variety of modes of incorporation”, works because:

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

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

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

The significance of the microcultures of place is highlighted by the achievements of prosaic negotiation and transgression in dealing with racism and ethnic diversity. The second part of the study argued that, ultimately, coming to terms with difference is a matter of everyday practices and strategies of cultural contact and exchange with others who are different from us. For such interchange to be effective and lasting, it needs to be inculcated as a habit of practice (not just copresence) in mixed sites of everyday contact such as schools, the workplace, and other public spaces. Alternatively, it can be organised as an experience of cultural displacement in transitory sites such as colleges of further education, youth leisure spaces, communal gardens, urban murals, legislative theatre, and initiatives inculcating civic duty.

The policy implication of this argument is that, although the micropublics can be identified (through, for example, case studies of good practice around the world), as can the general principles of effective communication and constructive dialogue (for example, conflict resolution techniques, stakeholder empowerment, deliberative strategies, effective leadership and intermediation), success remains the product of local context and local energies. This is why a search for national and international examples of best practice, seeking to implant them in different settings or to derive a common standard from them is futile, because it removes the site-specific circumstances and social relations that made a local solution workable. The exercise also loses sight of the national public culture that structures the rights and obligations that guide local practices, such as immigration and citizenship rules, national and local integration policies, attitudes to minorities, and sanctions against racism and ethnic discrimination. These are two reasons why the approach of social and urban regeneration policies needs to shift towards attending to “the best in the worst” (Judith Allen, personal communication), that is, to possibilities that spring out of, and resonate with, the dynamics of social engagement in particular places.

Another shift in policy approach implied by the discussion on agonism concerns the problematic nature of attempts to build community and local consensus, and the limitations of seeing ‘difficult’ areas as places of fixed identities and social relations. I have suggested that the problems of interaction—and therefore also their resolution—are fundamentally related to the political culture of the public domain, more specifically, to the scope there is for vigorous but democratic disagreement between citizens constituted as equals. This shift in register from the language of policy fixes to that of democratic politics is important, first because it highlights the significance of questions of empowerment, rights, citizenship, and belonging in shaping interethnic relations; second, because it shows that an open public realm helps to disrupt fixed cultural assumptions and to shift identities through cultural exchange; and, third, because it reveals that living with diversity is a matter of constant negotiation, trial and error, and sustained effort, with possibilities crucially shaped by the many strands that feed into the political culture of the public realm—from the entanglements of local institutional conflict, civic mobilisation, and interpersonal engagement, to national debates on who counts as a citizen, what constitutes the good society, and who can claim the nation.

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

Cultural complexity is amply illustrated by the affiliations of young Black and Asian people, whose anthropology reveals mixtures that cross and subvert ethnic boundaries and stereotypes, and whose politics of resistance gather around ethnic exclusions as well as other cleavages (for example, generational and gender conflicts, youth nonconformity, gang masculinities). But, cast in a racialised frame of belonging, they are not conceded the multiple and shifting identities that are assumed to be normal for White people. This kind of simplification on grounds of ethnicity also brackets them as people whose claims can only ever be minor within a national culture and frame of national belonging that is seen to be defined by others and their ‘majority’ histories, read as histories of White belonging and White supremacy (Hage, 1998; Parekh, 2000). Not for them the history of Englishness/Britishness based on centuries of ethnic mixture and considerable cultural interchange with the colonies and beyond (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Cannadine, 2001; C Hall, 1996; Ware, 1996).

The claims of the Asian youths of the northern mill towns and those of Black Britons (S Hall, 1998), however, amount to more than a desire for minority recognition in Britain. Theirs is a bid for the centre and the mainstream, both in terms of the right of visibility and the right to shape it. It is a claim of full citizenship—a rejection of the assumption that to be British/English is to be White or part of White culture. But, as long as this assumption remains intact, the status of minority ethnic people as British citizens will remain of a different order to that of White Britons—to be proven, under question, inferior, incomplete, reluctant (Alibhai-Brown, 1999; 2001). The latest manifestation is the government’s proposal that new immigrants should be required take an oath of allegiance to British cultural norms (such as fair play) and citizenship norms (presumably liberal). This kind of act perpetuates the idea that immigrants (subtly also those born and brought up in Britain) need to prove their loyalty and their national cultural credentials, while the identity and affiliations of White Britons—who presumably also include racists, internationalists, anticapitalists, socialists, Muslims, antinationalists, cosmopolitans, eco-globalists—remains unproblematic.

The political implication—one of fundamental importance—is that in order to enable all citizens in Britain, regardless of colour and cultural preference, to lay claim to the nation and contribute to an evolving national identity, the ethnic moorings of national belonging need to be exposed and replaced by criteria that have nothing to do with Whiteness. This imperative will also remain even if Britain more consciously adopts the multicultural model of nationhood, seen by many as the most progressive solution for multiethnic societies, through its offer of special rights and measures for minorities and its official state endorsement of cultural diversity.

Ghassan Hage (1998), in an excoriating critique of the Australian model of multiculturalism, has argued that, underlying the opposing ethics and politics of multiculturalists and White Australians who have become anxious about ethnic mixture, there is a common fantasy of White nation. For Hage, “many of those who position
themselves as ‘multicultural’ and ‘anti-racists’ are merely deploying a more sophisticated fantasy of White supremacy” (page 23), because buried under the language of tolerance, welcome, and positive action for immigrants is a benign White nationalist governmentality: “those who tolerate are the ones who fantasize that it is up to them whether people speak Arabic on the streets or not, whether more migrants come or not....Such people are claiming a dominant form of governmental belonging and are inevitably White Australians.... Those in a dominated position do not tolerate, they just endure” (page 88). The (non-White) immigrants—despite their Australian nationality—are placed in a national “space that is not naturally theirs” (page 90) and their subjectivity as citizens is determined by others. Hage suggests that this “nationalist practice of inclusion” (page 90) is simply the mirror opposite of the “nationalist practice of exclusion” (page 91) manifest in the White backlash against state multiculturalism and immigration, and epitomised by the now-familiar language of White victimhood (for example, complaints that Whites are downtrodden and neglected), cultural pollution and incompatibility, and nostalgia for a halcyon pre-immigration White culture of national cohesion and prosperity. Both responses, suggests Hage, “are rituals of White empowerment—seasonal festivities where White Australians renew the belief in their possession of the power to talk and make decisions about Third World-looking Australians” (page 241).

The issues alluded to by Hage are exactly those confronting a multiethnic society such as Britain, with its national imaginary steeped in memories of colonial rule and racialised assumptions of national identity and belonging (from Whiteness to village cricket and British fair play). The objections and practices of those caught up in the tide of White backlash are exactly those of their Antipodean counterparts, perhaps worse because of the stronger legacy of White rule and White nostalgia and because of the more pronounced overt racism and ethnic discrimination that exists in Britain. Similarly, the discourse of multiculturalism in Britain masks a White ‘nationalist practice of inclusion’, possibly of a much cruder nature, given that the national debate is at an earlier stage and that policy practices fall short of those in Australia and Canada. This is all too well illustrated by the frequent reference to people of a non-White colour purely in terms of their ethnicity, the endless public talk about the rights, obligations, and allegiances of new and settled immigrants, the constant questioning of the Englishness or Britishness of non-Whites—with none of this asked of White Britons. But, at a more subtle level, benign multicultural attitudes have allowed the liberal middle classes to pretend not to be racially or ethnically blinkered, thereby passing the burden of guilt and reform to be placed on others, most notably the urban working class—White and, when troublesome, non-White.

Such racial and ethnic coding of national belonging—benign and malign—needs to be revealed and publicly debated so that the “racial ontology of sovereign territory” (Gilroy, 2000, page 328) can be recognised and contested, perhaps by thinking “post-nationally” (Anderson, 2000). Without such moves, there will be little in the armoury to deal with the increasingly sophisticated and popular claim of racists and White worries that for reasons of cultural incompatibility the majority and the minority should remain separate. Nor will there be an end to the treatment of minority ethnic people as a different sort of British subject. Race and ethnicity need to be taken out of the definition of national identity and national belonging and replaced by ideals of citizenship, democracy, and political community (in the sense suggested by Parekh, 2000) as the basis upon which nationhood is constructed. This is not the place to discuss the strands of this politically—rather than culturally or racially—defined sense of national citizenship, but the principle is clear that it has to construct citizens as empowered subjects (so that genuine agonism is made possible), as equals in the
right to claim the nation, and as members of an open and plural political community. It requires imagination of the nation as something other than a racial territorial space, perhaps via a “planetary humanism” (Gilroy, 2000) that returns the nation as a space of travelling cultures and peoples with varying geographies of attachment. Then, the problems faced by the ethnic minorities and the anxieties of marginalised White working-class communities can be tackled as problems of citizenship and social justice in a country for all, with differences of ethnicity not overblown or played up for exclusionary political gain.

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