

## **Suburban drifts: Conflicted Discourses of Multicultural Belonging.**

**Anamik Saha (University of Leeds) and Sophie Watson (Open University)**

“I think that’s another thing that is going downhill there’s so much building going on, all the life and soul has gone out of it, all the traditional stuff”

Waheed, 33

I think it's gone downhill. It's just got a bit dirtier and then people who have moved into the area they're different... there's no sense of pride any more, though there was when I moved here all those years ago.

Sharmila, 35

Where emotions have emerged in discussions of race/ethnicity, multiculturalism and the city they invariably tend to be of a particular hue – negative in the form of an exploration of racism (Dwyer and Bressey 2008; Back and Nayak, 1999). There has been a particular focus on attachments and detachments to place, on the part of migrants, and on the emotional responses of ‘indigenous’ communities or residents to the ‘strangers’ in their midst. But very little research has considered the reaction of migrants to other migrants - even those belonging to the same ethnic group. How to interpret and explain those difficult and troubling moments of daily feeling that migrants sometimes express towards what they themselves see as the less palatable residues of contemporary multiculturalism? What power relations do these negative emotional responses of migrant groups to the material practices of other (or indeed, the same) migrant groups reflect, reinforce or undermine?

The quotes that open this piece were taken from interviews with a sample of 30-something British South Asians, living in the London Borough of Redbridge, a suburb located on the boundary of east London and Essex, that consists of a very large Asian community (Redbridge is the fourth most

diverse local authority in England and Wales<sup>i</sup>). The sample formed part of a larger research project that examined the sense of attachment to place expressed by three generations of the South Asian communities in Redbridge. While the older and younger generation were very clear in the attachment they feel towards where the area where they live, the group of 30-somethings were almost universal in their dislike of the area, and more specifically what they perceived as a decline in the physical look of Redbridge, which was seen as going 'downhill'. What was striking was how they attributed this decline to the particular material practices of the expanding Asian community, which had almost doubled in size within the previous ten years<sup>ii</sup>. The aim of this chapter is to explore the nature of this emotional response, and to consider what it reveals about the state of contemporary multiculturalism.

In research on the multicultural city, with the growing influence of psychoanalytic geography and the cultural turn more generally, there has been an extensive body of work mapping emotions in different contexts from anger to joy, anxiety to happiness and fear (Bannister and Fyfe 2001) to desire. These are often explored through notions of attachments or lack of attachments. One lens for understanding the complexities inherent here are the different ways in which global and local processes intersect to produce for many migrants an attachment to both places of origin and arrival at one and the same time, made possible by the increasing speed and ease of communication across space. These transnational lives and identifications with two places and peoples can produce emotional complexities that are difficult to maintain as many researchers have shown (Glick-Schiller 2011). Other research has explored the myriad of ways in which migrants attach themselves to their new surroundings. Svasek (2010) for example, has investigated the ways in which migrant organisations and institutions frame migrant experiences and increase the experience of belonging, while Burrell (2008) points to the importance of objects brought from home to create a sense of belonging. As the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on emotions and human mobility emphasizes (Svasek, 2010: 877) personal attachments to people and places are multiple and changing and the type and strength of emotional connectivity of migrants

to place at one time clearly depends on a plethora of factors. The responses of the people in place, what Hage (2000) refers to as the 'white nation' in the Australian context, to new migrants are also unstable and changing, ranging from fear, resentment (Watson and Wells, 2005) and expressed hostility or racism to acceptance, joy, or public tolerance albeit from a position of power (Hage 2000). In her study of belonging in a multicultural suburb in Sydney, Wise (2005) suggests the notion of 'hopeful intercultural encounters' as a way of reflecting on the social possibilities of new forms of integration of diverse cultures, notwithstanding the negative reactions she found amongst the local elderly population to the incoming Chinese who they saw as culturally different and disruptive of their sense of community and place.

This very brief excursion into the literature on migrants' sense of belonging and attachment to place can only scratch the surface of a now growing literature exploring the complex emotions in play in a world of increasing mobility of populations across space which has changed the face of cities across the world, such that the diversity and heterogeneity of urban populations is now the norm. That said, writing on emotions in geography and in relation to migrant populations more specifically has focused on some emotions more than others, and on some practices, institutions, and spaces more than others.

Our argument here is that the emotion of ambivalence from migrants towards the practices of other migrants within their community has been little explored. We see three reasons for this. The first reason, we suggest, lies in the research process itself. Where researchers are of a different ethnicity to the subjects of their research, the expression of negative or ambivalent emotions to 'kindred others' (not necessarily those of a similar ethnicity but subject nevertheless to racist discourses) would be seen as disloyal and even wrong. Arguably these emotions emerged in our interviews because one of us shared ethnicity (as well as 'regional' identity) with the respondents. Secondly, practices of attachment, with some exceptions have tended to look more at cultural practices rather than at material practices. Material practices of attachment have been considered most frequently in relation to religion, in

particular, the buildings and sites, such as mosques and temples, which have provoked resistance and contestation from local populations (Dodsworth et al 2013). Material practices in domestic and private spaces have received less attention. Thirdly, the sites of multicultural diversity, where questions of emotion and affect have been explored, have tended to be the more visible and central parts of cities, particular the inner city areas of London, New York and other global cities. Less attention has been paid to the quiet everyday suburbs which have only recently been recognized for the radical shift in populations that have taken place, as white residents have moved further out, leaving the traditional white suburbs to a diversity of migrant households, both first and second generation (Butler and Hamnett, 2010; Wise and Veluyatham 2009).

This chapter thus aims to address these lacunae by looking at the ambivalences, often unspoken, expressed by the children of South Asian migrants (i.e. second generation) in Redbridge, towards the material practices of people in their own community in the domestic landscape that they inhabit. Such a move brings with it its own ambivalence for the authors in different ways. For Saha this involves revealing tensions within his own community (that is, the British Asian community in Redbridge where he too grew up) that may have only been revealed in the research because of his presence as a researcher. For Watson, there is the discomfort of speaking about 'other communities' in what could be conceived in negative terms. Certainly it was felt that belonging to the same community and growing up in the same area immediately created a rapport between the respondents and Saha (who conducted this particular set of interviews). That is not to say that the responses they gave were more 'truthful', but it certainly appeared to give respondents freedom, or *confidence* to express ideas about racial and ethnic difference in a way that might have been different if the interviewer was, for instance, white. That said, the research was conducted with due process and regard to ethical procedures, and represents an intervention which hopefully destabilizes normative assumptions and paradigms concerning emotions in a world of mobility and change.

## The Research Project

The aim of this research was to explore the ways in which three generations of Asian communities (60+, 30-40 year olds and 16-18 year olds) express belonging and attachment to the London suburbs where they live. This chapter focuses on the accounts of the older second generation: a group of thirty-something British-born South Asians who grew up in the London Borough of Redbridge, from the 1980s onwards. Redbridge was selected as it has a large South Asian community and is illustrative of what has been described as the *ethnicization* of British suburbs (Huq, 2007; Nayak, 2010; Butler and Hamnett, 2011). Whether real or imagined, the suburbs have long been considered homogeneous, white, middle-class enclaves, representing social success and aspiration, and on the reverse side, banality and boredom (Silverstone, 1997). Yet this image of a monocultural, cultureless desert is finding itself increasingly at odds with the growing diversity of suburban spaces. Six of the ten boroughs with the highest proportion of non-white residents nationally are located in outer London – an issue virtually overlooked in the London Councils' report on suburbs (LFG, 2007). According to the 2011 census, as stated, Redbridge was rated the fourth most ethnically diverse local authority in the country, with a higher number of people stating their ethnic group as black and minority ethnic (about 60% per cent) than the average for London, and 34.5 per cent of people stating their ethnic group as white British, compared to 45 per cent for London and 83.35 per cent for England and Wales. In numerical terms, of the total Redbridge population of 278,970, 96,253 were white English, 116,503 were Asian or Asian British, and 24,845 identified as black or black British<sup>iii</sup>.

For this part of the project we conducted ten in-depth interviews with a mix of Asian ethnicities (including Gujarati's, Bengalis, Pakistanis) and religions (including Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh). While we aimed to reflect the diversity of British Asian communities, we were acutely aware of the dangers of using the term 'British Asian', and reifying the very ethnic and racial categories which we in fact seek to trouble and problematize (Alexander, 2006; Nayak, 2006). Alexander points out that while this is an inevitable risk, it

is not an easy one to resolve, and is indeed the paradox of researching racialized communities in the first place. For the purposes of this study, we want to stress that we use the term 'Asian'<sup>iv</sup> for pragmatic reasons alone – and in a strictly anti-essentialist sense, to describe a diverse and constantly evolving set of overlapping communities, but nonetheless defined by the shared experience of racism and (post) colonial histories.

We anchor the analysis that follows with an interview with Jean<sup>v</sup>, a worker at the Redbridge Museum, located in Ilford, the borough's administrative centre and its main shopping destination. We visited Redbridge Museum to get a sense of the official narratives of local (and national) heritage in Redbridge. At the time of our fieldwork the museum was showing an exhibition entitled 'Pieces of Ilford' described as 'a (very brief) journey through the history of Ilford'. The main portion of the exhibition consisted of displays based around Ilford residents from history, both famous and not-so-famous, This included Sylvia Pankhurst, the famed suffragette who moved to Redbridge after the first world war, Mary Davis, a worker at Ilford Ltd, the photographic equipment company based in Redbridge from 1879-1976, and Tahera Khan, a Pakistani woman born in Zimbabwe, who moved to Ilford in the 1980s after getting married. To give a sense of the exhibits, the glass display based on Mrs. Khan's life was centred on her wedding, containing the dress she wore, the wedding album, a box of henna, and a globe symbolising her journey across three continents. Jean was working on the main information desk when we visited the museum, and an informal chat turned quickly into a very interesting interview (with her permission the interview was recorded), and provided a useful introduction into the experience of living in Redbridge and feelings of attachment and belonging.

Jean was a 51-year-old black woman of Caribbean descent who had lived in Redbridge all her life. And from her accounts it was clear that she had a very strong attachment to the area. When we asked her about the way in which Ilford had changed she talked about it predominantly in terms of the increasing multicultural make-up of the area:

Interviewer: what have been the key things that have changed in Ilford in the 50 years you have lived here?

Jean: The different uses [of buildings] for example, churches. We obviously had Church of England, Anglican, Roman Catholic. Now we're seeing mosques and Sikh temples - things like that. Types of foods that were available... As a child if my mum wanted to cook something traditional she would have to travel quite a distance to purchase those things. Now you can go to Tesco's, Sainsbury's Waitrose, things like that. The music we listen to... you have greater access to the different styles, you see the different fusions in terms of music. The types of clothing that we wear [...] If I saw someone walking down the high street down my road in African dress or in a sari when I was five years old I would have just stood there and stared. Now I just go round the corner to Ilford Lane and the shops reflect the culture and the types of foods relating to those particular communities. Languages that we hear - as a child, English, cockney. In the 70s we had the east African Asians coming over and I remember quite distinctly my class teacher saying *oh, I'm leaving Shabina with you because you're the same*. In what ways? She's Ugandan Asian, we don't speak the same language we don't eat the same food, our cultures are so different but it's the mere fact that we two people of colour. The street that I grew up... [...] there were maybe half a dozen black families from different Caribbean islands.... now there are probably 3 or 4 of those families still around. The neighbours are no longer English and German, they are Pakistani and Chinese, and over the road we have a lady from Saudi Arabia....

In this whirlwind tour of Ilford life Jean describes the shift from a predominantly white area (with accompanying racism, such as the way Jean and Shabina were partnered at school on account of both being non-white) to one that is increasingly diverse. There are references to changing demographics, but also to popular culture, as well as the visual markers of contemporary multiculturalism (clothes, food, places of worship etc.). But as the interview developed what became apparent in Jean's story was a slight

lament for the way things used to be. In particular Jean described a deterioration in the physical environment, and a concurrent decline in community relations:

Interviewer: How has the look of your street changed?

Jean: Right, well we no longer have those pretty front gardens with rose bushes, the shrub in the middle. All of those front gardens tend to be paved over and we have 3 or 4 cars.

Interviewer: Why is that? When did it start happening

Jean: Probably the 80s and 90s [...] people wanted to be mobile. They got relatively good jobs and one way of showing their upward mobility would be the display of their wealth on the front driveway.

Interviewer: What other markers of change have you seen in every day spaces that people use?

Jean: In terms of the way streets look [...] I know from the types of railings that are put up outside the house to enclose their living space, the type of family who would live there. There are a lot of houses with porches that are additions to the general fabric of the house, and in that space, before you enter the house, you have all the shoes piled up outside. Sometimes people would buy houses next door to each other, and enclose the two properties in those black railings with the gold tips.

Interviewer: What kind of families are we talking about?

Jean: Mostly Asian. And sometimes they are very friendly, other times they ... they'll speak to you on the path, but once they are in within the confines of their gated community there's not much interaction.

We could not help but notice a slight discomfort or embarrassment when Jean was pressed to admit that the 'type of family' to which she was referring is 'mostly Asian'. But for Jean the incoming Asian communities had changed the look of the area, with the removal of front gardens for off-street parking, porches for family members and visitors to remove their shoes before entering the house, and the erection of 'black railings with gold tips', which, it was implicitly suggested, comes across as slightly vulgar or ostentatious. In this comment, the visual markers – porches, driveways, and gold-tipped railings –

connote cultural difference (and in particular the association of Asians with big families, and status symbols), underpinned by discourses of class and respectability. It was particularly revealing when Jean referred to how these Asian families effectively live in 'gated communities'. These are not gated communities in the strictest sense, but Jean is referring here to the perceived inwardness of Asian communities, who might say hello on the path but that is the extent of any interaction.

Jean's last quote echoes the findings of Butler and Hamnett's (2010: 87) study of east London and its outer boroughs where they found that white residents in Redbridge complained about the negative impact of the extensions and conversions that Asian families tended to build onto their homes. But what was interesting to us, and the reason we open with this narrative, was how Jean's account was almost exactly replicated in our interviews with second generation 30+ Asians. Compared to the members of the older generation and school pupils that we interviewed who described a clear attachment to the area where they live (see Watson and Saha, 2012), the group of ten older second generation British Asians in our study expressed feelings of ambivalence about Redbridge. This perhaps was because half of them were still living there, usually with their parents, in the same homes where they grew up (which they would explain was out of necessity due to the expense of renting and buying in London). The group of respondents found it noticeably more difficult to describe their favourite places in Redbridge, and was more likely to highlight the banality and blandness of the area. Except for the leafy environ of Wanstead, with its cafes, boutiques and gastro pubs, which was often mentioned as the most pleasant part of Redbridge (all the respondents were university educated, and nearly all of them professional, perhaps explaining their affinity for this more middle-class area), the respondents were quick to express their dislike of Redbridge – the lack of things to do and places to go, but in particular the increasing physical decline of the area. But while this would suggest little emotional attachment to the area, we argue their narratives and the feelings that are expressed, are revealing in a different way.

Like Jean, the respondents lamented the way that Redbridge was physically changing. Perhaps because of a shared ethnic and racial background with one of us also, the respondents felt no misgivings about explaining what they also perceived as a deterioration in the visual look of Redbridge explicitly in terms of the increasing numbers of Asians in the area:

One of the things I am quite conscious of and feel quite strongly about is the character being ripped out of the area. Not that there was a lot of character in the first place but it was a typical 1930s suburb. You could tell in the way that it was built. And it used to be part of an orchard hence why we had so many of trees. But unfortunately I am seeing less of these trees because [Asian] people are moving in, buying houses and knocking down these trees and building houses in their backyard or building extensions. Before it was a really green area but I think it's been taken away.

(Sharmila, 35)

In terms of housing people have more cars, three, four cars stuffed in their driveways! People get rid of their front gardens, and I know that's across the board and not necessarily to do with ethnicity, but you tend to find that Asians as they become more successful, it means more cars, bigger houses, let's add every single conversion, extension possible on the house. They just don't [have] you know, the typical English country feel which a lot of the houses here have, like the Woods Estate [an area in Clayhall, a particularly leafy and desirable part of Redbridge]. It's not gone totally downhill but I've seen our road change quite a lot and you know that the houses that are left behind – in terms of [those that keep] the original features – are owned by the locals, the English, who have been here a long time, have a bit more regard for this stuff.

(Naila, 35)

In the first quote Sharmila expresses her feeling that the supposedly Asian tendency towards building extensions onto their houses has little regard for

the aesthetics of the area. In the second quote Naila attempts to explain why Asians carry out this practice (though she wants to stress that it is not unique to Asians) – bigger families, concern with status and signifiers of upward mobility. There is additionally a reference to how older white residents have a greater respect for Redbridge's heritage. Indeed, it is interesting to note in both quotes the reference to the decline in greenery. Another respondent develops this further:

There are so many main roads around here... we're next to the M11, the A406. We definitely need that green. So it's a shame that so many trees have been cut down. Do you remember those cherry blossom trees? It's a shame that's gone. It would look nicer, more healthy, more attractive.

(Reshmin, 36)

Reshmin is describing the implication of Redbridge as the main thoroughfare connecting London and Essex. But what is of interest in all these quotes is the underlying nostalgia for Redbridge's past. In the description of the destruction of trees and front gardens there is a lament for Redbridge's fading heritage as a former orchard and as a quintessential 1930s London suburb. It may appear surprising for children of immigrants to be so sentimental for a very particular English past, but nonetheless nostalgia was the key theme that came out the most in our interviews with this group (see also Watson and Wells, 2005 for a similar nostalgia expressed by the old established white residents in an inner London borough).

During the time these respondents were attending school in the 1980s and 1990s, Redbridge felt more mixed. In addition to the majority white/Christian community, there was a significant Jewish community, who like the Asian communities, had left the East end of London, to settle in suburbs like Redbridge. Yet since the turn of the century, as more Asian people – particularly Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and South Indians – moved into Redbridge, the white and Jewish communities have moved further out to Essex. And what was evident in the respondents' complaints about the

decline in the physical appearance of Redbridge was a sentimental longing for a time when the area was more ethnically diverse and multicultural:

I like it when there's bit of a mix. When it goes to one ethnic minority, the character of places changes. And I'm into nostalgia and I quite like original buildings and I think you had more consistency in the facades of houses and stuff and now you have seen so much change and I don't think it's that great... people just putting up gates.

(Jas, 35)

According to this respondent, as particular neighbourhoods become more monocultural, there is a loss in heritage (through the changing facades of houses), which in turn has had a negative effect upon neighbourhoods and communal relations, where more inviting front gardens are replaced by inhospitable driveways and gates. Thus, emotional attachment to an area is expressed through a perception of how the physical area has changed, which in turn, expresses a certain ideal about multiculturalism and community.

Such a theme is exemplified in relation to the pedestrianization around the Ilford Exchange – Redbridge's main shopping centre:

I think the original Ilford had a lot of life and soul before it got pedestrianized. It had a good vibe to it. Because it was a lot more mixed, a lot more white folk, a lot of Asian folk; melting point-wise it was a lot better. But it all changed ... there was a period when it was okay but then it got progressively worse, because the population increased with all the Asians and the white folk were pushed out to more leafy areas such as Chigwell. But even Chigwell is changing and becoming much more Asian.

(Waheed, 33)

Again there is a lament for a time when Redbridge was more ethnically mixed. In the above quote the pedestrianization is seen to be somehow symbolic of the negative effect of the movement of Asians into the area, as the paving

over of Redbridge's old heritage (its high streets, and front gardens), driving the white residents further out to leafy areas more reminiscent of the old Redbridge. In fact this account from a British-born Pakistani man seems almost forgiving of the white flight, as though this was the natural, inevitable response to the influx of newly arrived Asians.

Gilroy's (2005) important concepts of postcolonial melancholia and conviviality in his account of Britain's uncomfortable relationship with contemporary multi-culture have some purchase here. In our interviews with the oldest generation of respondents (Watson and Saha, 2012) we found evidence that illustrate how 'racial differences appear ordinary and banal [...] (how) urban conviviality has taken hold' (Gilroy, 2005: 438). But more troublingly we find that with the younger generation they have appeared to have internalized a particular bourgeois, nationalist view of the effects of multicultural diversity on their communities. The following quote for instance, would appear typical of a particular nationalist discourse on the negative impact of demographic change and the 'influx' of immigrants on community, particularly its depiction of a prior, almost quaint local neighbourhood:

I think you can see it in terms of the main road Redbridge Lane East. When we first moved here, I remember there was a little bakery, a café, and I think you saw people out and about a lot more. I think there was more of a sense of community. You got the impression that people knew each other even from school. That people knew each other's parents. And now I don't think there is that sense of community.  
(Joyti, 37)

A similar narrative appears in the following quote:

Sharmila: I think [Redbridge has] gone downhill. It's just got a bit dirtier and then people who have moved into the area, they're different... there's no sense of pride any more, though there was when I moved here all those years ago. [...] I'm Asian myself, but it has become more predominantly Asian, and that's fine. But I just find that for some

reason regardless of what their backgrounds are, some of these people who have moved in... people don't talk to each other, and when I'm walking down the street I do notice that I get a bit of agro from the local boys, and there's more joy riders and there's not much respect for the elders of the community.

Here, the references to cleanliness, anti-social behaviour, people who are 'different' (even though they share the same 'race' as the respondent) has a more explicit racialized discourse running through it. There is an underlying discourse of class too; as mentioned the respondents are aspiring middle-class and many of the newer Asian communities to which they refer to are working class or at least do not share the same cultural capital. The nostalgia for the way things were (despite the fact that the respondents almost certainly experienced more racism in the 1980s than they do now), a time where according to Sharmila there was more 'pride', evokes emotionally the postcolonial melancholia Gilroy describes (ibid.: 433-35) as a 'malaise', as 'anxieties about identity' which 'are an unwelcome product of the particular historical circumstances' which mobilize the 'contemporary fears that globalization has emptied England of its distinctiveness'

The troubling aspect of this narrative, on the loss of pride, the loss of heritage and how this is a reflection of the failure of newer arrivals to Redbridge to integrate themselves properly into the community (whatever that community might be), is how it appears to dovetail with Prime Minister David Cameron's assertion of 'failure of multiculturalism'. But we argue that this describes in fact something much more *ambivalent*. As within these narratives there is a lament not just for the way things were, but for a more convivial time when Redbridge was an evenly distributed multicultural community. This is captured in the following reminiscences:

I have to say the thing about this area when I moved into it was that it was that it was... Redbridge Junior School where I went to, at the time it was Jewish, black, Christian and Asian - it was really well mixed. We had a school play about Lord Nelson, and the girl who played the lead

part - remember this was 1985 in a mixed school, mixed boys and girls - the person who got picked to play the part of Lord Nelson was an Asian girl. Which was really powerful for that time. Which just goes to show that we were brought up in a way where we never distinguished each other by our skin colour or religion.

(Sharmila, 35)

There is certainly something very evocative about the image of a young Asian girl cast to play a central character in England's imperial past. Jean expressed a similar emotion when we asked her to reflect on the 'Pieces of Ilford' exhibition:

Interviewer: How do you relate to all this kind of history (pointing to the exhibit)

Jean: I love it. This is my history. Just sitting here, I have childhood friends reflected here. The story of Tahira Khan reminds me of my friend Shabina. The [display of the] teacher's story, reminds me of my Jewish teachers and classmates - we sort of fell into a clique because we were a little bit different.

Jean's fond memories of her friend Shabina – who her teacher partnered with her on account of them both being non-white – and also the Jewish classmates with whom she bonded because they were all a 'little bit different', similarly reflect the ordinariness of schoolyard relationships and the 'urban conviviality' Gilroy speaks of. Similarly, the final note in Sharmila's quote, where she and her peers never distinguished each other by race or religion, illustrate a mundane multiculturalism, where, as Gilroy again puts it, racial differences appear ordinary and banal.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, what appears as a fairly conservative and troubling narrative on the influx of Asians into Redbride and the perceived decline in the aesthetic

beauty of the area that has resulted (and in turn, the negative impact this has on a sense of community) there is a sadness expressed not for a (mythical) culturally stable yet homogenous, post-war Britain, but for a relatively brief period in Redbridge's past, spanning just two decades, when the borough felt more racially and ethnically mixed and integrated. This we suggest demonstrates the *ambivalence* of what Stuart Hall (2000) calls 'multicultural drift'. What could be diagnosed as postcolonial melancholia regarding the decline of a London suburb is actually a lament for a particularly convivial time in the borough's past. Even if it was not experienced exactly in this way, this is how it is remembered and how the moment has been idealized.

This excursion into the reflections of a particular generation of Asian residents on the local aesthetics of domestic spaces and the streets of Redbridge has demonstrated a complexity of emotions/ affect in relation to senses of attachment to place which disturbs some of the more normative accounts of processes of belonging. As Gilroy, Watson and Wells and others have found, nostalgia operates in complex ways not just within the longer established white urban populations, but also within more recent migrants experiences, to produce complex accounts of attachment, or lack of attachment, to place. What was striking throughout all our interviews was how feelings of belonging to place, to nation, were expressed through nostalgia – and through *lament*. Even in the more pointed responses given by interviewees, there was no expression of anger, fear or disgust. The more sorrowful tone that characterized the responses of this group of second-generation Asians, is precisely what demonstrates the ambivalence of multicultural drift. It certainly can be read as a form of melancholia, but the almost humdrum emotional tone of the narratives, also jars against what various political leaders proclaim as the failure of multiculturalism. As we have suggested, it is difficult to explore these emotions, given their potentially damaging effects, but this research nevertheless has pointed to the importance of exploring the ambivalence emotions that many urban dwellers express, whatever their ethnicity, in order to make sense of the complexity of experience in the multicultural city.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://data.london.gov.uk/datastorefiles/documents/2011-census-snapshot-ethnic-diversity-indices.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/the\\_council/about\\_the\\_council/about\\_redbridge/2011\\_census/diversity.aspx](http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/the_council/about_the_council/about_redbridge/2011_census/diversity.aspx)

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/the\\_council/about\\_the\\_council/about\\_redbridge/2011\\_census/diversity.aspx](http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/the_council/about_the_council/about_redbridge/2011_census/diversity.aspx)

<sup>iv</sup> We also use 'Asian' in the British English sense, referring to those originating from the Indian sub-continent, including India, Pakistani, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, sometimes via particular postcolonial routes (e.g. Kenya and Uganda). It should be noted as well that the use of 'Asian' in British English excludes East or South East Asians (who are defined by their country of origin or more problematically, as 'Oriental') and central Asians.

<sup>v</sup> For the purposes of confidentiality we have changed the names of all respondents.